DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE IN PROTRACTED HUMANITARIAN CRISES

(aligned with commitment 1.2 of the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream)

June 2020

Publish WhatYouFund

The Global Campaign for Aid Transparency

Publish What You Fund is the global campaign for aid and development transparency. Launched in 2008, we envisage a world where aid and development information is transparent, available and used for effective decision-making, public accountability and lasting change for all citizens. Publish What You Fund combines effective research, evidence-based advocacy and technical knowhow to improve the quality and usefulness of data. We continue to campaign, to amplify and to extend the benefits of aid transparency for better development and humanitarian outcomes.

Authors:

Henry Lewis, Humanitarian Project Assistant, Publish What You Fund

Gary Forster, CEO, Publish What You Fund

With additional research by:

James Coe

Catherine Turner

Charlotte Smith

Ruba Ishak, Ground Truth Solutions

Max Seilern, Ground Truth Solutions

Reviewers:

Dr Tariq Al-Jarrah, DAMA, Iraq

Ranjit Chandra Das, BASTOB, Bangladesh

David Fallows, Department for International Development

Lindsay Hamsik, InterAction

Lizz Harrison, Independent

Shahana Hayat, Independent, Bangladesh

David Megginson, Centre for Humanitarian Data, UN OCHA

David Paulus, Delft University of Technology

Ary Syamand, Public Aid Organisation, Iraq

Project Partners:

Ground Truth Solutions is an international non-governmental organisation that helps people affected by crisis influence the design and implementation of humanitarian aid. It developed out of Keystone Accountability, which helps social change organisations improve their performance by harnessing feedback from the people they serve. It also captures the perspective of field staff and local partner organisations as a counterpoint to the views of those caught up in humanitarian crises. Find out more at https://groundtruthsolutions.org/

Development Initiatives (DI) is an independent international development organisation that focuses on the role of data in driving poverty eradication and sustainable development. DI wants to help build a world without poverty that invests in human security and where everyone shares the benefits of opportunity and growth. They work at global, regional, national and subnational levels, and have strong in-country partners. Find out more at https://devinit.org/

Contents

Boxes, figures, graphs and tables

SECTION ONE
Research overview and approach

Background and project overview

The Grand Bargain[1] was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016. Its goal to achieve $1bn in savings to address the gap in humanitarian financing was to be realised through a series of commitments in nine key areas.[2] In the area of transparency, a 'Transparency Workstream' was co-convened by the Dutch government and the World Bank to support signatories in implementing their commitment to publish timely and high-quality data on humanitarian funding and how it is allocated and used to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Standard (commitment 1.1; deadline May 2018).[3] This data had to be of appropriate quality to support data analysis, including the ability to identify the distinctiveness of activities, organisations, environments and circumstances. Signatories also committed to make use of available data in their programming and decision-making, to improve the digital platform and to support partners to both publish and access data.

BOX 1: What is the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)?

The standard is a set of rules and guidance for publishing standardised development and humanitarian data. Organisations can publish information on their finances (e.g. project budgets, funding allocations) and activities (e.g. locations of projects, project results). Data needs to be provided in the XML format. A range of organisations publish to the IATI standard, including donor governments, some UN agencies, and NGOs.

In the first phase of its activities (2017–2018) the Transparency Workstream focused on the commitment to publish data (commitment 1.1) in order to stimulate data availability, by enhancing the IATI standard to support the publication of humanitarian data and by providing support to signatories in publishing their humanitarian data. To unlock the full potential of transparent humanitarian data, it must not only be published but actively used to inform evidence-based interventions and efficiently allocate limited humanitarian resources to crisis settings. Therefore, the range of stakeholders had to be broadened to include humanitarian actors on the ground, to fully track financial flows and other information.

1   For more information on the Grand Bargain, including the name of all signatories, please see:
    https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain
2   The Grand Bargain was signed by 61 signatories (24 member states, 21 NGOs, 12 UN agencies, two Red Cross movements, and two inter-governmental organisations)
3   When the team talk about IATI, this includes the IATI standard, the actual data that comes out of IATI, and the platform(s) that use IATI data (e.g. d-portal). For more information on the IATI standard, please see: https://iatistandard.org/en/

BOX 2: **Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream commitments:**

1. Publish timely, transparent, harmonised and open high-quality data on humanitarian funding within two years of the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. We consider IATI to provide a basis for the purpose of a common standard.

2. Make use of appropriate data analysis, explaining the distinctiveness of activities, organisations, environments and circumstances (for example: protection, conflict-zones).

3. Improve the digital platform and engage with the open-data standard community to help ensure:

    a. Accountability of donors and responders with open data for retrieval and analysis;

    b. Improvements in decision-making, based upon the best possible information;

    c. A reduced workload over time as a result of donors accepting a common standard data for some reporting purposes; and

    d. Traceability of donors' funding throughout the transaction chain as far as the final responders and, where feasible, affected people.

4. Support the capacity of all partners to access and publish data.

For this reason, the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream, with funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, commissioned Publish What You Fund and Ground Truth Solutions to conduct research into the information needs and challenges faced by data users on the ground in protracted humanitarian response settings, to inform the efforts of the Transparency Workstream and Grand Bargain signatories.

Research methodology

The team conducted a combination of desk, online survey and key informant interview (KII) research of two case study countries – Bangladesh and Iraq – to make recommendations on how to increase transparency and to better meet the information needs of humanitarian responders, especially at a national and local level.

The research team chose Iraq and Bangladesh as its final case-study countries through a number of criteria (see methodology[4] for more on this). **Throughout, the team endeavoured to explore the research, and then present its findings, in a way which was consistent with what it heard from the mouths of those on the ground. As such, any omissions, for example regarding specific platforms or initiatives, should be interpreted with this understanding in mind**. While this provided an opportunity to compare and contrast two different protracted crises, the team recognises the limitations of this approach when trying to draw global lessons and insights.

4   Methodology: www.publishwhatyoufund.org/projects/humanitarian-transparency/

The survey (187 responses) and KIIs (66 participants) provided information about the challenges faced by humanitarian responders across a range of roles and types of organisations in accessing, submitting, sharing and using data from over 100 organisations across Iraq and Bangladesh (acknowledging that the limited sample size results in some challenges regarding the statistical significance of individual findings). The number of survey and KII respondents is broken down by organisation type in the methodology document. The study was weighted in favour of national and local actors,[5] but included interviews with governments, UN agencies, cluster coordinators, international NGOs,[6] and donor mission offices. For more information, please see Publish What You Fund's full methodology in footnotes.

Overall key findings

The research findings are presented across four themed briefing papers, as set out below. It should be noted while reading these reports that a key theme throughout is the cross-cutting issue of data quality. While there are agreed components of quality data, we haven't produced a definitive definition because this research illustrates the extent to which quality is largely a local construct and requires engagement and feedback loops to understand and address.

Research Brief 1 – Publication of humanitarian funding data (aligned with commitment 1.1 of the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream)

In this paper the research team presents its finding that funding data is of greater relevance to "coordinators" (e.g. recipient government officials and country-level coordination groups) than to "implementers" (usually the local level personnel who design and execute programmes and in turn report their activities "up the chain" to coordinators). The team also found that the quality of the available funding data is a serious concern and awareness and use of IATI data is lower than for data from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) Financial Tracking Service (FTS), which is itself used minimally (by only 1% of stakeholders in Iraq and 3% in Bangladesh had used IATI, while 3% in Bangladesh and 15% in Iraq reported regular use of FTS). In addition, however, it was noted that non-financial IATI data could be of use to a variety of actors within humanitarian response, for example 3/4W, results and outcomes data.

Research Brief 2 – Data collection, analysis and use in protracted humanitarian crises (aligned with commitment 1.2 of the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream)

In this paper the findings relate to issues of data quality and the differing needs of "coordinators" versus "implementers"; the former require more oversight information while the latter require management information to help design and implement their programmes. The lack of defined information management roles (including the people to fill them) inhibits collection and use of a range of different data types, including needs assessments, 3/4W, impact data, and monitoring data. Effective data sharing is undermined by limited and inconsistent data sharing practises. How best to treat sensitive data was found to be another challenge that all stakeholders needed to overcome when collecting, analysing and using data. Finally, data collection methodologies were found to often be unclear, or without rigour, suggesting that minimum quality control standards for data collection would be of value.

---

5   The research team defines national NGOs as operating in a single country, but in several regions of that country and local NGOs as operating in a single region within a country.
6   The research team defines international NGOs as organisations which work in multiple countries.

Research Brief 3 – The use, challenges and opportunities associated with digital platforms (aligned with commitment 1.3 of the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream)

In this paper the research team presents its findings around awareness and use of different digital platforms for programming and publication purposes. The team found that the number and usability of existing platforms is, in the eyes of users, sufficient for accessing the operational and financial data they need. The team found that users want to be able to download raw data in easily accessible formats such as Excel and to be able to download the underlying methodologies to understand how data was collected, and thus more accurately determine its legitimacy and value. The team identified the most commonly used data platforms and considered issues around data quality and sharing, finding that inconsistency in reporting and underlying data quality issues inhibit data use.

Research Brief 4 – Data use capacity in protracted humanitarian crises (aligned with commitment 1.4 of the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream)

In this paper the team identifies that data needs and corresponding capacity issues were similar across the two case study countries. The research finds that current funding models and reporting requirements inhibit data use capacity, particularly in local NGOs (but also INGOs) as they tend to receive less base funding, outside of projects, than other organisations, and do not have the time to report to multiple donors/platforms. Additionally, there is usually no explicit funding allocated to carry out needs assessments (a key requirement of on-the-ground organisations) and often either they cannot finance information management officer roles at all, or they lose their IM staff to bigger organisations. If data use capacity issues are addressed properly then it is likely that the use and publication of data (e.g. needs assessments, 3/4W, nutrition assessments, facility assessments, monitoring and evaluation data, and IATI data) among humanitarian organisations will also improve in the longer-term.

SECTION TWO

Data collection, analysis and use

Report purpose and scope

The purpose of this brief is to explore the needs and challenges associated with data collection, analysis, and use by humanitarian actors on the ground within protracted crises. The brief is based on data collected via an online survey and subsequent KIIs undertaken during field trips to Iraq (Kurdistan Region) and Bangladesh (Cox's Bazar and Dhaka). The brief will help inform the next steps for the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream signatories, particularly around commitment 1.2: "*Make use of appropriate data analysis, explaining the distinctiveness of activities, organisations, environments and circumstances*".

Specifically, the research team was looking to understand what roles different stakeholders play in each of the case study country responses, what kinds of decisions they have to make on a day-to-day basis, and what data and subsequent information products[7] they need in order to make those decisions. As a result, this brief outlines what key stakeholders on the ground highlighted as needing to change to help improve information exchange within protracted humanitarian responses. As such, it focuses on issues of coordination, effective data sharing, information management functions (defined by Loffler and Klann (2008) as "*the various stages of information processing from production to storage and retrieval to dissemination towards the better working of an organization*"),[8] roles and responsibilities with regard to data management, and how these are all impacting the quality of data being produced and shared within each of the case study country responses.

In many humanitarian settings, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) leads the coordination of the response and has a particular mandate around information management (IM),[9] and provides assistance and IM services to all those involved in a response. UN OCHA also gathers data and shares information products to encourage their use among partners and other relevant organisations across the sector to inform activities. Some of the types of data collected and/or compiled during emergency response and used by a broad range of stakeholders on the ground include, among others:

- Geospatial data – GPS locations, aerial images, satellite observations;

- Operational data – data that informs humanitarian operations (e.g. funding flows, logistics information such as procurement processes, number of people affected, etc);

- Survey and perception data – data collected directly from beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance to assess needs and concerns;

- Administrative data – data collected from official government sources (e.g. administrative boundaries, etc);

- Digital data – web-based portals, biometrics, SMS-based surveys, etc.

---

7   Data is the raw, unorganised facts collected from the affected communities in Iraq and Bangladesh. This data needs to be processed, structured and presented in the context of these crises to make it information. Analysis is the transformation of this information into useful and useable insights which can inform tangible actions within the responses.
8   J. Loffler and M. Klann, Mobile Response: Second International Workshop on Mobile Information Technology for Emergency Response (Berlin, Springer, 2008)
9   UN OCHA provides information management services: www.unocha.org/our-work/information-management

This is not a comprehensive list, but tries to cover a range of different data types generally collected to help inform the context, people affected and the response. To try to provide structure to collecting this data, UN OCHA and cluster leaders use the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC) which formalises needs assessments and response plans. Further, to try to align certain data types (administrative, boundary and population data) to help coordination in humanitarian responses, UN OCHA, at the global level, developed and then introduced the Common Operational Datasets (CODS),[10] but according to a number of sources the challenge has been implementation at the field level. CODS are mainly used in outward-facing visual information products, such as maps and charts.

All this data, often collected and analysed through the humanitarian needs overview (HNO) process annually, with another analysis done in advance of the mid-year review, informs the development of the humanitarian response plan (HRP) for each country and funding levels dedicated to each response.

Findings

FINDING 2A – THE QUALITY OF DATA AVAILABLE IS A CONCERN TO ON THE GROUND "COORDINATORS" AND "IMPLEMENTERS"

Stakeholders in Iraq and Bangladesh commented positively with regard to the quantity of data available within the responses and the increasing number of information products being produced to inform the responses as a result, but also emphasised that the quality of data was lacking and that not all actors are aware of where and how to access data. At the field level, the research showed that "coordinators" – primarily recipient government officials and country-level coordination groups – sought information to understand the scale of the response, the variety of actors, and to perform oversight to ensure that scarce resources reach the greatest number of affected people. On the other hand, "implementers" at the local level reported that their requirements include better management information (security and accessibility information, 3/4W data, etc), needs assessments and beneficiary data.

TABLE 1: COORDINATORS VS IMPLEMENTERS

COORDINATORS		IMPLEMENTERS	
Who:	country governments and coordination groups (e.g. clusters, donors, UN agencies)	Who:	local and national NGOs, INGOs, and often UN agencies (act as response coordinators while also delivering services directly to vulnerable populations)
Focus:	oversight, policy, evaluation and commissioning/funding implementers	Focus:	designing, sourcing funding for and executing programmes
Information needed:	scale of the response, variety of actors, financing	Information needed:	management information (security and accessibility information, 3/4W data, etc), needs assessment and beneficiary data

---

10   IASC, Common operation datasets (CODs) and fundamental operational datasets. Accessed online at: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy_files/common_operational_datasets.pdf

With regard to data use,[11] during the survey phase of this work, respondents in Iraq explained that the data they used most frequently was that pertaining to needs assessments (73% of respondents), 3/4W[12] data (52%), mapping and location data (46%), monitoring (46%), population/demographics (41%), security (39%) and data on financial flows (17%). This pattern was strikingly similar in Bangladesh albeit with the addition of natural hazard data (49% of respondents) and health data (35%).

With regards to data needs,[13] survey respondents in Iraq and Bangladesh explained that, in order to plan and implement quality assistance programmes for beneficiaries, they need more needs assessments (reported by 75% of respondents in Iraq and 72% in Bangladesh) and population/demographic data taking precedent (56% in Iraq and 63% in Bangladesh), followed by mapping and location (62%), natural hazard (58%) and health (45%) data in Bangladesh, and by mapping and location (54%), security data (45%), 3/4W (41%) and data on financial flows (30%, see Research Brief 1 for more) in Iraq.

During the KII stage of the research, however, it was evident that rather than simply seeking more data, when pressed, stakeholders were in search of better quality data and more comprehensive coverage (i.e. data sets that were reliable and comparable, with clear and rigorous methodologies attached and addressed all needs/regions). For example, research participants said that often there are good needs assessments for isolated locations, but not broader ones for districts or provinces. Figures 1 and 2 show data quality satisfaction among the online survey respondents. As can be seen in Iraq 61% of survey respondents were unsatisfied or somewhat satisfied with the quality of data, while in Bangladesh it was 55%.

FIGURE 1: **HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE QUALITY OF DATA THAT IS PUBLICLY AVAILABLE FOR THE IRAQ HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE?**
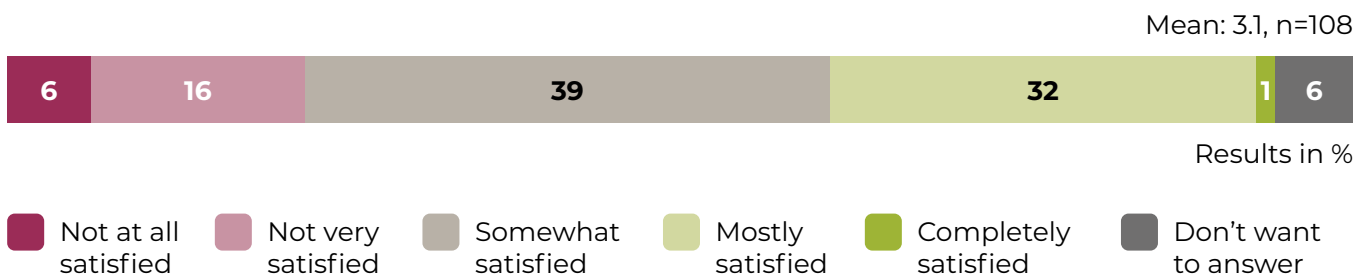
Mean: 3.1, n=108

6	16	39	32	1	6

Results in %

- Not at all satisfied
- Not very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Mostly satisfied
- Completely satisfied
- Don't want to answer

FIGURE 2: **HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE QUALITY OF DATA THAT IS PUBLICLY AVAILABLE FOR THE BANGLADESH HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE?**

Mean: 3.2, n=78

6	17	32	41	4

Results in %

- Not at all satisfied
- Not very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Mostly satisfied
- Completely satisfied

---
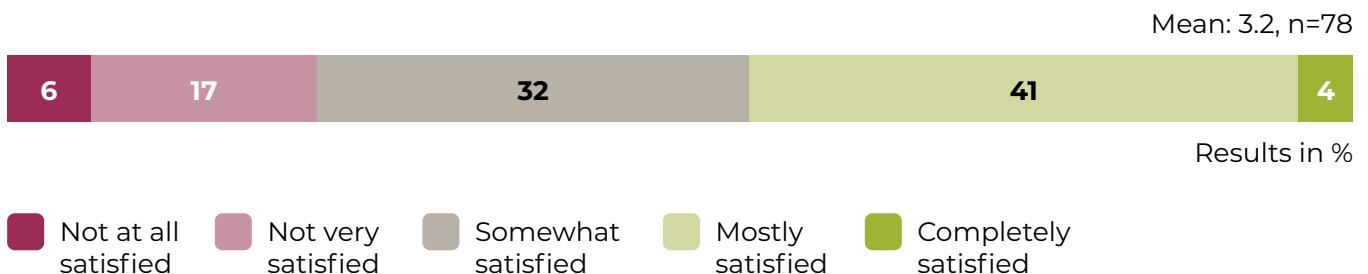
11   Survey question: What type of data do you use at least once a month? (select all that apply from a list).
12   3/4W data is the who does what where (i.e. it is data that tracks the location of activities, which actors are carrying out those activities within each sector/sub-sector actors, levels of funding). The raw data provided is used to provide information for coordination and gap analysis. Collection of 3/4W should be led by an information management office (IMO).
13   Survey question: What type of data do you need more of? (select all that apply from a list).

> ## " We lack effective contextual insight into what people are thinking in terms of social dynamics "
>
> ### Donor, Bangladesh

Implementers, regardless of size, prioritise the need for up-to-date, granular, validated, management information to inform the design and implementation of their programmes. They need this information to help them determine the mix of services to ensure that their expertise is allocated where the need is greatest, minimising duplication and preventing gaps in the response. Equally, there is a demand among a broad range of stakeholders the team spoke to during the KIIs who want more and better quality qualitative data (e.g. perception surveys, vulnerability assessments/matrices, KIIs, focus groups, historical narratives) to enhance analysis and understand the less measurable side of the responses (i.e. around social dynamics, culture, etc). This was particularly the case in Bangladesh where actors wanted to know more about the Rohingya people, their culture and the history of the persecution they have faced. As one INGO employee made clear during an interview, "*The data gap is more so on the qualitative data, as well as good quality qualitative data*." Currently, the priority is being given to quantitative data (e.g. household surveys, needs assessments, demographic data). Overall, actors on the ground generally want more *information* and less *data*. During this research the team found there was definitely a sub-set of users, particularly coordinators, who needed the data to be consolidated, for example through analysis or as visualisations, which they could use to inform their activities and where to allocate funding. Nonetheless, it was deemed important to get a balance between quantitative and qualitative data so organisations can know the numbers of people affected by a crisis, while also being able to understand trends and macro issues within a crisis. However, the poor quality of data (i.e. it lacks comprehensiveness, timeliness, relevance, comparability and reliability) remains a barrier to greater use and analysis, and a number of challenges remain, including weak data governance[14] on the ground and a lack of "data leadership"[15] in-country.

DATA IN PRACTICE

One research agency in Iraq was leading the way in improving access to and use of qualitative data in the response. This stakeholder wanted to provide something to those in the field who required more in-depth understanding of the root causes of the crisis. To do this, the organisation used mixed methods approaches (i.e. quantitative and qualitative methods) in their research which allowed them to go beyond just the numbers of people affected and explore the underlying causes of the conflict. Every written product they produce, both analysis and discussions, is made public. As one staff member said, "*There's a growing push for publishing and sharing analyses to make them accessible to all actors on the ground*".

---

14   Survey question: What type of data do you need more of? (select all that apply from a list).
15   An individual, organisation or entity with the authority to implement data policies, standards and controls.

FINDING 2B – INFORMATION MANAGEMENT CAPACITY IS MORE OF AN IMMEDIATE ISSUE FOR "IMPLEMENTERS" THAN "COORDINATORS"

> **Data management is vital for reducing gaps, overlaps in the work of humanitarian organisations, and increasing collaboration at all phases of the response, including needs assessments, joint planning, monitoring and evidencing**

INGO, Bangladesh

There is a need to improve data collection, analysis and eventual use to help organisations better understand the context of a crisis, and what is being done in a response. In both Iraq and Bangladesh, actors on the ground stated that there is a substantial quantity of data available within the responses, but a lack of information management (IM) functions, particularly the absence of dedicated information management or monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) officers/units, at the response and cluster levels are hindering the effective analysis, use and sharing of it. As one IM officer told us in Bangladesh, "*information management is integral to the response*". Specifically, cluster coordinators, INGOs and local organisations stated in interviews that a lack of IM capacity (both the number of information management officers (IMOs) and their respective mandates/power) throughout the responses and within their own organisations meant there was an absence of guidance to help improve the effective exchange of information between and within humanitarian organisations.


BOX 3: What is the multi-cluster/sector needs assessment (MCNA/MSNA)?

A crisis-wide and inter-agency multi-sectoral assessment, which supports specific humanitarian milestones such as the humanitarian needs overview (HNO) and humanitarian response plans (HRP). It should be noted that the MCNA is also known as the MSNA in some countries and not every HNO is developed based on the MCNA/MSNA. REACH Initiative, an INGO, is the lead agency for the MCNA/MSNA data collection in most responses. In countries where the REACH Initiative is not present, OCHA coordinates a multi-sectoral assessment. Coordinated assessments are carried out in partnership with all humanitarian sectors, through the use of agreed-upon indicators, in order to assess the humanitarian situation. and to identify the needs of the affected population.

Stakeholders highlighted that in their opinion IM functions are essential across the responses, particularly in the collection and analysis of data and to provide effective transmission of information to those that need it, in a timely and accurate fashion. Internal IM functions, such as having a dedicated IMO or unit, can provide organisations, particularly clusters and INGOs, with the capabilities to share best practice and advise on data collection methodologies, and also deal with incoming data from the field and their local partners. For example, a dedicated IM would have the ability to analyse the information that on-the-ground stakeholders most need, such as needs assessments, 3/4W data, mapping and location data, and monitoring data, while turning it into easy-to-use visual formats such as infographics, maps, tables, reports, and dashboards. These can then be used to support and make evidence-based decisions around response planning activities, such as the allocation of often-limited resources by coordinators and inform programme activities of implementers on the front lines of the response.

Needs assessment data was both the most frequently used type of data (73% in Iraq and 74% in Bangladesh) and the most frequently needed type of data (75% and 72% respectively) among online survey respondents.

IRAQ   **BANGLADESH**

USED   NEEDED

73%   75%   74%   72%
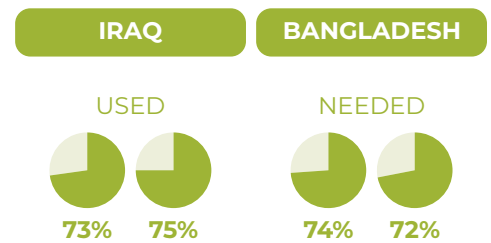
Stakeholders explained the extent to which they believe that IM capacity within INGOs and NNGOs is essential, and provided examples of instances where monitoring and evaluation officers were having to pick up typical IM duties. IMOs are seen as especially important within the cluster system. This is due to the amount of data being submitted, usually by a large number of partners, and the need to analyse this data in a timely manner to subsequently inform cluster activities and focus, while ensuring that all partner organisations involved have the same information. However, the team heard from a number of cluster IMOs in both settings that their main concern is 3/4W data being submitted in a timely way by partners to ActivityInfo (Iraq) and ReportHub (Bangladesh). As one IMO in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, stated, "*we are struggling to collect 4W data. Only 40–50% of our partners are reporting this type of data.*"

DATA IN PRACTICE

In Bangladesh, there is one cluster that works on cross-cutting issues within the Rohingya response and, therefore, the ability to analyse data from multiple sectors is essential. This cluster has two dedicated IMOs. As a result, they are able to collect reporting data from 50-plus implementing partners and 34 programme partners (as of 2019), which they are additionally able to upload onto the sector specific website and turn into sector wide maps. Further, this cluster has also been able to build a close relationship with the equivalent global cluster to gain access to training opportunities. This training has helped enhance the skills and knowledge of the IMOs, which in turn has meant that the cluster has been able to produce information products more quickly and assist partners with their data collection and use needs.

They put this down to a lack of time and IM capacity among staff in partner organisations, particularly local NGOs (see Briefing 4 on data use capacity), and a lack of IM mandates to enforce data submission from partners. This can produce data gaps. According to the online survey, in Iraq and Bangladesh clusters and working groups are the primary source of data for respondents at 37%, compared to getting data from within their organisations at 28% in Iraq and 31% in Bangladesh.

On top of this issue, cluster coordinators and local NGOs interviewed in both case-study countries said that IM positions are not being adequately funded by donors and were not seen as important positions compared to other roles. This is impacting the ability of organisations to collect, analyse and use data in an effective manner. Specifically, as there is not a minimum standard for IM positions (e.g. lack of terms of reference [ToRs], no minimum number of IMOs required, etc), it can be difficult for donors and other funders to decide what level of funding is required for these roles. Cluster and NGO research interviewees stated that this is especially the case in Iraq as the response winds down and moves towards a post-conflict, longer-term recovery phase with a lower overall humanitarian-focused budget.

FINDING 2C – DATA SHARING PRACTISES ARE INCONSISTENT AND LIMITED

> **There are so many different organisations that publish data, it is sometimes difficult to find the right data. Some organisations are very protective of their data (for example, needs assessments) and don't want to share their findings. Sharing could be improved**
>
> **INGO interviewee, Iraq**

From the online survey, the team found that over half of respondents from both Iraq and Bangladesh said their organisations shared data to help improve coordination within the responses. Once on the ground undertaking the KIIs, however, the team found that data sharing practices between organisations are inconsistent and limited. There were many reasons put forward by stakeholders to explain why data was not being widely shared, but the main reasons identified include:

i. Local and national NGOs lack confidence in the rigour of their data collection processes or have concerns about the perceived quality of their data;

ii. There is a perception that UN agencies and INGOs in particular value some form of competitive advantage gained by being the custodians of primary data;

iii. All actors expressed concerns about the way in which data may be used/interpreted by third parties, in particular national governments (e.g. the data does not show the organisation in a favourable light, such as evaluations which indicate failings);

iv. Local and national NGOs, and some smaller INGOs, are not aware of, or do not have capacity to share data on existing data-sharing platforms;

v. Limited use or absence of data-sharing protocols/agreements/memos of understanding (MoUs) between data producers and third-party organisations;

vi. Some data is deemed too sensitive to share even with trusted parties and/or where data-sharing protocols are in place;

vii. Local NGOs are not aware that others might find their data useful.

A combination of the above has generally limited data sharing. This lack of sharing has an impact on data visibility and quality, while inhibiting analysis and use by different implementers in the responses. This means that important decisions are being made without seeing, or having access to, all the information needed to make them. This is made even more important by the fact that in Iraq, all of the online survey respondents said they used data to inform evidence-based decision making, while in Bangladesh this was said by around three-quarters of respondents.

> **Some standard data sharing practices are missing from this [Rohingya] context. Other NGOs need to share reports as often as possible so we can help each other. We need a Cox's level information sharing process for everyone to use**
>
> **Local NGO, Bangladesh**

Due to a lack of guidance on what data should be shared, how and with whom, organisations have defaulted to sharing only what is required by donors, cluster leads, or other funding-related mechanisms, for example, the UN's funding mechanisms in the HPC i.e. sharing most commonly follows reporting lines. As such the team found local NGOs were providing substantial volumes of data to their lead donors, including UN, pooled fund, and INGO funders, but not vice-versa. As an example, on many occasions local and national responders expressed their anger at the inequity of data sharing, that they have to work on an open book basis, be subject to comprehensive audits and share all of their data with their funders, meanwhile they said they have no visibility of the finances flowing into their country, how it is used by the bigger actors, and for what purpose. Local stakeholders are very clear that this data sharing imbalance not only undermines all localisation efforts, but fundamentally undermines trust between different actors in the response. For example, the research team were told of rumours circulating in Bangladesh that western actors, and particularly the UN agencies involved in the response, were not transparent about their costs and activities because they had something to hide. While this was a perception among some local actors in Bangladesh, it still highlights the issue of trust between international and local partners. Beyond the Grand Bargain transparency commitment, there is no specific formal global agreement on what humanitarian data should be shared that can be used to hold donors, international agencies and other actors to account.

> **Data competition was starker in the Rohingya crisis than any other I've experienced… there are weak data protocols and competition that is tense enough to discourage data sharing**
>
> **Independent consultant, Bangladesh**

The research team heard from stakeholders that "*a lack of trust between agencies, particularly at the higher levels, has limited data sharing and openness, so there is a need to know the right person to get the information you need*". A lot of the data sharing that does happen is at the lower level, based on informal personal relationships among IMOs, humanitarian affairs officers, etc, rather than by formal agreement among agencies and INGOs. The major problem here appears to be a gap in trust between different types of humanitarian actors, partially as a result of weak or non-existent data sharing protocols between UN agencies, the government and other organisations involved in delivering humanitarian aid. It was brought up by multiple local and national actors that INGOs and the donor community do not trust either their ability to produce quality information, or believe them to be insufficiently unbiased in order to produce reliable information.[16] While the first appears to be a problem across the board, this second reason seems to be particularly the case in Bangladesh, due to the nature of the humanitarian crisis itself. For example, it was pointed out in interviews with INGOs that local and national actors in Bangladesh are perceived as having different long-term goals in relation to the refugee crisis. INGOs perceived certain local actors to be insufficiently impartial, and more likely to align politically with the Bangladeshi government, whose policies are not always supported by the INGOs.

---

16   John Bryant and Caitlin Wake, *Capacity and Complementarity in the Rohingya Response in Bangladesh* (Overseas Development Institute, HPG Working Paper, 2018)

DATA IN PRACTICE

An INGO working on community feedback mechanisms in the Rohingya response in Bangladesh highlighted the importance of data-sharing agreements. This particular organisation needed access to data from other organisations working in the same area and wanted to encourage further sharing. This was made easier when a staff member at this organisation created a two-page data sharing agreement to use. While this was not a legal document, it helped reassure all organisations involved that GDPR would be complied with, with everyone only requesting anonymised data. This data sharing agreement also stated that the leading organisation could not only use one organisation's data, rather it must be combined and validated with other community feedback data from other organisations. Additionally, as staff turnover is high in Cox's Bazar, the data-sharing agreement meant that it didn't have to constantly renegotiate what data should be shared with new staff members. As one staff member involved said, "*Data should be free, people are too protective of the data. What is the point of collecting community feedback data if you are not incorporating it in your work?*"

> ## " There is competition between agencies over the information being shared "
> ### Working Group Coordinator, Bangladesh

Further, inter-agency competition among humanitarian actors on the ground creates a lack of trust and makes the accessibility of information difficult. In many cases, the research team found that data was viewed as a competitive advantage, particularly for donor and humanitarian response plan (HRP) funding, so was not shared widely or at all, as one working group said in Bangladesh, "*this leads them to control outflow of information more tightly*". For example, in Bangladesh there was a widely held perception among implementers that competition between UN agencies leading the response was leading to a lack of data sharing at the top levels, and therefore, organisations further down the information chain were not able to access the data they needed to inform their programmes. As one independent consultant interviewed told us, "*Data competition is starker in the Rohingya crisis than I have seen in any other crisis. UNHCR, WFP and IOM are in the midst of a data war.*" While these two examples are context specific, they provide an illustration of the ways in which tensions in a humanitarian crisis can affect trust and perceived reliability of information produced.

For those implementers closer to the front lines of the response, mainly local and national NGOs, there was a demand for more granular and disaggregated data due to the nature of their role in delivering assistance directly to beneficiaries. This data needed to be up-to-date, preferably having been validated, cleaned and provided in a straightforward format in the form of raw data or at least pre-analysed information. However, local and national NGOs highlighted in interviews that within both responses there is a lack of proactive efforts to include them in cluster meetings, to hold meetings and produce information products in local dialects, and to agree methods for sharing data with local organisations, including government and civil society organisations (CSOs). One KII participant in Iraq put this down to the fact that many local and national NGOs do not have a proper understanding and/ or awareness of international humanitarian architecture and the cluster approach, which they said might lead to poor participation of these organisations in cluster meetings. On the other hand, the team did hear that at the regional level, some clusters were better than others at including local and national organisations, and strongly advised them to join meetings to have their voices heard and get access to information.

> ## The cluster system is the means we use to get everyone to the table – if you are not part of this system then your voice is less likely to be heard

UN agency employee, Iraq

For local NGOs, simply accessing this data about the response in which they are contributing can be a challenge. A number of local organisations told us that they had felt effectively excluded from coordination meetings where they would receive such data and often relied on more informal methods to get access to the information they require. These cluster meetings are important avenues for sharing information about the crisis and potential avenues for funding. For those that are invited to cluster meetings there is a level of commitment required, but there are also a number of barriers, including the associated time and financial cost of returning from the field, and barriers regarding the language of the papers and discussion at the meeting. In one example, a local NGO explained their frustration given that attendance at cluster meetings was a requirement in order to apply for funding from the HRP. Further, attendance at cluster meetings would allow for better recognition of local and national NGOs working in the sector, and allow for them to meet and pair up with INGOs when applying for HRP funding (see Briefing 4 on data use capacity).

> ## What is not happening due to lack of data sharing is what needs understanding

Donor, Bangladesh

A cross-cutting challenge that impacts many of the issues in these research briefs, but particularly information sharing, relates to the humanitarian–development nexus. There has been a concerted effort in recent years to close the "humanitarian–development gap", particularly as humanitarian assistance is increasingly shifting towards funding long-term responses rather than purely rapid on-set emergencies.[17] In such protracted crises, the line between the humanitarian and development responses becomes blurred.[18] This has a particular effect on communication and information exchange between the two sectors. One interviewee highlighted that they often feel that they have a broad understanding of the wider humanitarian response, but little in terms of how that humanitarian response may be able to utilise pre-existing programmes and infrastructure established by the development community. This would be particularly useful where a humanitarian crisis is taking place within a development context, as is the case with the Rohingya situation in Bangladesh. According to another INGO interviewee, there are major gaps on the development side, with actors "just not talking to each other". This was repeated by an IMO at the UN in Iraq, who said:

"The development side are not as good at collecting data. They do not have the same types of platforms. There are no parallel systems or the infrastructure does not exist. This needs to be improved and there needs to be better talking. As the humanitarian response in Iraq shuts down, there is a disconnection with the cluster system and agencies moving towards development work."
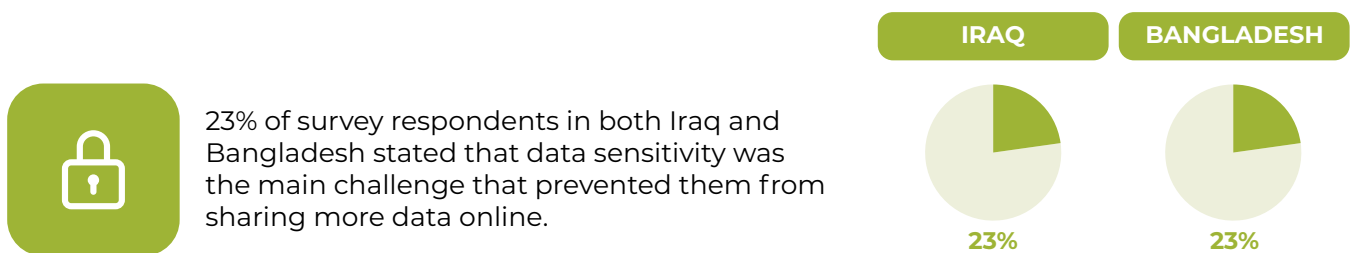
17 Development Initiatives, Global Humanitarian Assistance Report (2016)
18 UN OCHA, The Humanitarian Development Nexus—What do evaluations have to say? (2018)

Development actors rarely participate in or are invited to humanitarian cluster meetings, so there is no formal mechanism for the two sectors to exchange information.[19] This should be taken on a case-by-case basis as some cluster meetings do include a number of development actors, for example, the emergency livelihoods cluster in Iraq. More widely, this lack of information exchange makes it hard for national governments to plan future country budgets and activities. There was some argument that development actors were excluded to maintain the independent, impartial and neutral nature of humanitarian coordination architecture. This, however, should not preclude collaboration and there needs to be agreement and structure on data sharing and MoUs between development and humanitarian actors.

FINDING 2D – DATA SENSITIVITY PRESENTS ANOTHER CHALLENGE THAT STAKEHOLDERS NEED TO OVERCOME WHEN COLLECTING, ANALYSING AND USING DATA

Sensitive data includes personally identifiable information (PII) and demographically identifiable information (DII), for example, the names of victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), who is receiving cash-based assistance, data linked to child protection and child safeguarding policies, and camp registration details. As some interviewees directly told us, in most cases disjointed rules and policies around data sensitivity, such as a lack of ethical and legal frameworks and guidelines, can lead to confusion and conflicting ideas about what data can be shared and in what format.[20] For example, information sharing protocols (ISPs) are not easy for most partners to understand (especially for local and national NGOs) and organisations need training, workshops and capacity-building on them. Often, this has made it difficult to access sensitive data at all. In Iraq and Bangladesh nearly a quarter of the online survey respondents indicated the main challenge that prevents them from sharing more data online relates to the sensitive nature of the data. While users are aware of how to anonymise and amalgamate data in order to render it less sensitive, they still lack confidence in handling this information. Therefore, even aggregated and anonymised data was rarely shared, according to one local NGO in Iraq, which ultimately reduces the availability of information being produced in each response.

IRAQ	BANGLADESH

23% of survey respondents in both Iraq and Bangladesh stated that data sensitivity was the main challenge that prevented them from sharing more data online.

23%   **23%**

In many cases, stakeholders also refrain from sharing data because they perceive that their own data is of insufficient quality to be useful to other actors, or to show their organisation in a good light. Given challenges relating to the limited capacity of some actors and the funding constraints for undertaking needs assessments, this situation is somewhat understandable. However, raw or messy data can still be usable at a specific level of aggregation (e.g. mid-level picture of the magnitude of the response). The risk is that if data is released in this state, other organisations might try to use it at lower levels of detail, so more is needed to invest in verifying and cleaning up the data.

---

19   It should be noted that since the inception of this research the UN Secretariat has established a Development Coordination Office in Iraq: www.uniraq.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=951&Itemid=619&lang=en

20   Some UN agencies, INGOs and others do have their own responsible data management guidelines, standard inter-agency agreements, etc.

In a context where formal procedures for handling sensitive data are inconsistent and protection risks to civilian populations are significant, some interviewees highlighted that INGOs and the UN err on the side of caution by not sharing data rather than risking their reputation. Some INGO interviewees suggested that being transparent on which local partners they are working with and where, may result in increased risk to staff and inhibit access to displaced populations or camps, as different "political camps" may object to the fact that the INGO is working with both sides. This could potentially inhibit data sharing to the extent that individual actors design and implement activities without the data they need. While almost all of those spoken to agreed that this is a risk, several interviewees across a number of humanitarian actors suggested that an overly cautious approach could be used as an excuse to avoid being transparent. As one local NGO in Bangladesh said, "*there is data that is sensitive, but we should not use this as a blanket approach not to share any data*". All agreed that it is context specific. Figures 3 and 4 show examples of the kinds of data that the online survey respondents initially said they were not comfortable sharing and which was explored further during the KIIs.

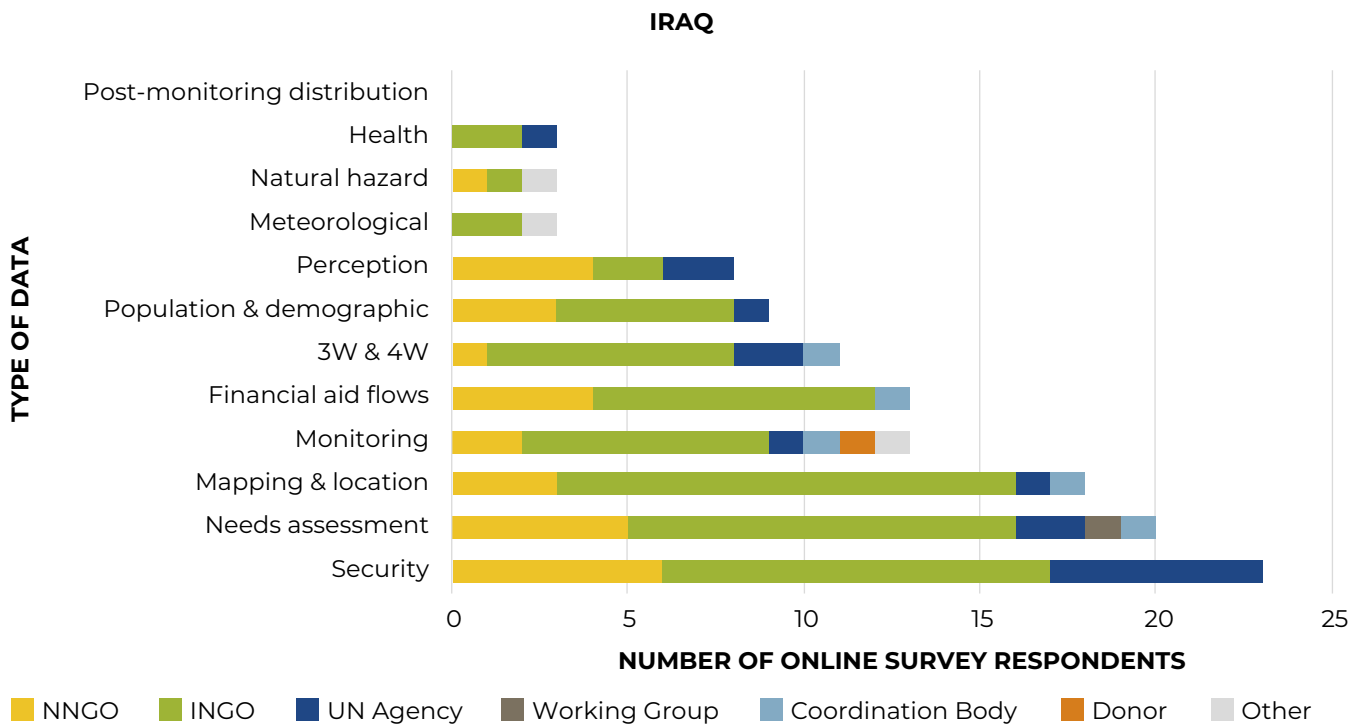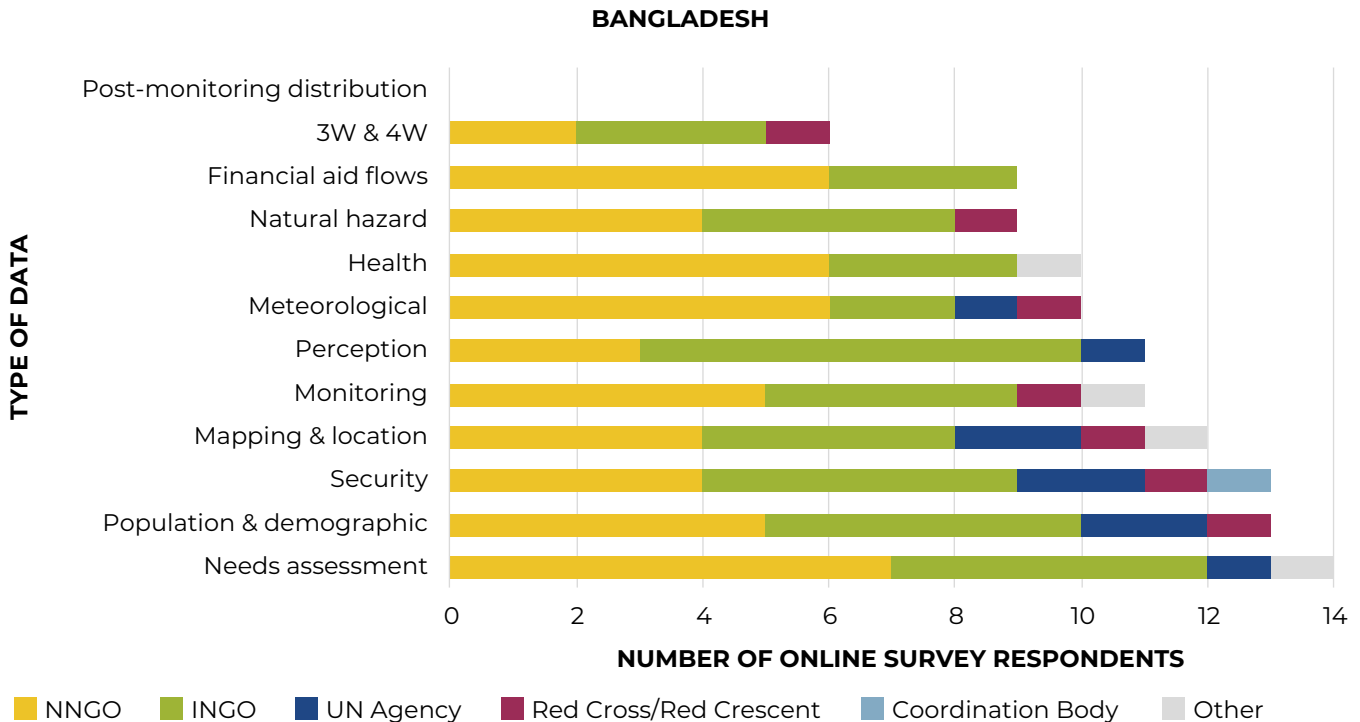**FIGURE 3: WHAT TYPE OF DATA DO YOU *NOT* FEEL COMFORTABLE SHARING PUBLICLY IN IRAQ?**

IRAQ

FIGURE 4: **WHAT TYPE OF DATA DO YOU *NOT* FEEL COMFORTABLE SHARING PUBLICLY IN BANGLADESH?**

BANGLADESH

It is important to recognise the "do no harm" principle here, and that in certain cases, full transparency has the potential to cause more harm than good. For example, the team heard reports from one stakeholder in Iraq of serious reprisals, including assassinations of local NGO staff, as a result of funding information being made publicly available, particularly around who they were receiving funding from. The rise of widespread data collection and sharing in humanitarian emergencies has posed a series of new challenges to the "do no harm" principle. It should be noted that the draft UN OCHA Data Responsibility Guidelines[21] (under development during our field research) offer a set of principles, processes and tools that support the safe, ethical and effective management of data in humanitarian response. The core audience for these guidelines is OCHA staff involved in managing humanitarian data across OCHA's core functions, but the OCHA team is also working with Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) partners to develop joint operational guidance on data responsibility at a response level.[22] The Centre for Humanitarian Data is also doing work on data sensitivity issues to help improve the management of sensitive data on their Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX) platform.[23] Yet, there is an issue that the guidelines do not speak to the full range of issues raised by actors on the ground, and therefore, whether they have the potential to have an impact if they are integrated at the country-level. For example, clusters without a dedicated IMO might not have the time or technical skills necessary to implement these guidelines with their partners, if they are more widely implemented beyond OCHA staff.

21   UN OCHA and The Centre for Humanitarian Data, Data Responsibility Guidelines Working Draft (2019). Accessed online at https://centre.humdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/OCHA-DR-Guidelines-working-draft-032019.pdf
22   See here for more: https://centre.humdata.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/IASC-RG1-Sub-Group-Survey-results-analysis-Final-.pdf
23   The Centre for Humanitarian Data, *Improving the Management of Sensitive Data on HDX* (2020). Accessed online at https://centre.humdata.org/improving-the-management-of-sensitive-data-on-hdx/

FINDING 2E – THERE IS A NEED FOR CLEAR AND ROBUST METHODOLOGIES WITH MINIMUM QUALITY CONTROL STANDARDS FOR DATA COLLECTION

Concerns were raised during the KIIs that in circumstances where there is limited oversight and/or quality control of data collection methods, due to a lack of internal IM capacity and mandates for example, the comprehensiveness, timeliness, relevance, reliability and comparability of data can be negatively impacted. Currently, data collection is characterised by issues around:

   i.   A lack of minimum standards for data collection with regards to robust methodologies;

   ii. A lack of ethical sampling;

   iii. No set guidelines on the frequency of assessments;

   iv. A lack of feedback loops to beneficiaries;

   v. A lack of efforts to minimise duplication of interviews;

   vi. A lack of quality assurance processes; and

   vii. Political influence, such as authorities restricting access to certain areas or affected populations, and/or bureaucratic hurdles and delays.

There were very real concerns that without quality control around data collection practises, some beneficiaries may be expected to participate in multiple needs assessments by different organisations in short periods of time, often with little or no feedback loops as to how that data has been used and what the outcomes might be. These concerns extended to the collection of sensitive data, including qualitative GBV data. For example, in Bangladesh the research team heard that vulnerable Rohingya, especially women and girls who had been victims of sexual violence, were being interviewed regularly, multiple times and by multiple different NGOs, all collecting the same information, so were having to relive the trauma of their experience over and over again. Many research interviewees recognised that such a situation was unethical and aside from concerns about the potential distress caused and lack of expertise present among data collectors to deal with these issues, these practises could serve to undermine the confidence of beneficiaries in the response. While these examples were more numerous in Bangladesh (where the beneficiary population is more accessible/static), similar concerns were raised by local NGOs working directly with displaced populations in Iraq. There, how methodologies were explained and how feedback was provided were considered paramount in relieving tension between different ethnic/religious groups who ultimately might receive different support by nature of their circumstances. One IM who had previously been posted to Syria explained that in that response there were controls in place (including peer reviews of methodologies) to prevent use of weak or unethical approaches, and much greater oversight over data collection practise and sharing more broadly.

Stakeholders on the ground expressed concern that there is a lack of alignment and oversight on the development of needs assessment methodologies and tools, particularly the smaller, localised agency-specific assessments, which impedes data analysis as it is difficult to disaggregate and compare data sets. One IMO in Bangladesh stated, "*There is a difference in the sample sizes that organisations use. There are different methodologies by agencies. This brings challenges for us as it can bring different results.*" While different sectors will necessarily have different methodologies due to their focus (i.e. health versus food security), in order to address some of these challenges, humanitarian partners in Bangladesh supported the roll-out of a joint MSNA.[24] However, a number of stakeholders emphasised that as humanitarian actors continue to undertake their own needs assessments, the challenge they are facing is around how to minimise duplication and methodological divergence. Here, it should be noted that the Grand Bargain Needs Assessment Workstream is working to address these issues through a number of initiatives, such as their Principles for Coordinated Needs Assessment Ethos and their Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework.

24   Known as the multi-sector needs assessment (MSNA) in Bangladesh

Conclusion and recommendations

The over-riding conclusion of this research brief is that each of the findings relate in one way or another to issues of oversight and data governance. Specifically, inadequate protocols for data sharing risk exposing PII and DII of at-risk individuals or vulnerable organisations (i.e. local, national and international NGOs), or conversely can inhibit data sharing to the extent that individual actors design and implement activities without the data they need to make evidence-based, informed decisions. The lack of data sharing and general "*brain drain*" of local/national NGOs diminishes trust between local and international partners. In the longer-term, this erosion of trust could inhibit the ability to achieve the localisation agenda (for more information on these issues, please see the work being carried out by Workstream 2: more support and funding tools to local and national responders).
The lack of comprehensive reporting of needs assessments findings, sharing of data sets, and sharing data on planned assessments to assist coordination, at best results in duplication of activities or else implementation gaps, and at worst results in beneficiaries being interviewed multiple times, in short timeframes, about extremely sensitive matters. A lack of mandate for any IM function leads to inadequate methodologies, often with non-existent feedback loops and questionable ethics, which aside from the human rights implications, represent a general drain across the response. Therefore, commitment 1.2 of the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream cannot be fully achieved without first addressing these underlying barriers to better data quality, improving the challenges posed by poor data governance on the ground and "data leadership" in-country.

Based on its findings the research team has put together a number of recommendations for both the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream signatories and other relevant Workstreams where the findings overlap and would potentially be useful.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALL GRAND BARGAIN SIGNATORIES ENGAGED IN THE GRAND BARGAIN TRANSPARENCY WORKSTREAM:

a. Consider options for establishing an inclusive data coordination entity in-country at the response level (supported at the global level) with the mandate and seniority to ensure adherence to basic data governance standards (e.g. deciding on definitions, peer reviewing data collection methodologies, providing capacity/training/mentoring support, etc.), and who will engage with frontline responders and existing working groups during a crisis (e.g. IMWG, assessment working group) to improve guidance, practice and implementation at the field level.

b. Draft a set of ToRs for a data coordination entity to guide discussion about the role and responsibility of information management functions and assist with implementation of global guidelines at field level in humanitarian response.

c. Work with signatories to identify a code of good practice with regard to enabling data transparency at field level that can form the basis of a code of conduct within humanitarian operations.

d. Thought needs to be given to local level capacity building, training and implementation as it is the local adoption of global guidelines that is frequently highlighted as a challenge.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER RELEVANT GRAND BARGAIN WORKSTREAMS:

- **Workstream 2: More support and funding tools to local and national responders**

  - Cluster leads and coordinators should make increased efforts to ensure the participation of local NGOs in cluster meetings and other coordination mechanisms.

- **Workstream 5: Improve joint and impartial needs assessments**

  - Investigate the current state of needs assessment recording and registration in-country and establish improvement plans to ensure all assessments and activities conducted and/or planned are captured then rationalised.

- **Workstream 6: A participation revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives**

  - Agree mandatory standards for needs assessment feedback loops to ensure that communities are informed of the outcomes of their assessments.

- **Cross-cutting issue: Humanitarian–development nexus commitments**

  - Improve data sharing between humanitarian and development actors at the field level by developing a formal mechanism of engagement during the transition phase through clearly defined parameters for engagement to enhance collaborative analysis where applicable. For example, In Iraq, this could be formal collaboration between UN OCHA and the UN Development Coordination Office.