HUMANITARIAN DATA TRANSPARENCY SERIES

Brief 4 of 4

DATA USE CAPACITY IN PROTRACTED HUMANITARIAN CRISES

(aligned with commitment 1.4 of the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream)

June 2020

Publish What You Fund
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.

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GROUND TRUTH SOLUTIONS

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

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/

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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 use capacity

Report purpose and scope

The purpose of this brief is to explore the issues and challenges that humanitarian actors on the ground in protracted crises face and the impact these have on data publishing, collection, analysis and use. In particular, it considers issues with data use capacity, i.e. having the resources and staff with the skills and knowledge to access, manipulate and analyse data, and how this impacts the quantity and quality of data and subsequent information products[7] being used to inform response activities. The brief is based on data collected via both the online survey and key informant interviews (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 1.4: *Support the capacity of all partners to access and publish data*. For this research, the team has expanded its interpretation of the commitment to include capacity to use data. It outlines what key stakeholders on the ground highlighted as their key capacity challenges, and how these can negatively influence their ability to access and use data to design and implement interventions. As such, it focuses on issues of funding for needs assessments and data use expertise, training and systems, visibility around methodologies used for data collection, but touches on other issues including localisation, and how these are all impacting the quality of data being produced and shared within each of the case study country responses.

Data underpins the humanitarian system and is a tool on which decision-making for an effective response is based. All stakeholders involved in a response need the support to invest in and develop organisational and staff capacity to help collect, analyse, publish and use data to their, and their organisations', best ability. The quicker data can be collected and analysed in a response, the more effective that response is likely to be and, if properly collected during the initial stages of a crisis, can benefit early recovery activities later on. Data collected in the field helps inform the development of the humanitarian response plan (HRP)[8] in each country, and helps individual humanitarian organisations, as well as host country governments, make decisions about where to focus resources (e.g. on a health project in camp X or an education project in camp Y). For this reason, it is essential to have comprehensive, timely, relevant, reliable and comparable data in order to make sure that each intervention is designed based on the most accurate information in order to improve the likelihood that resources will be allocated efficiently and to where the demand is most pressing.

Just like shelter materials, non-food items or the salaries of community health workers, data has a value, and a cost, so it also needs to be given thoughtful consideration. Often in humanitarian response, there is a trade-off between having data quickly and its quality and consistency. Poor quality data can hinder the response, delay action, undermine trust and ultimately can have a real and negative impact upon beneficiaries. Collecting the wrong information, duplicating information, using weak methodologies, etc – are a waste of time (for both collectors and providers of data) and money, and can often put affected people at risk as they are the ones providing the same information multiple times, as well as putting staff at unnecessary risk as they are often collecting data in insecure environments. It is also important to recognise the inherent and less tangible value of data, insofar, as it can serve to build trust between response actors and their counterparts in-country, including government, civil society and affected populations themselves. If organisations involved in a response do not have sufficient data-use capacity – such as clear data processes, systems and standards – they risk making decisions based on flawed or inaccurate information. Therefore, humanitarian organisations should be supported to make sense of often ill-structured humanitarian response situations, while addressing and mitigating potential biases early on.

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 In Bangladesh, the humanitarian response plan (HRP) is referred to as the joint response plan (JRP) and specifically covers the response to the Rohingya crisis.

At the field level, as outlined in the other three reports, the research showed that those closer to the front lines of humanitarian assistance (e.g. "implementers") are in need of more management type information, while those with oversight and coordination responsibility (e.g. "coordinators") need more information products. To understand the impact of capacity challenges which these stakeholders face, it is important to first understand their specific data use and subsequent data needs. The table below, collected during the initial online survey phase, shows the striking similarities between Iraq and Bangladesh in terms of the main types of data that respondents said they used on a monthly basis and what they need more of:

TABLE 1: TYPES OF DATA USED AND NEEDED BY RESPONDENTS OF THE ONLINE SURVEY

	IRAQ (% OF RESPONDENTS)		BANGLADESH (% OF RESPONDENTS)	
TYPE OF DATA	**USED**	**NEED**	**USED**	**NEED**
Needs assessment	73	75	74	72
3/4W[9]	52	41	41	38
Mapping and location	46	54	63	62
Monitoring	46	44	42	49
Population and demographic	41	56	59	263

Other types of data that respondents said they needed more of included security (45%) and financial (30%) data in Iraq (see Research Brief 1 for more on financial data), and natural hazard (58%), and health (45%) data in Bangladesh.

In order to collect, process, analyse, share and use data in a protracted humanitarian response, there needs to be sufficient capacity within both the response and organisationally in terms of resources. This could come in a number of forms, such as sufficient funding, the number of staff allocated to information management (IM) roles, the skills they possess to collect, analyse and use data, training open to staff members who use data regularly to improve their understanding and skills, and orientation on relevant digital platforms. Commitment 1.4 of the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream commitments involves supporting partners to access and publish their data to the IATI Standard. However, the findings in this briefing are drawn from a broader investigation into data use across multiple platforms, standards and sources.

9 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 officer (IMO).

Findings

FINDING 4A – CURRENT FUNDING MODELS AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS INHIBIT DATA USE CAPACITY BUILDING

> **In a lot of agencies, the monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) officers are being given the information management (IM) responsibilities. These are very different areas. There is a lack of training around monitoring and evaluation and capacity building (especially for IMs)**
>
> **Working group, Bangladesh**

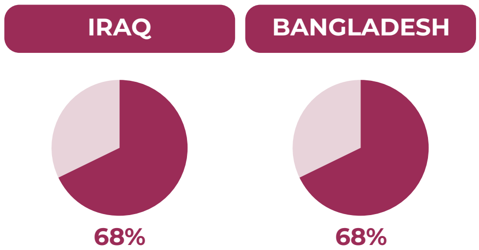
Humanitarian funding cycles are often short term and project-focused, which is reflected in the sometimes chaotic nature of humanitarian response and the reality of rapidly changing needs and priorities on the ground among both responders and beneficiaries. This is unlikely to change in the immediate future, but the way other elements of funding are managed (e.g. overheads, training budgets, mentoring, etc) can make a significant difference. The research identified that current humanitarian funding models, with limited contributions to indirect costs, leaves little room for organisations to invest in developing data collection, publication and use expertise. Specifically, during the KIIs, the team heard that funding models with limited indirect costs means there is no funding, or a lack of dedicated funding, to allocate to information management officer (IMO) positions and units within clusters and local and international NGOs.

DATA IN PRACTICE

One cluster in Iraq has shown the importance of IM capacity. This cluster has a dedicated IMO and data management assistant to deal with all incoming data collected in the field. This has allowed the cluster to share the data in a comprehensive and timely manner among its 49 HRP and non-HRP partners in useable infographics, maps and dashboards (as of August 2019). The cluster has made HumanitarianResponse.info the main platform for accessing and sharing data and information products. As the cluster coordinator said, "*Other clusters could learn from us. Having an IM makes our cluster more efficient and effective. This means we can be more reactive and improve the visibility of our data. This has made the cluster more realistic.*"

A lack of dedicated funding is impacting the ability of clusters and local and international NGOs to collect, process, analyse and share information in a comprehensive and timely manner, both internally and externally, as responsibilities are being shifted to staff who do not have the necessary skills and who in turn are drawn away from their own responsibilities. As staff without the necessary skills (e.g. looking for patterns, analysing results, designing dashboards) are given data management responsibilities, the quality of data will be impacted. Further, it can impact the quality of their other work, where their expertise would allow them to contribute more. This is important as in the online survey the team found that in Iraq just under three-quarters of respondents said that they helped to create and manage data that is used by others, while in Bangladesh this was around two-thirds. As an example, the team heard from some INGO staff members that as IMO positions are not funded as a direct post by donors or the UN, the responsibilities for data use tasks are being split up and given to monitoring and evaluation and/or MEAL officers instead, despite the fact that they are two specific and separate roles.

68% of online survey respondents in Iraq and Bangladesh said that they help manage and create data.



During the KIIs, the research team consistently heard from local NGOs, in both Iraq and Bangladesh, that they receive only a very small proportion of response funding. Local NGO interviewees put this down to the fact that most of the funding they receive is project-based and goes through an intermediary organisation, such as an INGO or UN agency. As one local in Bangladesh said, "*It is a difficult time for local NGOs as funding is reduced with the focus on the Rohingya crisis.*" When local NGOs do receive funding, it is often as a sub-contractor for an INGO, so they are seen as service delivery organisations rather than a partner organisation. As local organisations only receive a small proportion of response funding, which often does not support core costs, they are unable to invest in longer-term internal projects such as improving their organisations data use capacity, upskilling staff on data management processes and data collection techniques, or updating internal policies around data sharing. As such, this has a knock-on effect on the response as local organisations are often used to collect data directly from the field and beneficiaries. This is data that donors then rely on to make allocation and funding decisions. Therefore, it is essential that more funds are channelled into helping local organisations develop their data use capacity.

> **Most donors say they won't fund needs assessments. The Humanitarian Pooled Funds (e.g. CERF and CBPFs) do not include funding for needs assessments**
>
> **INGO, Iraq**

Further, a number of implementers, particularly local actors and INGOs, were concerned that insufficient funding explicitly for needs assessments is resulting in less reliable data on which to design and implement response interventions. This is particularly important as, according to the online survey, needs assessment data is both the most frequently used type of data and the most frequently needed type of data in Iraq (73% and 75% respectively) and Bangladesh (74% and 72% respectively). Needs assessments are a critical tool during humanitarian crises as they provide baseline information (e.g. number of people affected) on which situation monitoring, response planning and severity is based. The assessments provide evidence for the strategic decisions that need to be made, such as allocating funding to certain sectors or where to deliver aid. It is essential needs assessments form a key and continuous part of the humanitarian programme cycle (HPC). During the in-country KIIs when the research team was able to explore these results further, it became clear from interviewees that in most cases donors do not fund needs assessments directly or as a separate budget line item, so organisations with limited resources will necessarily have to be conservative with the resources they already have and what they can allocate to such activities. As one programme manager in Iraq said, "*Within the humanitarian sector, they are unwilling to fund assessments which give you the data you need.*" Specifically, this means that there will not be the needed organisational resources, in terms of staff time and technical ability, to fully invest in and develop a comprehensive and rigorous methodology and/or adequate training of data collectors and enumerators on the ground for needs assessments. Additionally, as one INGO staff member in Iraq specifically stated, "The quality and breadth of data reduces as funding reduces."

> **“Reporting is burdensome. We have to do multiple reports all in different formats”**
>
> **Local NGO, Bangladesh**

Due to inconsistent funding there is a lack of staff resources and capacity to allocate to both reporting response activities to clusters and reporting on project activities for donors. Specifically, there was a sense among coordinators that many actors in the response are failing to report their activities frequently (if at all) through the appropriate cluster and reporting mechanisms. However, interviewees, particularly local NGOs and cluster coordinators, put this down to a number of challenges:

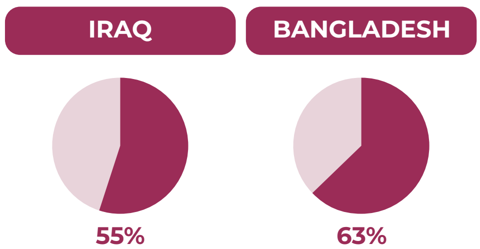
i. The burden of reporting to multiple donors/clusters, across numerous platforms, using different information and templates (Grand Bargain Workstream 9 – Harmonize and simplify reporting requirements – aims to reduce this reporting burden in relation to progress reports to donors/funders, but is currently making slow progress);

ii. A lack of expertise around how to use the reporting systems properly (see Brief 3 for more on digital platforms). This lack of expertise derives from a lack of training opportunities for staff and organisations on the specific platforms and reporting standards used by some coordinators; and

iii. A lack of access to training opportunities, especially around data literacy and data collection.

While it is difficult to identify causality, these challenges could be some of the reasons why many donors and clusters told us that they face difficulties with the timeliness and completeness of data they receive, such as data platforms not being updated with the latest response information (e.g. ActivityInfo in Iraq and ReportHub in Bangladesh), and partners not submitting their data to cluster coordinators on time, only in part, or at all. For example, the need for more 3/4W data (needed by just under half of the survey respondents in Iraq and Bangladesh) is a challenge in itself, as clusters particularly highlighted that they struggled to get their partners to report this to them and as a result they do not always have the data they need to make quick decisions. According to a majority of stakeholders spoken to, untimely or incomplete data risks the creation of data gaps in both Iraq and Bangladesh.

55% of respondents in Iraq and 63% in Bangladesh said that improving coordination was the main reason they make data publicly available to others.

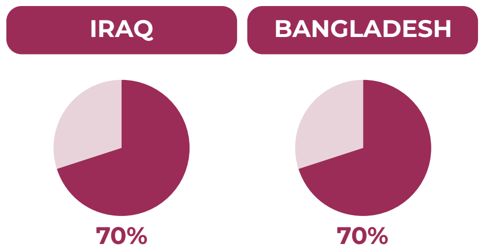


FINDING 4B – TRANSPARENCY OF HOW DATA IS COLLECTED IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE DATA ITSELF

A lack of transparency around data management processes can have a knock-on effect on issues of data policy and subsequently the effective transmission of information in response settings. Specifically, if there is a lack of visibility on how data management is done across the response, and within each organisation involved in the responses, and limited capacity assistance is provided to organisations with finite resources (e.g. staff time and understanding), then there is a risk of data policies being improperly implemented. Data collected from the field needs to be properly stored and eventually shared with others working in the response in order to identify and respond to the changing needs of beneficiaries. Poor data policies can lead to sensitive data being shared accidentally, data not being stored or protected in the correct way (i.e. not password protected and backed up on electronic items or stored in insecure filing cabinets if in paper form), and issues around what data should be shared and with whom. This is having an impact on the availability and accessibility of data within the Iraq and Bangladesh responses. As an example, the research team heard during its KIIs that local organisations are more likely to adopt data sharing policies, but they do not always have the capacity to actually follow through with them.

Evidence from the interviews highlights that the perceived quality and reliability of data is linked to the transparency and rigour of the methodology. Numerous stakeholders in Iraq and Bangladesh mentioned that the majority of actors do not share their data collection methodologies, which effectively makes it impossible for users to determine the quality and rigour of the resulting data. One INGO staff member in Iraq explained why it is important to share data collection approaches, "*Where you can see the methodologies being used, you can tell that some data is going to be of questionable validity.*" Local NGOs, in particular, stated that UN agencies and INGOs do not often share their data collection methodologies, unless specifically requested. For those organisations that do not have the necessary capacity (e.g. dedicated staff with the necessary data collection knowledge and skills) to develop their own rigorous data collection methodology or lack the data collection or enumerator skills, other organisations being more transparent with their methodologies is an important process to improving the quality of the data they collect and eventually share.

70% of respondents in Iraq and Bangladesh said they most frequently used data for evidence-based decision making.



Additionally, there is a risk that a lack of visibility around data collection approaches increases the likelihood of unethical data collection where aid beneficiaries are being interviewed about sensitive topics on a frequent basis with little feedback on how this data is being used (see Brief 2 for more on ethical data collection). The research team heard during its interviews that any organisation involved in the Iraq and Bangladesh responses, regardless of data collection capacity and knowledge, is able to collect data from the field. While this is partly down to a lack of "data leadership" in-country (see brief 2 where we recommend the establishment of an inclusive data coordination entity to take on the role as data leader and provide guidance and support at the field level), it can also be seen as a capacity issue due to the fact that there are not the resources to review each organisation's data collection methodology. Therefore, without data collectors being visible with the data collection methodologies they use, it is not possible to have any oversight or input into them to check how frequently they are going to be collecting data from beneficiaries, what questions they will be asking, who they will be collecting data from (e.g. especially vulnerable groups, like gender-based violence victims), and how beneficiaries' data will be used by the collecting organisation. This is particularly important where organisations collecting the data do not have the necessary data collection capacity, such as having specialised staff who understand the cultural context and who have the ability to avoid words which can be misunderstood or misconstrued in local languages/dialects, adapt questions to local levels of education (e.g. more or less complex/simple), to understand open ended survey questions, how to collect data from vulnerable communities, how to ask sensitive questions in an understanding manner, and how to analyse survey data after collection. It should be noted that often local and national NGOs are better equipped to deal with local cultural issues than international actors.

FINDING 4C – LACK OF LOCALISATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT CAPACITY INHIBITS EVEN BASIC DATA USE AND CREATES A TWO-TIERED SYSTEM

> **"There should be a greater focus on capacity building, including training, to help build up organisations"**
>
> **Local NGO, Bangladesh**

During the in-country KIIs, the research team found that while data production and analysis capacity within larger INGOs, UN agencies, and donors was found to be mostly sufficient, smaller organisations, particularly local NGOs, more frequently reported capacity challenges. The research identified that INGOs and UN agencies consistently perceived local and national NGOs as having insufficient organisational, technical or resource capacity to manage data and access information, and believed that this lack of technical capacity inhibits even basic data use. One INGO staff member in Iraq explained, "*There is a lack of local capacity to collect high quality information and to analyse data*".

DATA IN PRACTICE

One donor in Iraq explained the lengths they go to in order to encourage interaction between partners and, by extension, sharing of information and coordination. Since making it a strategic priority to work with and build the capacity of local organisations there has been a big focus on capacity building. Often this focuses on using lead partners (INGOs and UN agencies) to train local partners to develop mock-up plans, write proposals and use an e-tendering system to make it easier for local NGOs and businesses. While progress has been made in terms of building local financial management and project management capacity, the donor recognised that data collection, management and sharing capacity was still an under-invested area. However, as one NGO representative explained, such capacity building is fine except when each donor is looking to train organisations on their own specific requirements and system at which point it can become extremely complicated and inefficient.

While data capacity challenges did indeed have a disproportionate impact on local NGOs, local responders highlighted in interviews this was actually due to an unwillingness on the part of donors, UN agencies or INGOs to invest in and prioritise training and capacity development around data use in local NGOs. This feeling among local actors was supported by a cluster coordinator in Iraq, who said "*Capacity building of locals is often not prioritised in practice.*" This was particularly the case in Iraq where, as the response winds down, data capacity is being de-prioritised. Local NGOs believe this unwillingness to invest in data capacity, both in terms of staff skills and training, results in sub-optimal data which undermines the design of intervention activities being carried out by local NGOs. In this case, capacity strengthening could come in the form of mentoring, which does not necessarily require the same levels of funding as trainings (e.g. INGO/UN staff could design data collection methodologies together with local actors, collect data jointly and analyse it together).

> **"Local NGOs do not have the same level of access to information and data"**
>
> **INGO, Bangladesh**

Further, the technical capacity of local NGOs is being eroded by bigger organisations in the response. Specifically, local NGOs described the "*brain drain*" associated with INGOs and the UN recruiting the most capable of their staff who were most likely to have already gained experience in data management. Often, INGOs and UN agencies offer higher salaries than these organisations can afford, so as a consequence they end up having high IM turnover. Local NGOs explained that as a consequence they lacked the technical knowledge needed to develop their own rigorous data collection methodologies and subsequently collect their own data as their staff lacked enumerator skills or the ability to execute surveys satisfactorily. This issue was reiterated by a research agency in Iraq, who said, "*Many NGOs do not have the capacities to build surveys, train enumerators, collect and analyse data*". Though the research found the "brain drain" was a particular burden in Bangladesh, local actors involved in both case study countries suspect that it is impacting the ability of local organisations to collect, analyse, use and share data comprehensively and in a timely manner during protracted humanitarian crises. As one local NGO staff member stated, "*All data is accessible to those with power*". This is particularly important because, as previously mentioned, local and national NGOs are usually the ones who collect primary data directly from beneficiaries. Therefore, if these organisations lack staff with the necessary skills, it will negatively impact the quality of data being initially collected and used to inform response activities.

While local NGOs are more likely to have physical capacity issues when compared to bigger agencies, their strength lies in bringing local knowledge, language skills, and access that INGOs and other agencies do not have. Specifically, local NGOs stated that their local knowledge was being neglected by bigger agencies/organisations. Further, physical issues came in the form of basic problems, such as lacking the necessary equipment needed to run an organisation properly (e.g. furniture, electrical items, etc), and internet connectivity and power outages which affect smaller, more local actors who lack the funds and/or equipment. This was especially the case in Iraq where the central government lacked basic items, such as lockable filing cabinets and computers, all of which are essential for effective data management. As one INGO project manager who works closely with the government said, "*Many government departments do not have computers, so data protection is difficult*."

Conclusion and recommendations

The over-riding conclusion of this research brief is that the capacity to publish, access and use data is very limited in the Iraq and Bangladesh responses. There needs to be an increase in funding dedicated to data use expertise and training, particularly in local NGOs, and a more concerted and focused effort from donors, UN agencies and INGOs to address the structural issues currently acting as barriers to better data use capacity (which are well known by all stakeholders on the ground).

Further practical steps, such as sharing data collection methodologies or increasing funding for indirect costs for local NGOs would help, but all the issues outlined in this report undermine data use. As this report highlights, the capacity and resource gaps at the field level act as barriers to improving data quality and information exchange. Inconsistent funding and access to funds that cover indirect costs limits the investment in data use expertise, training and skills, while a lack of transparency around data use processes, such as data collection approaches, increases the likelihood of poor-quality data being collected in an unethical way. Local NGOs, through mentoring, need to be sensitised to the important contribution data has in effectively responding to the needs of affected populations. It is important that humanitarian actors recognise that data underpins the entire humanitarian system – as a civil society leader in Cox's Bazar explained, "*The humanitarian response plan is built on data, so if your data is wrong, the response will be wrong*". Specifically, both coordinators and implementers need to ensure that in future responses the quality, availability, and timeliness of data meet standards commensurate with the value of data to the response. If capacity building issues are addressed properly then it is the use and publication of data will also improve in the longer-term.

Specifically regarding IATI, the on-the-ground capacity issues the research team has outlined throughout this report need to be addressed first if the data is to be useful and worthy. Stakeholders should not be publishing data merely for the sake of compliance as this adds to the already high reporting burden and stretches resources within organisations that lack capacity. This is the case across almost all "implementers" in a response. Rather, all data needs to be of a high quality and be of use to the response given the resource constraints. This is where the challenge lies. Currently, most organisations are likely to get their activity information from 3/4W data platforms, such as ActivityInfo or ReportHub, so publishing this information to IATI would add little data-use value. There needs to be agreement among donors and other relevant stakeholders on the specific data that they require to be published to IATI and how this could assist decision-making and effective programming in the longer-term as this would reduce the staff time and resources currently needed to collect, analyse, publish and use data.

Therefore, 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. The Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream and signatories need to consider their role vis-à-vis capacity building for data users, and to identify where, if at all, it will seek to work through other initiatives and Workstreams. Specifically, attention should be paid to:

   i. Reviewing plans for rolling out IATI publication requirements to frontline humanitarian organisations given the capacity constraints identified during this work.

   ii. Reviewing current funding models to include dedicated funding for information management capacity building to better support the data needs of local and national organisations;

   iii. Agreeing on the transparency of data collection methodologies;

   iv. Supporting the capacity building of local and national organisations data management practices through increased access to training opportunities and urging UN/INGOs to invest time in mentoring and accompanying their local partners.

b. Keep discussions regarding capacity building focused on the aim of improving data quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER RELEVANT GRAND BARGAIN WORKSTREAMS:

- **Workstream 2: More support and funding tools to local and national responders**
  - Consider capacity building as it relates specifically to data collection, analysis and use for 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**
  - Consider the storage and presentation of response data in light of the limited capacity and frequent exclusion of local actors, and specifically how methodologies can be shared transparently to assist organisations who do not have the capacity to develop their own methodology from scratch.
  - To improve the quality of data being collected during needs assessments, donors need to consider more dedicated, flexible, multi-year funding options which support data use capacity building for all organisations in a response, particularly for local and national NGOs.
- **Workstream 9: Harmonising and simplifying reporting requirements**
  - Refine reporting requirements to reduce the volume of resources that all responders, particularly local and national organisations, have to dedicate to such activities.

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