BANGLADESH COUNTRY REPORT

A case study of humanitarian data transparency in the Rohingya Crisis

August 2020

PublishWhatYouFund
The Global Campaign for Aid Transparency

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SECTION ONE

Research overview and approach

Project overview

The Grand Bargain[1] was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016. Its goal of addressing 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 more 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. project locations, project results, evaluations). Data needs to be provided in XML format.[4] 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 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.

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.

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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). The Grand Bargain originally consisted of ten key thematic areas, but since its inception this has been reduced to nine key areas and one cross-cutting commitment.
3   When the research 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/
4   XML refers to Extensible Markup Language and is a text-based format for characterizing information, such as documents and data.

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.

Research methodology

The team conducted a combination of desk, online survey, and key informant interview (KII) research in two case study countries. Bangladesh was selected as one of the final countries using a number of criteria (see methodology[5]). 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 in Bangladesh. As such, any omissions, for example regarding specific platforms or initiatives, should be interpreted with this understanding in mind.

The survey (78 responses) and KIIs (34 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 54 organisations across 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[6]. The study was weighted in favour of national and local actors,[7] but included interviews with government ministers, UN agencies, sector coordinators, international NGOs,[8] and donor mission offices.

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5   Publish What You Fund humanitarian data transparency research methodology:
      https://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/projects/humanitarian-transparency/
6   Ibid
7   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.
8   The research team defines international NGOs (INGOs) as organisations which work in multiple countries.

SECTION TWO

Findings and conclusion

Report purpose

This research brief explores the information needs of humanitarian actors on the ground in Bangladesh and the challenges they face in accessing and using this information. It is based on data collected via an online survey and subsequent interviews undertaken during a field trip to the Cox's Bazar district in September 2019.

This brief focuses on four specific areas: 1) publication of funding data using the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Standard and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Financial Tracking Service (UNOCHA FTS); 2) data collection, analysis, and use; 3) the use and challenges associated with digital platforms, and; 4) data use capacity. To address these areas, the research team needed to first understand the roles different stakeholders play in the response, what kinds of operational, programmatic and financial decisions they have to make on a day-to-day basis, and what data and subsequent information products[9] they need in order to make those decisions. As such, this brief touches on issues of funding, coordination, data governance and leadership, information management functions, awareness and use of digital platforms, and how these are collectively impacting the quality of data produced, used, and shared within the Rohingya response.

This research brief forms one of two case-study country reports, with the other brief focusing on Iraq. As part of the wider research for this project, the findings from Bangladesh were combined with those from Iraq and global stakeholders to produce a series of four reports exploring humanitarian data transparency in protracted crises. The four reports were targeted at a global-level audience and aligned with a commitment of the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream:

1. Research brief 1: publication of humanitarian funding data

2. Research brief 2: data collection, analysis and use in protracted humanitarian crises

3. Research brief 3: the use, challenges and opportunities associated with digital platforms

4. Research brief 4: data use capacity in protracted humanitarian crises

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9   Data is the raw, unorganised facts collected from the affected communities in 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.

Why Bangladesh?

Bangladesh is not a country unknown to crisis. Over the years, it has been at the centre of both natural and human crises including flooding, cyclones and large scale displacement. More recently, conflict in northern Rakhine state in neighbouring Myanmar has led to the mass displacement of the Rohingya people across the border to the Chittagong region of Bangladesh. Violence since August 2017 has forced approximately 750,000[10] Rohingya people into refugee camps in Cox's Bazar district, putting significant pressure on local communities, resources, services, and the environment. Most Rohingya refugees who arrived in Cox's Bazar district sought shelter in the already established refugee settlements of Kutupalong and Nayapara. This recent wave of mass displacement has brought the total number of refugees in the district to 860,356,[11] according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This crisis is further exacerbated by the fact that Cox's Bazar is also one of the most cyclone-prone regions of Bangladesh due to its proximity to the Bay of Bengal, so recurring floods and landslides create fresh difficulties for those displaced in the camps and those providing assistance.

The humanitarian response to this crisis, to date, has focused mainly on meeting the substantial needs of the Rohingya communities now living in the refugee camps. Local organisations and the Bangladeshi government were the first responders, but three-years into the crisis there is now a large scale international response led by the UN, and supported by numerous international NGOs. While the immediate needs of populations have been mostly met, the protracted nature of the crisis means that medium and longer-term activities are now needed. According to the 2020 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Crisis, USD$877 million is required to meet the needs of 855,000 Rohingya refugees.[12] Food security, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and shelter were identified as the sectors with the greatest funding needs.

As such, Bangladesh offered the research team the opportunity to explore a crisis characterised by a relatively static refugee population that is frequently affected by natural disasters and is considered to be in a protracted status. This presented the team with the chance to explore multiple needs, whilst having access to a wide variety of on the ground humanitarian organisations to understand their challenges and recommendations for accessing and using this information.

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10   UNHCR Data Portal: refugee response in Bangladesh. Accessed online (27/07/2020): https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar_refugees
11   Ibid
12   Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Crisis (2020). Accessed online:
      https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/jrp_2020_final_in_design_280220.2mb_0.pdf

Findings

FINDING 1 – "COORDINATORS" NEED CONSOLIDATED INFORMATION, WHILE "IMPLEMENTERS" REQUIRE MORE GRANULAR MANAGEMENT DATA

The research found that actors on the ground in Cox's Bazar could generally be split into two broad categories. "Coordinators" were primarily recipient government officials and country-level coordination groups, while "implementers" at the local level were those directly delivering assistance to Rohingya populations themselves, though the team recognises some organisations can fit into both categories.

FIGURE 1: "COORDINATORS" VS "IMPLEMENTERS"

"COORDINATORS"		"IMPLEMENTERS"	
Who:	country governments and coordination groups (e.g. clusters, donors, UN agencies, working groups/sub-clusters)	Who:	local and national NGOs (NNGOs), INGOs, and often UN agencies (act as response coordinators while also delivering services directly to vulnerable populations)
Roles:	humanitarian affairs officers, sector coordinators, programme/policy/advocacy officers, ministry representatives, information management officers (IMO)	Roles:	field officer, camp manager, information management officer (IMO)
Focus:	oversight, policy, evaluation, monitoring, commissioning and funding implementers	Focus:	designing, sourcing funding for, and executing programmes for beneficiaries
Information needed:	scale of response, variety of actors, financing	Information needed:	management information (3/4W data, etc.), needs assessment and beneficiary data

There is a vast quantity of data available in numerous formats (e.g. dashboards, reports, evaluations, etc.) within the Rohingya response, but it is important to understand what information these "coordinators" and "implementers" are prioritising. As such, there is a need to know what information different types of stakeholders are frequently using and what information these actors say they need more of before exploring the challenges they face. At the field level, the research found that those actors closer to the ground (e.g. "implementers") need more management type information, such as 3/4W data, access and security data, combined with needs assessments and beneficiary data. Implementers need these types of data to ensure that their resources are allocated appropriately, to help minimise duplication of services, and prevent operational gaps in the response. This information, by the nature of their role, needed to be up-to-date, granular, and validated to further inform the design and implementation of their programmes. Those at higher levels (e.g. "coordinators"), on the other hand, sought information to understand the scale of the response, the variety of actors, and to perform oversight to ensure that the scarce resources available within the response were reaching the greatest number of affected people. However, unlike implementers, coordinators require this information to be consolidated in the form of needs assessment registers, project databases or multi-sector reports.

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

TYPE OF DATA	USE (% OF RESPONDENTS)	NEED (% OF RESPONDENTS)
Needs assessments	74	74
Mapping & location	63	63
Population & demographic	59	59
Natural hazard	49	49
Monitoring	42	42
3W and 4W	41	41
Health	35	35
Meteorological	27	27
Perception	23	23
Security	21	21
Financial aid flows	15	15

With regard to data use , during the survey phase of this work, respondents explained that the main types of data they used most frequently were those pertaining to needs assessments (74% of respondents), mapping & location data (63%), population & demographic data (59%), natural hazard data (49%), and monitoring data (46%). In terms of what data actors said they need more of,[13] the types of data followed a similar pattern to data use, with needs assessments (72%) and population & demographic data (63%) coming out on top. This was followed by mapping & location data (62%), natural hazard data (58%), and monitoring data (49%). Other types of data respondents said they used and needed can be found in table 1.[14]

13   Survey question: What type of data do you use at least once a month? (select all that apply from a list).
14   Survey question: What type of data do you need more of? (select all that apply from a list).

FINDING 2 – FINANCIAL DATA IS USEFUL ACROSS THE BOARD, BUT NEEDS TO BE TRANSPARENT AS A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE AND SUIT THE NEEDS OF THE ACTOR

The research found that the type of financial aid flow data published to IATI and FTS is of greater use to "coordinators" on the ground. Whilst there was a broad need for financial data across a variety of actor types, the specifics of financial flow data used and needed depended on an organisations role within the response. For example, the survey found that 15% of respondents reported frequent use of financial flow data with NNGOs and INGOs leading, followed by a single UN agency and a coordination group. In each case the proportion of "implementers" to "coordinators" stating that they make use of financial flow data was about equal. Among these same respondents, 35% said they needed more financial aid flow data. Again, the majority of organisations seeking further financial aid flow data were NNGOs and INGOs.

However, one observation to note is that there was a difference between the survey responses and the KII discussions. Financial data was mentioned much less frequently during the KIIs, but when the team were able to discuss financial data further with interviewees, it became clear that in reality, "coordinator" organisations required funding information to understand the scale of the response and to perform a governance function to ensure that resources were used effectively and reached the greatest number of affected people. Specifically, they sought granular financial data indicating specific actors and programmes, but also macro-level information regarding the scale and the level of funds available. To an extent, this type of information can currently be accommodated by IATI and FTS. "Implementers", on the other hand, said that whilst they also have a need for funding type data, generally they wanted more market specific data to help prepare project budgets. Specifically, they needed data on the cost of WASH and shelter materials, medicines, transportation costs, etc. to help them determine the cost of services and supplies, and to forecast future activity budgets. This need was especially prevalent among local NGOs who mainly focus on project implementation and service delivery.

DATA IN PRACTICE

The research team heard a number of instances where actors were using FTS data. One NNGO told the team that they used FTS data *"to determine who is funding what in Cox's Bazar and across Bangladesh more widely"* and another *"used FTS data as an advocacy tool to help guide [their] fundraising and find the gaps in certain sectors so we can address them"*. Others stated that their organisation needed to be careful with or calibrate FTS data before use.

Stakeholders across both groups raised concerns about the quality of data held within these platforms. On the ground in Bangladesh, the awareness and use of IATI data is lower than compared to FTS. Among the survey respondents only 6% said they were aware of IATI and only 3% said they had previously used IATI data. With regards to FTS, while awareness of the platform was higher (24% of survey respondents) regular use was still low at 3% of survey respondents. The low use for these platforms was highlighted by concerns stakeholders had with the quality of data, particularly questioning the comprehensiveness, timeliness, relevance, and accuracy of what was available. Stakeholders said this undermined the trust they held in these platforms and inhibited their use as decision-making tools. As an example, interviewees reported that their trust in FTS data was frequently undermined as a result of data discrepancies. A number of stakeholders mentioned the differences between FTS figures and the funding outlined in the joint response plan for the Rohingya response. One information manager explained that, of the funds tracked by FTS in Bangladesh, approximately 25% of these were "unallocated" and that "as much as another $200m of funding is provided outside of the JRP" – which FTS does not then have visibility of. As such, the research team could not find any definitive use cases of either IATI or FTS data being used to make decisions within the Rohingya response. Interviewees further highlighted a number of reasons why they questioned the quality of data held in FTS and IATI, and therefore, why they lacked trust in the data. These included a lack of openness from UN agencies on their spending details and overheads, discrepancies between HQ and field level financial data published to IATI and FTS, and a lack of transparency on who is receiving aid.

> **The main stumbling block is that the UN system does not publish to IATI... Insight into the flow of money in the response is ultimately blocked by the UN system**

Donor

Local stakeholders in particular, expressed frustration at the fact that some organisations within the response did not report to IATI or FTS, notably UN agencies and INGOs, which made it difficult to get a clear and complete picture of what resources were already available and where they were going. One government stakeholder in Cox's Bazar questioned *"how can the response be managed and assessed if this data is not available"* going on to state that *"when NGOs partner with UN agencies we are not clear where the funds they (the UN agencies) receive are going"*. Most interviewees believed that financial data should be made more transparent as a matter of principle, even if they do not directly benefit from it.

Stakeholders also referred to the Government Aid Information Management System (AIMS) platform as a source of funding data, but again commented negatively with regards to the quality of data held within this platform. Specifically, they highlighted issues with the timeliness of the data as a result of inconsistent reporting by donors to the government.

FINDING 3 – STRUCTURAL BARRIERS WITHIN THE ROHINGYA RESPONSE ARE INHIBITING DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS, UNDERMINING QUALITY AND USE
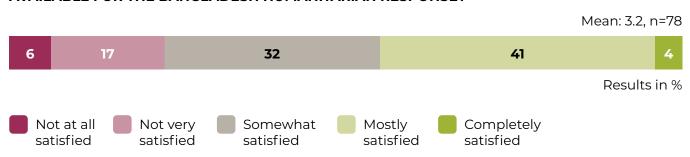
> **Data management is vital for reducing gaps, overlaps in the work of humanitarian organisations, and increasing collaboration at all phases of the response, including needs assessments, joint planning, monitoring, and evidencing**

INGO staff member

Stakeholders commented positively on the quantity of data available in the response and were generally happy with the increasing level of information products (e.g. maps, dashboards, situation analysis, etc.) being produced as a result. During the KIIs, however, the team found that stakeholders did not want more data, but rather better quality data. This was a particular concern for "implementer" organisations (e.g. local/national NGOs and INGOs) as they are the ones using the data on a daily basis to monitor, adapt, and plan their programmes to meet the changing needs within the camps. Figure 2 shows data quality satisfaction among the survey respondents, and, as can be seen 55% of respondents were unsatisfied or somewhat satisfied with the quality of data. This is especially important as over half of these same respondents said their organisations shared data to help improve coordination within the response, while three-quarters said they used data to inform evidence-based decision-making.

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

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 structural challenges remain, including:

I. A lack of information management (IM) functions, specifically the lack of information management officers (IMOs) at the response level and within organisations, particularly local NGOs and smaller INGOs. IM functions need to be viewed as an essential part of any programme approach, rather than as just an operational tool;

II. Inconsistent funding dedicated to information management positions creates high turn-over of staff, particularly among local/national NGOs, INGOs, and some specific sectors;

III. While the response has sector coordinators, the absence of a formal cluster system is limiting data sharing across the response, particularly with local partners, and is making it more difficult to access, analyse and use information when needed. There needs to agreement and understanding on a minimum data sharing standard between implementers and coordinators, so that implementers can influence strategic decision-making;

IV. Inconsistent reporting creates gaps in the data, particularly with 4W[15] data;

V. A lack of data leadership and governance, with the absence of UN OCHA, means that no single organisation has the mandate to address or coordinate data management issues. It is important that UN agencies show how they are feeding data into their decision-making processes as this will encourage implementer organisations to maintain an effective operational system for data management and ultimately improve their own use of data in decision-making;

VI. Limited use of data sharing protocols, MoUs, and agreements between data producers and data users on what data should be shared, how and with whom;

VII. Disjointed rules and policies around data sensitivity (i.e. no common guidelines) is leading to confusion about what data can be shared and in what format;

VIII. Inter-agency competition, particularly between the lead UN agencies and bigger INGOs, creates a lack of trust between local and international responders;

IX. A lack of transparency around data collection methodologies makes it difficult for smaller organisations to design and implement rigorous collection practices;

X. A lack of quality control standards around data collection practises, particularly for smaller, agency-specific needs assessments, is leading to concerns about unethical behaviour (e.g. duplication of interviews, no set frequency on number of assessments, no feedback loops to communities);

XI. A lack of qualitative data (e.g. historical narratives, focus groups, vulnerability assessments) to understand the less quantifiable side of the response, particularly around the social dynamics and cultural understanding of the Rohingya people.

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15 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).

DATA IN PRACTICE

An organisation working on community feedback mechanisms 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 data sharing agreement. It reassured all organisations involved that data privacy would be complied with and everyone could only request anonymised data. This data sharing agreement 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. 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?"*

Incoherent rules or misunderstandings about the definitions regarding sensitive data often makes it difficult to access sensitive data at all. Nearly a quarter of the survey respondents in Bangladesh indicated the main challenge which prevents them from sharing more data relates to its sensitive nature. Most interviewees said they were aware of how to anonymise data to make it less sensitive, but some organisations, particularly INGOs and UN agencies, took an overly cautious approach so even data that had been aggregated and anonymised was rarely shared. While almost all spoken to agreed that it is important to handle data in a safe and secure way, several interviewees across the response suggested that this could be used as an excuse to avoid being transparent. As one local NGO said, *"there is data that is sensitive, but we should not use this as a blanket approach not to share any data"*. This is especially important as the research found that while needs assessments (74% use and 72% need), mapping and location data (63% use and 62% need), and population and demographic data (59% use and 63% need) were the most used and most needed types of data among survey respondents, they are also the types of data organisations feel least comfortable sharing publicly (18%, 15%, and 17% of respondents respectively) due to concerns around the sensitive nature of the information therein. INGOs, UN agencies, and coordination bodies make up about three-quarters of these respondents.

Further, the team found that inter-agency competition among actors in the response is creating a lack of trust which is making the accessibility of information even more difficult. In many cases, the research team found that the production and possession of data was viewed as a competitive advantage, particularly for donor and joint response plan (JRP) funding, so was not shared widely or at all. As one working group said of UN agencies and large INGOs *"this leads them to control outflow of information more tightly"*. For example, 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. One independent consultant interviewed described the situation, *"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 a UN agency staff member said the, "Politics here is the worst I've ever experienced". These tensions are consequently eroding trust and the perceived reliability of information produced within the response.

" **Closing of the loop in terms of communicating findings back to affected people does not occur** "

UN agency

Stakeholders on the ground expressed concern that there is a lack of alignment, oversight and quality control on the development of needs assessment methodologies and tools, particularly the smaller, localised agency-specific assessments. This not only impedes data analysis as it is difficult to aggregate and compare data sets, but also brings concerns about ethical data collection practises. The team heard during interviews that responders had challenges around the ethical collection of data. Interviewees said some Rohingya 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, so were having to relive the trauma of their experiences over and over again. This included sensitive issues around gender-based violence, protection, and maternal health. One additional issue is that there are no consistent feedback loops between data collectors and Rohingya beneficiaries explaining how they might benefit from the information they are providing or how said information would be used to influence the type of assistance they will receive as a result. Whilst first and foremost this being an unethical approach, it also risks creating survey fatigue among beneficiaries and leading to a lack of trust between aid provider and aid recipient. In order to address some of these challenges, humanitarian partners' in Cox's Bazar supported the roll-out of a joint multi-sector needs assessment (MSNA).

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

A crisis-wide and inter-agency multi-sectoral assessment, which supports specific humanitarian milestones such as the humanitarian needs overview (HNO) and joint response plans for the Rohingya crisis (JRP). REACH Initiative, an INGO, is the lead agency for the MSNA data collection in the Rohingya response. 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.

While a combination of the above has generally limited effective information exchange between actors involved in the Rohingya response, some of these issues are having a greater impact than others. A lack of sharing, inter-agency competition, concerns with data collection, and issues of sensitive data, in particular, are impacting data visibility and quality, while inhibiting analysis and use by different implementers in the response. As a result, important decisions are being made without all the information needed to make them.

FINDING 4 – THE RESPONSE HAS A HIGH LEVEL OF DIGITISATION, BUT UNDERLYING DATA QUALITY ISSUES AND A LACK OF GUIDANCE ARE INHIBITING THE EFFECTIVE USE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS

66
There are no standards for how information should be shared in this context 99

INGO Manager

The research team found that on the ground, the awareness and use of digital platforms for programming and publication purposes focuses on a few specific platforms. These specific platforms reflected the main types of data used, needed, and uploaded/shared, including needs assessments, mapping and location, 3/4W, natural hazard, monitoring, and population and demographic data.

TABLE 2: **AWARENESS AND USE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS USED FOR ACCESSING AND UPLOADING DATA IN THE ROHINGYA RESPONSE (PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS RESPONDING POSITIVELY)**

PLATFORM	AWARENESS	USE	USED TO UPLOAD DATA?
Needs and Population Monitoring (IOM)	65	45	21
HumanitarianResponse.info	64	45	26
ReliefWeb	55	23	13
UNHCR's Operational Data Portal	53	30	15
Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX)	47	28	26
REACH Resource Centre	46	13	12
Government Aid Information Management System	28	18	21

Highest awareness and/or use   Lowest awareness and/or use

Across the response, there was a large number and variety of digital platforms, a reflection on the quantity of data available within the response and the scale of digitisation. Some interviewees asked whether there was a *"platform of platforms"* to guide actors to appropriate sources, while others suggested that there should be a *"master platform"* to house all response data. On the ground, the team found that as well as the key platforms outlined in table 2, the main platform for uploading/ sharing data was ReportHub.[16] The clear message highlighted by all stakeholders on the ground was that the number and usability of existing platforms is sufficient for accessing the operational and financial data they need. Additionally, some stakeholders suggested reducing the number of platforms used in the response, while others said that standardising data governance and management around these different digital systems would help improve data quality, reduce duplication, and lead to more effective use of limited humanitarian resources.

However, interviewees were again concerned with the quality of data and highlighted a number of challenges they faced when using these platforms:

I.   A lack of visibility of the raw data and data collection methodologies used with no explanation of how this raw data is treated to produce information;

II. The sensitivity of data and a lack of guidance on how to handle and upload it to these platforms;

III. Inconsistency in reporting and uploading of data to platforms due to a lack of agreement on which to prioritise, creating data gaps;

IV. Limited technical understanding of the platforms themselves, especially for those not dealing with data on a daily basis;

V.   The inability to compare data from multiple sources, such as different data providers producing data in different formats and using different data collection methodologies (even within the same sector).

16 ReportHub was not originally included in the survey questionnaire as this was a platform discovered during the key informant interviews in-country. Accessed online: https://immap.org/product/100000449/

As a result, the team found that users had two specific requirements. The first is the ability to down-load raw data in easily accessible formats such as Excel, and the second is to be able to download the underlying data collection and analysis methodologies to understand and more accurately determine the value of the data.

FINDING 4 – ENGAGEMENT WITH DATA USERS/PRODUCERS IS REQUIRED TO IMPROVE LOCAL CAPACITY AND ULTIMATELY DATA QUALITY WITHIN THE RESPONSE.

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

Local NGO

A lack of localisation and investment in data management capacity are inhibiting data use and creating a two-tiered system between local and international organisations. There needs to be sufficient capacity across the response and within organisations in terms of resources to collect, analyse, and use data effectively. Whether this comes in the form of sufficient funding, the number of staff allocated to IM roles, the skills they possess to manage data, training open to staff members to improve their understanding and skills, or orientation on relevant digital platforms, capacity building needs to be a continuous process. From the survey the team found that approximately two-thirds of respondents said that they helped to create and manage data that is used by others in the response. During the KIIs, when the team was able to explore this further, it was found that organisations across the response face data use capacity challenges which affect their ability to create and management data, including:

I. Local and national NGOs only receive a small proportion of response funding, usually project-based with little support towards core costs, so are unable to invest in and development data management capacity, such as training their staff and updating data policies;

II. A lack of access to training opportunities, especially around data literacy and data collection, particularly for local NGOs;

III. An unwillingness on the part of UN agencies, donors, and INGOs to prioritise data use capacity building/training/mentoring among their local partners;

IV. Local NGOs face the erosion of their technical capacity as a result of a "brain drain" where INGOs and UN agencies recruit their most capable staff who already have experience with data management;

V. Local and national NGOs have limited exposure to coordination meetings between international organisations in the field and at the response level;

VI. Local NGOs and INGOs receive insufficient funding for needs assessments.

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

International NGO

Although data use capacity challenges impact a broad range of organisations involved in the Rohingya response, they are having a disproportionate impact on local and national NGOs, with smaller organisations more frequently reporting 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. Local NGOs interviewed stated that they actually believed it was a lack of consistent funding and an unwillingness by bigger organisations in the response to support them that was inhibiting the improvement of data use capacity. Without sufficient funding, local NGOs will consequently lack the ability and necessary skills to collect, analyse, use and share data comprehensively and in a timely manner. As one local NGO staff member stated, *"All data is accessible to those with power"*. This is particularly important because 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.

Conclusion

While this research brief does not offer a comprehensive analysis/evaluation of data management in the Rohingya response, the findings do outline some of the key challenges facing actors. The overarching conclusion is that in order to improve data quality issues, the structural challenges acting as barriers to better data collection and use need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The risks of not addressing these challenges are significant and risks undermining the response as a whole. Overall, ambiguous and insufficient data leadership at the field level is inhibiting data sharing to the extent that individual actors are designing and implementing activities without the data they need to make evidence-based, informed decisions. This lack of data leadership and governance has led to a number of challenges, including no response-wide agreement on what constitutes sensitive data and how to handle it, varying standards around data collection methodologies being used for needs assessments due to a lack of quality control standards, and no agreement on which platforms organisations should be using to upload data and report to. Further, a lack of data sharing, inter-agency competition, and general "brain drain" of local/national NGOs is diminishing trust between local and international partners. In the longer-term, this erosion of trust could inhibit the ability to achieve the localisation agenda. A lack of support and mandate for any IM functions can lead to inadequate data collection methodologies, as there is no single entity with the authority to provide quality assurance over these methodologies and/or a lack of IM staff with the necessary skills to support the design of rigorous and ethical data collection processes for needs assessments. Without this input, data collection methodologies, particularly in smaller NGOs, are often designed without feedback loops in-place and with questionable ethics. Therefore, addressing these underlying barriers to better data quality, addressing the challenges posed by poor data governance on the ground and "data leadership" in-country is essential.

Many of the issues outlined in this research brief could potentially be addressed through an inclusive data coordination entity, which would play an advisory role and have the capability to convene organisations across the response to find solutions and problem-solve wider issues around data. This could include defining data quality as it relates to the response, providing IMO surge capacity to organisations that lack technical data staff, and developing and agreeing data sharing protocols between local and international actors. However, in order to address these issues effectively, it is essential to engage with both data producers and data users at the local level to understand what their information needs are and to help them address any challenges they face in accessing and using said information. A number of interviewees said that the types of discussions and questions the research team were having with them were just not taking place in the response. As such, UN agencies, donors and INGOs should actively seek to engage with their local partners in the Rohingya response to discern their data capacity limitations and to see if the data available to them is useful with regards to implementing projects directly to beneficiaries.