Is Ubiquitous Technology for Needs Data Management a Game Changer in Humanitarian Arena?

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ABSTRACT

One in every 70 people around the world is caught up in a crisis (natural disasters, conflict, climate change, etc.) and urgently needs humanitarian assistance and protection according to the OCHA. The humanitarian community assists millions of people every year based on emerging humanitarian needs. Most of the time, the conditions inside the countries, once the humanitarian needs data is collected, are not very conducive and required simple ways to collect data like paper-based data collection with simple questions. This data is later entered into a database or spreadsheet using rigorous and time-consuming data entry efforts. Dynamic changes in needs of people; numbers of partners involved; the complexity of evolving processes; and emerging technologies over time has led to a change in processes for data collection and management. This article is an attempt to capture humanitarian data collection best practices and the use of different technologies in managing data to facilitate humanitarian needs assessment processes for the Syria crisis.

KEYWORDS
Data Cleaning, Data Management, Data Weighting, Humanitarian Data, KoBo Toolbox, MIRA, MSNA, Multisector Data Collection, Needs Assessment, Quality Assurance, R-Script, Syria Crisis

1. INTRODUCTION

To provide life-saving humanitarian assistance to the people affected by the crisis, whether natural or man-made disasters, it is widely recognized that availability of timely and accurate information is a foundation for informed decision making. It is evident that the number of people affected by humanitarian crisis has almost doubled in the past decade and is expected to keep rising whereas the cost has more than trebled putting pressure on global humanitarian response system (OCHA and DARA, 2014). Moreover, the number of crises receiving international-led humanitarian assistance almost doubled between 2005 and 2017 whereas the average length of crises is also increasing (OCHA, 2018). On the other hand, the gap between needs and the resources available to provide humanitarian assistance has widened resulting overstretched global humanitarian system (World Humanitarian Summit, 2016). In order to prioritize the limited resources available, it is widely recognized that

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humanitarian agencies require timely and reliable information to understand, define, identify and measure the needs more accurately (World Humanitarian Summit, 2016). Need assessment is regarded as a vital tool to collect data for evidence-based planning and prioritization by aid organizations (Dysvik & Rohatgi, 2017; Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), 2015; OCHA and DARA, 2014).

2. MULTI-SECTOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT (MSNA)

A multi-sector needs assessment (MSNA) is a collaborative effort of the humanitarian community to collect primary data to identify the number of People in Need (PiN), where they are located and quantum and severity of their needs. The MSNA in Syria is based on the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Multi-Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) (Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), 2015) guidelines which were customized and improved for the Syrian context over the years. The MSNA is a key element of the Humanitarian Program Cycle (HPC) that is used to develop the evidence-based Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) (Figure 1).

Syrian Arab republic, with nine years of continuous hostilities and conflict, constitutes one of the biggest displacements and protection crises in the world in recent time, with more than 5.6 million refugees and 6.2 million internally displaced people (IDPs). The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)\(^1\) has classified Syria humanitarian crisis as Level 3 (L3) emergency which is activated in the most complex and challenging humanitarian emergencies when highest level of mobilization of resources is required across the humanitarian system. In such a large-scale humanitarian crisis, the humanitarian system requires notable efforts to gather timely and accurate information for the country-wide analysis of needs and informed prioritization of resources.

Figure 1. Humanitarian Programme Cycle
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