



Operational Learning Review of Libya Secondary Data Review

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1. Background

The ultimate goal of the ACAPS project is more effective, efficient and appropriate humanitarian responses to crises. The aim is to achieve this by promoting better informed and more evidence-driven responses, specifically by supporting a process of coordinated needs assessment which is timely, coherent, and appropriate to context, with results that are accessible and relevant to decision-makers. This is partly prompted by donor demands for more evidence-based funding proposals, as well as for more 'joined up' and better prioritized program strategies.

Continual improvement will be required to refine assessment approaches to achieve this aim. Operational learning is one key component of this support. Tufts University has been contracted by ACAPS to implement this element of their support to the wider sector.

In March, 2011 ACAPS received a request from UNDAC to undertake a Secondary Data Review (SDR) of the Libya crisis situation in support of a planned UNDAC deployment to the border area between Libya and Tunisia. ACAPS proceeded to use a secondary data review methodology that is in development to provide the necessary analysis in support of the UNDAC deployment. Previous secondary data reviews were done for Pakistan and Cote D'Ivoire however as the tool was new the dissemination was limited.

In March, ACAPS requested Tufts to conduct a review of the development and use of the Libya Secondary Data Review to capture lessons learned. This report is the result of this review.

2. Objective of the Review

To review the content and process of the Secondary Data Review development, dissemination and use by stakeholders in order to learn how to improve future Secondary Data Reviews.

3. Methodology

To conduct this review the Tufts team conducted interviews with key informants (10) and originators (2) and implemented an online survey. The online survey was sent to over 490 people, however due to out of date emails and travelling recipients the survey only received minimal respondents (13). Luckily the research team was able to interview key informants from a range of important audiences including operational agencies in the field, donors, the UN, and the US Military.

4. Findings

a. Process

i. Purpose

As stated by the ACAPS team, the purpose of developing the secondary data review product was to fill the 'information gap' that exists in the aftermath of a crisis before a Flash Appeal is issued. It

was an attempt to integrate data from secondary sources and analyze the information. In recognition of the demands on people in the field in the onset of a disaster, by collating and analyzing secondary data this document was developed by an ACAPS team in headquarters to inform and provide a foundation for assessment activities by first responders on the ground in the initial days of an emergency. In this case, the SDR was requested by UNDAC on March 1. By March 3, the SDR was finalized and sent to UNDAC and on the same day it was circulated by email to partners and the ACAPS contact list.

ii. Target Audience

The target audience of the SDR was UNDAC. UNDAC planned to use the SDR to plan their mission to evaluate the humanitarian situation in relation to the population movement out of Libya at the border and prepare for an inter-agency assessment mission in the western parts of Libya. The SDR was later shared with operational agencies, donors, and the UN.

iii. Implementation

To produce the SDR ACAPS allocated three people to work on the first draft which took 24 hours to produce. In 48 hours the SDR was finalized and approved by senior management. Two technical experts supported this activity by working on sector specific analysis and population figures allocating approximately 4 hours to this work. One additional senior manager was responsible for final review and sign off. The three core personnel were involved in both the data compilation and analysis. Data compilation focused on collating information from trusted secondary sources including UN agencies and reliable media sources. Phone calls with local contacts on the ground were used to verify key information. This process followed a new methodology developed by ACAPS.

According to the originators, a SDR, more generally, is seen as a tool which one step in the development of a preliminary scenario definition (PSD) to be used and verified by response teams on the ground. UNDAC could be the appropriate vehicle for this process. In this process the SDR could be developed and sent to UNDAC and then the team on the ground would use this tool to create a PSD which could be circulated to the humanitarian community. In the Libya case, the dissemination of the SDR to a wider audience was a management decision made with the intention of sharing this resource with the wider humanitarian community to explore its value and learn how best to improve it.

b. Dissemination strategy

On March 3 at 15:40 Central European Time (CET), ACAPS first sent the Libya SDR draft in PDF by email to their UNDAC counterparts, the ACE team, consortium members and the NGO network who was consulted during the development. At 16:18 CET the final draft was sent to UNDAC, the ACE team and consortium members and posted on the ACAPS website and sent to the ACAPS full contact list. This dissemination strategy was successful for many audiences; it was timely and straight to their inbox. However, the email channel was unsuccessful for some key audiences including a donor contact. In this case the email was buried in their inbox while they were on holiday and upon discovery two weeks later it was completely out of date and unhelpful. Many informants suggested dissemination through multiple channels, insisting that email is not enough.

Online accessibility, beyond the ACAPS website, is recommended, with both updates provided and a more interactive platform where users could help update information. Informants also suggested smart phone friendly formats in addition to the standard format. In addition they recommend continuing the email distribution but to a wider audience, making sure to include more than one person per agency.

Respondents also discussed strengthening the dissemination through linking this output with other processes on-going including UNDAC or OCHA assessment activities. If this activity were to become part of an automatic UNDAC function then the SDR could be disseminated on the Virtual On-Site Operational Coordination Center (VOSOCC). This would not exclude it from also being sent out by email. Another informant stressed that the SDR could be effectively distributed if it was sent through the UN channels reaching partners through the clusters. Many informants stressed the continued use of informal networks for distribution by email until alternative modes of dissemination are available.

c. Uses of Secondary Data Review

According to the informants, the SDR was primarily used to provide an overview of the crisis situation and create a shared understanding and awareness of the situation. Many people said they used it to 'get everyone on the same page.' It was used as a briefing paper for people being deployed to the field and for information sharing purposes both in the field and with the press, advocacy, and communications people in each organization. We know it was even shared with the Norwegian Foreign Minister in one case. Many respondents appreciated the level of analysis and thought that this was only possible as a result of its production at the HQ level. Other respondents highlighted that the SDR would have been useful if it had reached the teams in the field on time, but instead much of the research happened in parallel as a result of the SDR not getting to the right people in time.

The other main use of the SDR was for proposal development. All of the operational actors used the SDR content for preparing proposals, many of which were funded. They highlighted specifically the sections which focused on the pre-crisis information as useful for proposal development including the country profile, population figures, scenarios, key national indicators, refugee figures, and sector specific sections. These sections were used for proposals, to develop scenarios and contributed to internal response discussions by providing background on the situation.

d. Content

Most informants were appreciative of the level of information included in the SDR and accuracy of the information at that point in the crisis. Since it reached most audiences early in the emergency, most people saw the information as very useful, although they cite that the information only remained relevant for a very short time and very quickly they were updating the information based on new information from the field. Most people felt that the level of accuracy was sufficient because they saw the SDR as another source of information which could be triangulated with

other sources, used to verify and guide more research and assessment into the situation. Most used it as a foundation from which to update based on the information coming from actors on the ground. The main issue that people mentioned as missing from the document was the water issue, both the issue of desalination and the water and sanitation challenges that presented themselves early in the crisis. Secondly, one person cited the inaccuracy in the prediction of food shortages, however, said that this was not confirmed as inaccurate until weeks into the crisis.

OCHA informants commented that simultaneously to the release of the SDR they were conducting a compilation of secondary data that fed into the dashboard and compilation of the Common Operational Datasets (CODs) and Fundamental Operational Datasets (FODs). They called on the Voluntary Technical Community to identify relevant datasets to compile in the CODs and FODs. They did not use the ACAPS SDR because they did not consider it an authoritative document on the situation. Without a trusted ACAPS brand, OCHA felt unable to trust the information presented in the SDR and therefore stated that the SDR had limited legitimacy. They also stated that questions of accuracy also highlighted their concerns over the legitimacy of the information. OCHA relied on sources within the UN including the UN agencies or 'trusted' groups including International Crisis Group (ICG) and The Economist.

iv. Country Profile

The country profile which presented the pre-crisis information was highlighted by many as very useful. It was fed directly into proposals and informed communications, advocacy, and media. The donor highlighted that country history of crisis and disasters was discussed in this section which helped them get an idea of what could emerge in terms of disease based on the low incidence of natural disasters and communicable disease outbreaks.

v. Population Data

The population data presented in the SDR was generally well received. The pre-crisis refugee and immigrant figures were highlighted as especially useful. Some asked for more population data, highlighting the need for specific population data for all the cities in Libya whether they were affected or not. It was also raised that the sources for population figures need to be clearly cited. The importance of focusing on secondary data sources, not tertiary sources, was also mentioned in reference to unconfirmed figures on third country nationals.

vi. Cross Sector Analysis

This section was considered by many as the most important section of the SDR with its analysis of the situation across all sectors highlighting the priorities. Due to this some felt that this section was mislabelled and should have been at the very beginning of the SDR with a flashy heading like 'priorities' or 'key take-aways.'

vii. Information Gaps and Needs

This section was highlighted by the EUCOM team as a key section for their purposes. They would have liked to have been able to feedback to this section to fill in some gaps and coordinate on new

information gaps and needs. This would enable a mutual sharing of information in a more active way.

viii. Scenarios

The majority of respondents found the scenarios very useful. Most used them to inform their own scenario development. To improve the scenarios it was suggested that the SDR could present a few more scenarios that were shorter. At that point in the crisis shorter scenarios that are less specific are recommended. One suggestion was to develop 3-4 scenarios with ratings for level of probability and level of humanitarian impact/need from low, medium to high. Then these scenarios could be verified by the UNDAC team or the first people on the ground.

OCHA did not see scenario development as the responsibility of a headquarters team and instead saw this as the preview of the country team on the ground.

ix. Sector Analysis

The responses on the sector specific sections were mixed. Some respondents appreciated these sections because they found all of it useful to provide background. However other respondents both operational and high level found this information to be too premature at this point in the crisis, and therefore they didn't reference these sections much. Others suggested additional sectors that could have been included specifically water, economic activity and livelihoods, energy and political situation.

OCHA does not see sector specific analysis as the responsibility of a headquarters level team. OCHA recommends that sector specific analysis be the responsibility of the clusters to ensure ownership, accuracy and legitimacy. And OCHA reported that they could never support a product that ACAPS produced if it was not endorsed by the clusters. In this person's estimation the sector specific analysis could be misleading without the expert analysis and authority of the clusters.

x. Maps and Charts

The maps and charts were considered very useful by all audiences. Maps were favoured over the charts.

e. Format

Most respondents appreciated the format of the SDR, highlighting its simple and clear headings, use of bullet points and limited narrative as user-friendly. Some of the suggestions included changing the order of sections by presenting the pre-crisis information first then moving on to the post-crisis situation and analysis, highlighting the difference between pre and post crisis information. This could prevent any confusion between the two types of information. Other suggestions included creating different formats for different audiences, including a short and flashy format for high level decision makers and the media, with a more dense and comprehensive format for operational actors. A smart phone accessible format was also suggested, with the

information in drop down menus based on the headings mentioned in the content list. Even with these suggestions most people thought that all the information was relevant and thought that it was just long enough, slightly bordering on too long yet without clear suggestions on what to cut out.

OCHA cited the format as an issue in its similarity to the dashboard format. It was stated that this could cause some confusion within the humanitarian community, misleading consumers to think that this is a separate product of OCHA/NATF.

f. Links to Phase One and Two Assessment Activities

As the originators cite, a Secondary Data Review is envisioned as a document which could be developed by a headquarters team to feed into the UNDAC process of preliminary scenario definition to ease the burden of secondary data collection and analysis from the field teams.

OCHA informants stressed that the SDR process is a vital part of the phase zero and phase one assessment processes and is the responsibility of the country team, including OCHA and the clusters. If the country teams do not have the capacity on the ground to create the PSD then they can request support from headquarters. They were concerned that there would be confusion if the SDR was released as a separate product outside of the MIRA methodology. It was suggested that the SDR could be produced as a service to the IASC for which they could use it in whatever way they saw fit, but with this arrangement it would not be circulated outside of the IASC requesting body unless they chose to do so. In this way the suggestion would be to produce this content as a service to the IASC instead of releasing it and branding it as an ACAPS product which could cause confusion. OCHA stressed that unless this activity fed into the OCHA assessment processes then it would be redundant since OCHA has the responsibility to produce the PSD.

UNDAC saw SDR development as a preliminary action before the “first contact” mission. In that people should already have a SDR before they land on the ground. To hit this timing correctly will be very challenging. However, if this document could be produced in 48 hours it is feasible to link its production to a UNDAC deployment, ensuring that it got to the UNDAC responders before they got on the plane. With this timeliness issue, it was recommended that SDR development be integrated into preparedness, especially in cases where crisis is imminent or highly expected. OCHA also referenced the process of secondary data compilation as a key activity in assessment preparedness processes.

Many respondents stressed that to ensure effective dissemination of the information it would be important to clarify the links of this document to both the PSD and dashboard. Many saw this as a valuable document that could feed into both of these products and in this way could make sure that everyone had access to the information in an accessible manner. Others were not as well-versed in the phase one assessment methodology as promoted by the NATF and therefore were happy with the continuation of email dissemination suggesting online accessibility as a welcome addition.

5. Recommendations

- Dissemination:
 - Provide weekly updates for a limited period of time
 - Enable online accessibility
 - Develop a smart phone accessible format
- Content:
 - Three to five scenarios could be better
 - With specifications for each of:
 - Level of probability –high, low, medium.
 - Level of humanitarian impact (needs/imperative)- high, medium, low
 - Information that could be included:
 - Infrastructure in bordering countries including roads, airports, health services, supplies, facilities to better enable logistical planning
 - Population figures for cities, possibly maps with population figures could be useful
 - Political analysis might be useful- ICG type analysis depending on situation
 - Ethnic, sectarian or clan information– could go a little deeper into describing the normal problems of the country if relevant.
 - Security risks
 - Translations available for local or national languages, Arabic in this case. Important to make it available to national NGOs and authorities.
 - More information about infrastructure in the country, including health facilities
 - Bibliography could be useful.
 - Development of a “first contact” mission population profile methodology. This was done by an OCHA person on the UNDAC team to acquire a quick profile of the immigrant populations that were reachable during the first contact mission. This type of methodology development could be an activity for ACAPS.
- Format:
 - Clarify some of the headings: “cross sector analysis” heading misleading, could be renamed “priorities”
 - Could reorder the layout of the information. Pre-crisis then post-crisis to make this distinction clear
 - Change the content and layout for different audiences:
 - Short, flashy for high level decision makers and communications people
 - Long, detailed for operational agencies
- Clarify links with Phase One and Phase Two need assessment methodology
 - Clarify how SDR is linked with MIRA and PSD
 - Clear understanding and articulation of how the SDR is adding value and not competing with another product but instead complementing it.
 - Integrate SDR methodology and activities into preparedness process
 - Start working on SDRs for possible imminent crises: Yemen, Syria?
 - Ensure that ACAPS or the system has the capacity to produce the SDR sustainably

6. Conclusion

In general the SDR was seen as a valuable product by primarily operational agencies, donors, the US military and UNDAC. Its integration into phase 0 (preparedness) and 1 (preliminary scenario definition) assessment processes seems possible, through UNDAC or the IASC, yet further discussions will be necessary. Everyone agrees that secondary data analysis will be crucial in enabling faster and more effective responses, however, how this activity is executed and who is responsible for it is still a question. ACAPS has proven that a quality secondary data review process with analysis is possible within 48 hours of initiation. It is a methodology that should be replicated and institutionalized into responses, yet how this should happen still needs to be defined with the input of ACAPS, the UN, operational agencies and the donors. As requested by some respondents, hopefully this report will be shared and can be used to help facilitate this discussion within the wider humanitarian community.