

Logistics Assessments and Planning

Common Terms in Assessments

Primary Data	New data collected directly from the field, through direct observation, key informant interviews, community group discussions and/or other tools.
Secondary Data	Existing data that was gathered previously or provided by other sources.
Indicator	A quantitative or qualitative variable that provides a simple and reliable basis for assessing achievement, change or performance.
Vulnerability	The conditions determined by physical, social, economic, environmental and political factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of a community to the impact of shocks/hazards.
Capacity	The resources of individuals, households, communities, institutions and nations to resist the impact of a hazard.
Coping Mechanism	The adapted/unusual strategies that people or communities develop as a way of living through difficult times.
Resilience	The ability to reduce, prepare for, resist and recover from shocks/hazards.
Bias	The perceptions based on cultural background, experience, professional training and many other factors that people have and could disfigure a fact. Every organisation or person is susceptible to bias in some form.
Analysis	The process of turning the data gathered during an assessment into useful information to guide appropriate decisions.

Overview of Assessments in the Humanitarian Context

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Assessment is a vital component of the response planning and implementation. It provides the information on which the response is designed and adapted. While good information does not guarantee a good response, poor information almost certainly guarantees a bad one.” [UNDAC, 2006 \(Disaster Assessment\)](#)

An accurate assessment depends on thorough planning, design and preparation. Under normal circumstances, the means of collecting and analysing the necessary data and information should be established as part of an organisation’s pre-disaster planning. Preparedness ensures no time is lost revising procedures or questionnaires when the disaster hits.

Assessments enable logisticians to understand the impact of a disaster on the environment, how it affects populations, and how the logistics services should be provided. The findings from logistics assessments are critical in enabling appropriate decision making, planning and organisation for effective disaster response. However, logistics or any other functional unit cannot act as silos – every functional unit needs to complete its responsibilities in line with every other unit. This guide is focused on logistics and operational assessments, but will make reference to, explain and use concepts from the programmatic perspective. Logisticians need to have some knowledge and be able to use and discuss these concepts for a comprehensive and accurate assessment.

Definition

An assessment is a planned exercise to gather, analyse and disseminate information about the outcome of an event or a remarkable contextual change. Its aim is to provide accurate recommendations that will allow the decision-makers to tackle or alleviate the undesirable effects of an event in a timely and efficient manner.

An assessment is performed to understand a situation in order to identify problems, their sources and possible consequences. The primary purpose of the assessment process is to determine not only whether an intervention is required, but also the nature and extent of the intervention.

Assessments by Purpose

There may be different scopes when initiating an assessment, however, they are all related and aim to gather information that can shed some light on specific questions that humanitarian organisations have. Normally individual assessments are interconnected and it is common that while conducting one assessment, information gaps are identified that lead to another assessment to collect information about other topics. Experts in logistics tend to intervene in most assessments carried out by an organisation, providing information on the means, transport, accommodation, communication, safety, and other logistics related components that are required for a successful programme. Sector experts will also conduct their own independent assessments.

Common areas of assessment include:

Context Assessment The political and social background, and major events or cultural changes within a specified geographical area. Some context assessment can function as forecasts as well, identifying the likelihood of future developments.

Needs Assessment Needs can be analysed from several perspectives:

- Technical assessments focused on programmatic matters that identify the main humanitarian needs.
- Operational assessments focused on the feasibility and possible constraints of programmes.

Risk Assessment Assess interventions and the different threats, including: operational, reputational, safety and security and others.

Internal and external capacity assessment inform humanitarian organisations ability to respond to an intervention.

Capacities Assessment

- Internally – An organisations’ own limitations and the feasibility of the intervention.
- Externally – Resources available in a specific context, such as airport/seaport capacities, roads, transport means, internet connectivity or energy solutions.

Stakeholders Assessment

Assessment of different stakeholders, especially decision-makers and (if possible) the communities who will be impacted by the assessment; government, authorities, donors, humanitarian coordination bodies, International or national NGOs, heads of households, and any other parties involved in the intervention.

Assessment Types

Assessment Classification

One common humanitarian classification is the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) emergency phases. Each phase has its own particularities and priorities that prompt assessments to look for different answers and use different dedicated tools.

Note that in emergency situations, processes are intentionally shortened to speed up and facilitate immediate response. Assessments done during the recovery phase or in the development project may have other timelines, thoroughness and use other tools.

Initial

An initial assessment is the one performed in the first hours following a disaster, usually within the first 72 hours. The intention of an initial assessment provides a quick overview of the situation in a moment when there are more questions than answers. An initial assessment should not be confused with a detailed situation report, but only regarded as a highlight of the main facts and gaps in the information.

Initial Emergency Assessment:

Purpose	Time	Access to information sources	Typical information sources	Importance of assumptions	Type of assessment team
First impact evaluation of the crisis.	Within the first 72 hours.	Very Limited: Movements are usually restricted and communications not always functioning.	Relies on previous networking, coordination groups and official sources if any.	Very high: Few things are confirmed, assumptions must be made based on previous experience	Preferably a representative with experience in emergencies.

Adapted from IFRC, [Guidelines for assessment in emergencies](#) & IASC, *Classification of emergency phase*.

Rapid

Guided by the initial assessment and incorporating the new developments, rapid assessments are generally produced within the first two weeks of the emergency. Rapid assessments provide information about the needs, possible intervention strategies and resource requirements. They also comprise situational, resource, and needs assessment in the early, critical stage of a disaster and are intended to determine the type of immediate relief response needed. This assessment can be conducted internally or, as a component of a general assessment format (i.e. [Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment \(MIRA\)](#)) as a coordinated effort among different partners.

Rapid assessments aim to identify:

- The impact a disaster has had on a society and its infrastructure, and the ability of that society to cope with changes.
- The most vulnerable segments of the population that might need to be targeted for assistance.
- The level of response by the affected country, its internal capacity to cope with the situation, and the level of response from the international community.
- The most urgent relief needs and potential methods of meeting them most effectively.
- Coordination mechanisms.
- Significant political, cultural, and logistical constraints.

Rapid assessments also seek to:

- Make recommendations which define and set priorities for actions and resources needed for immediate response.
- Highlight special concerns regarding the development of the situation.
- Draw attention to geographical areas/substantive sectors needing in-depth assessment.

Rapid Assessment:

Purpose	Time	Access to information sources	Typical information sources	Importance of assumptions	Type of assessment team
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Immediate response / lifesaving activities.	Maximum two weeks after the crisis.	Limited: Security and/or safety can limit movement and access to people as well.	Secondary information, local services (health, water, etc.), NGOs, government, affected population/ household visits, partners and close providers.	High: Insufficient time to verify all the information. Situation is still volatile.	Experienced generalist, with previous exposure to emergencies.
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Adapted from IFRC, [Guidelines for assessment in emergencies](#) & IASC, *Classification of emergency phase*.

In-Depth

An in-depth assessment should be conducted following the initial and rapid assessment only where information gaps have been identified, where further information is needed to inform programme decision-making, and to measure programme outcomes or for advocacy purposes. Initial and rapid assessments provide the basis for subsequent in-depth assessments that deepen (but do not repeat) earlier assessment findings. During an in-depth assessment, it is important to focus on the situational changes before and after the disaster.

Each in-depth assessment will be unique, taking into account the individual circumstances and relevant factors, the identified gaps and the actual information needs of the organisation. Please reference the [Logistics Assessment](#) section of this guide for logistics related information.

In-Depth Assessment:

Purpose	Time	Access to information sources	Typical information sources	Importance of assumptions	Type of assessment team
Medium term operational plan.	Less than one month after the crisis and/or each time is considered needed.	Commonly Accessible: Possibility to visit enough locations and interview a full range of informants.	Secondary information, and primary information gathered through a full range of informants.	Low: Sufficient time to interview full range of informants. Coordination with partners is mandatory to avoid duplication and ensure the reliability of the data collected.	Generalist, possibly supported by specialists.

Adapted from IFRC, [Guidelines for assessment in emergencies](#) & IASC, *Classification of emergency phase*.

Continual

It is important to continue different assessments as needed. Continual assessment involves regularly updating information on the situation and seeking relevant feedback from the beneficiaries in order to facilitate decision-making on long-term activities. Effective continual assessments help to spot changes when they occur.

Continual Assessment:

Purpose	Time	Access to information sources	Typical information sources	Importance of assumptions	Type of assessment team
Evaluations, monitoring and research.	Information collected regularly throughout the operational period.	Full normal access.	Primary and secondary information gathered through selected informants, based on indicators, with a standardised and planned exercise generally conducted by the organisation's staff.	Medium: Assumptions based on indicators and informants, but these can be verified from other sources.	Organisation staff during the normal activities development.

Adapted from IFRC, [Guidelines for assessment in emergencies](#) & IASC, *Classification of emergency phase*.

Information Gathering Methods

A standard methodology to collect the data and/or manage the information obtained through the assessment is not only encouraged, an assessment won't work without standard inputs. Deciding what information is needed and how the data will be collected is crucial to achieving the assessment objectives. Indicators should be selected not on the basis of the organisation's interests and capabilities but on the basis of needs on the ground in order to design the most appropriate intervention.

Data can be qualitative or quantitative - both are needed, but the way they are collected differs. While gathering quantitative numbers and statistics is easier and provides figures that build assumptions, qualitative data requires a deeper understanding of the context, time to get find the appropriate sources, and staff trained to extract and analyse the information.

Data collection methods:

Direct Observation Direct observation is useful for cross-checking formal and informal information or reports. Informal discussions are usually the most straightforward approach to assessing infrastructure and logistics.

Surveys A survey is a series of standard questions asked of a predefined group of respondents drawn from a representative sample of the population. Surveys usually involve questionnaires that could include quantitative or qualitative questions and can be carried out remotely through the internet or phone. It is important to carefully design the questions and sampling method with the goal of seeking reality and not just confirm the organisations' assumptions.

Interviews Interviews are a powerful tool, however good judgement will be needed to decide what sort of information the informant can usefully provide. It is crucial to select the key informants who have specific knowledge about one topic and determine the best approach to address them. While individual interviews represent the quickest way to obtain technical information and allow individuals to talk about sensitive issues, group interviews promote interaction among people by encouraging an atmosphere of constructive debate.

Assessment Cycle

“A quick response to obviously urgent needs must never be delayed because a comprehensive assessment has not yet been completed” (UNHCR handbook for emergencies).

The assessment cycle is a conceptual tool that helps to better define the different stages of an assessment and at the same time emphasises the idea of a continual process. The final objective is to provide decision makers with reliable, accurate and valuable information to guide their decisions. The process is cyclical and responds to 5 phases.

1. Prepare
2. Design
3. Implement
4. Analyse
5. Share

Prepare

The preparedness phase ideally starts well before the emergency strikes by defining assessment procedures and policies that fit with the organisation’s contingency plans and programme planning. The assessment plan should explain how the organisation will carry out the assessment from start to finish, what the different parts of the organisation are responsible for, and how it will balance cost, speed and quality.

- Prior to the emergency: Review existing tools, mechanisms, and lessons learned. Update and trim tools if necessary, with enough time to reflect and adjust them appropriately.
- During and after the emergency: define how the organisation is going to intervene in and what value it will add to the response.

Planning an assessment involves:

- Identifying end users of the assessment information (i.e., program staff, donors, etc.) and their respective needs (i.e., budgets, programming, planning, etc.)
- Setting the objectives of the assessment.
- Establishing terms of reference for the logistics assessment team.
- Selecting team members.

- Identifying and/or preparing the assessment tools and pilot testing them.
- Mobilising resources to facilitate the assessment - staff, vehicles, computers, etc.
- Agreeing on reporting format.

Design

Assessment designs will vary in different contexts - a single methodology that meets every information need in every situation will not exist. Every design has to start with the basic facts, including information about; where (locations affected), who (groups in need) and what (sectors that require action), and should be designed in a way that enables organisations to make specific decisions.

An assessment design has to be realistic, manageable within the existing capacities, and balance the cost of data collection against the benefit of having that information. The first step in design is reviewing existing secondary data - If there are significant gaps or specific questions to be answered, an assessment may need to be launched to collect primary data.

The assessment process should not compromise the protection and privacy needs of the affected population. The [Sphere for Assessment guide](#) highlights two elements of the principle, based on the humanitarian core concept of do no harm:

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1. The form of humanitarian assistance and the environment in which it is provided do not further expose people to physical hazards, violence or other rights abuse.
2. Humanitarian agencies manage sensitive information in a way that does not jeopardise the security of the informants or those who may be identifiable from the information.

Implement

Assessment implementation requires keeping objectives and deliverables clear while measuring the assessment progress continuously. While it is important to follow a plan, several modifications to the assessment plan may occur due to context or internal developments. The process should be standardised, transparent and clearly documented process to recognise possible flaws.

The more qualified and experienced an assessment team is, the more accurate and reliable the assessment findings will be. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) should be agreed upon with key stakeholders, and in accordance with the plan. SOPs describe the roles and responsibilities of team members, the team's management lines and

support functions, and clearly identify team leaders.

Analyse

Assessment analysis involves the combination of available information and its interpretation. An analysis should identify patterns, gaps and concrete facts, and provide solid arguments based on cross-checked evidence compiled through a specific methodology by a professional assessment team.

The complex and unpredictable nature of humanitarian emergencies, combined with the limited availability of data, makes precision and accuracy difficult. It is essential to clarify which data the analysis is based on and the source of that data. It is important to be honest about gaps in the data and seek explanations for those gaps, such as lack of access, resources, or others.

When possible, the analysis should also identify gaps in capacity: human resources, aid materials, logistics capabilities, coping strategies, and more. What resources exist to meet the needs identified, and what additional resources are still needed?

Sharing Results

Assessment findings, conclusions and data should be shared internally and externally.

- Internally, to allow decision-makers to guide their actions and other potentially interested colleagues.
- Externally, to assist others in their work, contribute to the overall baseline data available and increase the transparency of the response.

It is important to make the findings available to peers from other organisations, coordinators, government bodies, clusters, local and national authorities, and the affected communities.

Assessment findings are usually presented in the form of an “assessment report” that should fulfil the following criteria:

- Be clear, concise and relevant - as little writing as possible but as much as needed to communicate the findings.
- Enable users to identify priorities for action.
- Describe their methodology to demonstrate the reliability of data.
- Acknowledge assumptions, limitations, biases and gaps honestly.
- Enable a comparative analysis if required.

- Follow global humanitarian protocols which are technically compatible with other agencies' data.
- The frequency of data-sharing is context-specific but should be as prompt as possible.

Every report includes basically three major components

1. Findings
2. Analysis of those findings
3. Methodology followed to collect and analysis the data.

However, reports are not the only way to communicate findings; different users will require different formats and details. Briefing notes, maps, slides presentations or other formats that could meet the target audience's expectations may be required.

The findings should be shared widely and quickly where security and safety concerns permit. Once the information is made public, it can compromise the situation of the affected population, especially in conflict areas or tense situations. For these reasons, information products from an assessment (reports, maps or other outputs) should be prepared with sensitivity to protection issues.

Logistics Assessment

Logisticians should to try to plan ahead, having as much necessary information as possible before the full intervention scope is finalised. This may include being able to explain the times and costs of an intervention, and propose operational solutions. The main objectives of logistics assessment are:

- Gather, analyse and disseminate logistics related data and information in relation to the impact of a disaster
- Use that information to facilitate informed operational decisions making regarding feasibility of activities and proposing efficient solutions - including costs and times - to enact them.

While a logistics assessment determines the extent of the impact, it is also used to plan logistical needs.

A logistician may need to look for information on some of the following subjects.

Identify impacts and infrastructure functionality (facts):

Area of Assessment	Template	Expected Outcome
Airport	Download	Establish accurate and comprehensive information about the feasibility of air transport.
Seaport	Download	Establish accurate and comprehensive information about the seaports capacities.
Waterways and River	Download	Identify the different options on waterway transport, capacities and possible challenges.
Road	Download	Identify capacity of surface road movement options, the accesses actual status and possible secondary routes.
Rail	Download	Establish accurate and comprehensive information about the rail route capacities.
Customs	Download	Understand requirements and limitations for importation of emergency relief supplies.

Clarify for operational purposes (needs):

Area of Assessment	Template	Expected Outcome
Warehouse	Download	Gather information about the possible storage options, and analyse their characteristics in support of programmatic objectives.
Premises	Download	Gather information about the possible living and working facility options and analyse their characteristics to match organisational needs.
Procurement	Download	Gather and analyse information about the context where the procurement activities will take place and the details about the actors involved.
Fuel	Download	Gather and analyse information about fuel availability in the context of operation.

Logistics Support to Project Cycle

A response can only be successful if programme and operational needs are fully understood and addressed. The key to a good project is an integrated collaborative planning process across functions.

Logistics personnel are frequently not adequately involved in all stages of a project. The contribution that logistics professionals can have in each stage is not only crucial to determine the feasibility of the project, but make significant contributions to the effectiveness and efficiency of the intervention.

Programming

The programming phase defines an organisation's position in a country, its objectives and capabilities, its connections with other stakeholders and partners, and with the community it pretends to support.

Poor programming can severely limit the ability to implement a project and have a negative impact on the overall response to the affected populations.

Areas of Logistics Support:

- Assess logistics capacities in the area or region: geography, population, urban / rural areas, roads, infrastructures, etc.
- Collect information on context and safety, as well as maps of the area.
- Initiate a market analysis.

Identification

The purpose of the identification phase is to analyse the problems faced by the project's target population and identify possible alternatives to address them. Each organisation has its own procedures and tools.

It is important to pay attention to infrastructure, safety and weather conditions throughout the year. Policies and procedures may be revised or adjusted to national laws, especially contracts with providers. The OECD has developed a [Methodology for Assessing Procurement Systems \(MAPS\)](#) that takes into account qualitative and quantitative indicators, along with gaps and findings to make recommendations regarding the specific market assessed. The Logistics Cluster also produces assessment information using the [Logistics Capacity Assessment \(LCA\)](#).

Areas of Logistics Support:

- Identify and establish contact with competent authorities and possible collaborators in the intervention area, such as suppliers, carriers, customs agents, etc.
- Provide logistical support to the evaluation teams, making available means of transport, communication and accommodation, among others.
- Provide the necessary access information to the assessment teams: maps, security, geographic, etc. gathered in the previous phase.
- Provide information on roads / landing strips and transportation for goods and personnel.
- Support a possible supply chain strategy, including storage, order management, and identifying origin of materials.
- Conduct market surveys, including local and regional.
- Establish communications using existing and appropriate equipment or services already in the area.
- Assess infrastructures, including what is available or what needs to be built or rehabilitated
- Assess capacity and availability of qualified labour.
- Identify all associated costs.

Formulation

The formulation phase is defined as the phase in which the action is planned, being a crucial moment in the supply chain. Logistics participation in the formulation phase of any project phase is crucial. Logistics informs and provides the safest and most efficient way to establish the project, assuring its feasibility and sustainability. A procurement plan and budget must be prepared based on planned project activities, including the costs and delivery times for the materials and services that may be required are established into it.

The most commonly used tool for project formulation is the logical framework matrix. The matrix establishes logical links between the necessary resources to carry out the planned activities that will allow the expected results drive to achieve the intervention objectives.

Areas of Logistics Support:

- Understand the project aims and activities to achieve them and analyse its feasibility and costs or propose adjustments.
- Define the logistics needs (at the level of storage, purchasing management, transport of goods and people, equipment) and estimate their costs.
- Understand the donor rules correctly, adhere to the intervention to them or advance possible constraints or request changes where applicable.

Funding

The funding phase is when organisations obtain financial resources to run a project. Funding needs will be based on budgets, which must include all the expenses derived directly or indirectly from the execution of the project. The main categories reflected in them are generally, personnel, travel, equipment, supplies (programme inputs), support and indirect costs. A procurement plan will be the basis for calculating the costs of the products or services and the logistics cost of making the project operational.

Institutional donors usually require a project proposal, which includes a detailed budget. Donor agreements are usually governed by a contract, and donor funds cannot be used indiscriminately – they must be used in a controlled and optimised way, and in compliance specific rules regarding the management of both funds and the materials, goods, services and properties (bought or rented) financed with their funds.

Areas of Logistics Support:

- The costs of the inputs and services necessary for the implementation of the project.
- The costs of acquisition, operation and maintenance of communication equipment.
- The costs of transporting personnel and goods.
- The costs of hosting the equipment.
- The costs derived from security management.
- The estimated depreciation of fixed assets.

Implementation

Areas of Logistics Support:

The implementation phase is when projects are actually carried out. The actual progress of the activities is monitored and contrasted with the initially planned progress. Monitoring Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), such as the cost of maintenance or deliver timelines can help ensure adequate fulfilment of planned projects.

- Updating procurement plan and supply plan information.
- Managing procurement.
- Monitoring compliance with donor rules.
- Budget and spending forecasts.
- Track maintenance and transportation costs.

Evaluation

Internal evaluation of projects allows for measuring objectives and identifying problems. Ideally evaluations should be done at the time of closing to facilitate the design of future projects or programmes. Some donors also require a final report at the end of a project.

Areas of Logistics Support:

- Documenting the procurement process.
- Conducting market evaluation.
- Conducting stock consumption analysis.
- Supporting equipment management, including donation to third parties, assignment to other uses, or requests for exception.
- conducting a lessons learned or after action review.

Assessment Tools and Resources

Templates and Tools

[Sphere for Assessment Guide](#)

[TEMPLATE - Airport Airstrip Assessment Tool](#)

[TEMPLATE - Customs Assessment Tool](#)

[TEMPLATE - Fuel Assessment Tool](#)

[TEMPLATE - Office Premises Assessment Tool](#)

[TEMPLATE - Procurement Assessment Tool](#)

[TEMPLATE - Rail Assessment Tool](#)

[TEMPLATE - Road Assessment Tool](#)

[TEMPLATE - Seaports Assessment Tool](#)

[TEMPLATE - Warehouse Assessment Tool](#)

[TEMPLATE - Water Transport Assessment Tool](#)

Sites and Resources

- [Sphere Project, Handbook \(2018\)](#)
- [CARE Emergency Toolkit: Logistics](#)
- [IFRC Rapid Emergency Needs Assessment Guideline](#)
- [ACAPS Needs Assessment Guidance and Tools](#)
- [Map Action](#)
- [Crisis Mappers](#)
- [Logistics Cluster - Logistics Capacity Assessments](#)
- [WFP Dataviz](#)
- [SPHERE, \(2015\). Sphere for Assessment](#)
- IASC, (2015). Multisector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) guidance. ([English](#), [French](#), [Spanish](#))
- [OCHA Assessment and Classification of Emergencies](#)
- [UNDAC, \(2006\). Disaster Assessment](#)
- [WFP, \(2002\). Emergency Field Operations Pocketbook](#)
- [UNHCR Handbook for Emergencies](#)
- [USAID \(2005\) Field operations Guide v4](#)
- [IOM Emergency Operations Manual](#)
- [UNICEF, Emergency Field Handbook](#)
- [NRC, \(2014\). Humanitarian Needs Assessment, the Good Enough Guide](#)

- [ACAPS, \(2013\). Severity and Priority, their measurements in rapid needs assessments](#)