Inclusion of Evidence-Based Approach to Humanitarian Needs Assessment in Flash Appeals

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Lund 2018

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Number of pages: 66
Illustrations: 4

Keywords
Evidence, evidence base, evidence-based approach, Flash Appeal, funding humanitarian crises, humanitarian needs assessment, sudden-onset emergencies

Abstract
According to the humanitarian principle of impartiality, decisions on what to fund in humanitarian crises should be based on a clear identification and prioritization of need. However, both the donors and responders have been reported to not act solely based on the needs. Previous studies indicate that skepticism around the quality of humanitarian needs assessments, especially in Flash Appeal documents concerning funding requests for responding to sudden-onset emergencies, is often given as one of the reasons. Adoption of an evidence-based approach to needs assessments is believed to increase credibility of identification and prioritization of needs and create accountability to respond to the needs of the highest priority. By reviewing all Flash Appeals launched in 2017, the purpose of the thesis is to provide a timely snapshot of how the evidence-based approach is applied to needs assessments in Flash Appeals, what are the current challenges and what are the opportunities for developing the concept. To answer the questions, the study utilizes a literature review, a document analysis and a systematizing expert interview with a representative from UN OCHA's Coordinated Assessment Support Section.

The findings indicate that a clear and well-established definition of the evidence-based approach in a humanitarian context remains unconcluded. Based on the results, the author suggests the following definition: "The evidence-based approach in humanitarian action means the use of credible and transparent evidence to support identification and prioritization of needs, arguments for how the needs can be addressed and why the response works in a given context". The concept is concluded as inclusion of seven components that can be considered as evidence to support claims in Flash Appeals: context analysis, use of baseline data, transparent sourcing and referencing, transparent methodology, clear terminology and definitions, data disaggregation and data triangulation. Using these components as criteria for evaluation, the results reveal that inclusion of evidence is weak in each Flash Appeal. Identified challenges include lack of capacity and knowledge how to integrate evidence in current practices but also lack of incentives to do so. The study concludes that evidence base in Flash Appeals can be enhanced by setting an agreed-upon definition for the evidence-based approach in the humanitarian context, by increasing preparedness among the agencies developing the appeals through training and simply by paying more attention to transparency of the information used to develop and present requests for funding.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The journey from the first outline to the final report has been a process of immense self-improvement and an unprecedented learning experience for me. The outcome of this thesis is undoubtedly the biggest achievement in my academic and professional life so far. I could not have accomplished the work without the help, guidance and support I got from my peers, friends and the staff of Lund University.

Especially, I would like to thank the staff of UN OCHA's Coordinated Assessment Support Section for introducing me to the field of humanitarian needs assessments, providing me with a topic that eventually evolved into this thesis and for supporting me throughout the process.

I would also like to give my special thanks to my supervisor, Tove Frykmer, for her indispensable support and encouragement. Without your analytical mind set and attention to detail, I could have not reached the level of competence needed to conduct a research of this extent.

Many thanks to everyone involved in the process!

Lund, 13 May 2018

Esa Kukkonen

ACRONYMS

CCCM	Camp Coordination and Camp Management (cluster)
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ERC	United Nation's Emergency Relief Coordinator
FA	Flash Appeal
IDP	Internally Displaced People
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian affairs
OCHA-CASS	Coordinated Assessment Support Section in PSB
PIN	People in need
PSB	Programme Support Branch in OCHA
UN	United Nations

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to the humanitarian principle of impartiality, decisions on what to fund in humanitarian crises should be based on a clear identification and prioritization of need (General Assembly resolution 46/182). This entails addressing the highest risk to life and livelihoods first and thereby mitigating the most likely and potentially most catastrophic humanitarian consequences. To identify and prioritize the actual needs within and between emergencies[1], and to respond to these needs, needs assessments and decision-making processes should be based on credible evidence. The evidence-based approach, with its roots in public health, was introduced to the humanitarian field in the 1990's (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014), but has lately gained more momentum as reflected by a series of research conducted by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS), the Overseas Development Initiative (ODI) and others (ACAPS, 2013a, 2013b, 2014, 2016; Christoplos, 2017; Darcy, Maxwell, Stobaugh, & Walker, 2013; Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; ODI, 2009; United Kingdom's Department for International Development [DFID], 2014). Adoption of the evidence-based approach to the needs assessments is believed to increase the validity of identification and prioritization of needs and response activities (Darcy et al., 2013) and create accountability to respond in a best possible way (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; DFID, 2014). Donors' commitments to the Good Humanitarian Donorship have driven the implementing humanitarian agencies to improve the needs assessments and appeals in terms of transparency, but according to ODI (2009) the concern of the quality of evidence still persists. Indeed, previous studies (Development Initiatives, 2015; ODI, 2009; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2012) conclude that the donors are sceptical about the quality of the analyses done by the international humanitarian agencies. This in turn, from the donor's perspective, has led to low weighting of the information provided by the needs assessments. To some extent, this leads to a contradiction about following the principle of impartiality obligating allocations or resources according to need and need only.

[1] The study uses the term "emergency" to denote all the societal disruptions of different scope, scale and severity that are also commonly referred to as "crisis", "disaster", "catastrophe", etc.

Flash Appeals (FA) are used to provide a situational analysis and information about impacts and corresponding needs of crises, for response planning and as mechanisms for funding sudden-onset emergencies requiring international humanitarian aid. The FAs determine the needs of people affected by an emergency and the people of highest priority to be targeted with humanitarian assistance. For the donors, such appeals are commonly considered to be the main window to an emergency. However, especially for large donors, the appeals were reported to be only one amongst a range of reference points for decision-making regarding funding, which implicitly reflects the lack of confidence in needs analyses (ODI, 2009). Even though a detailed assessment was generally not expected in the first phase of a sudden-onset emergency due to urgency, most of the donors still looked for a "credible" needs assessment (ibid.). Based on an initial scoping review, as introduced by Peters et al. (2015), and past experience in the humanitarian field of the author, questions about the use of evidence to support needs assessments in FAs were raised.

Whereas use of evidence as part of the donors' decision-making processes has been studied by many organizations and scholars (Bradt, 2009; Christoplos, 2017; Darcy, Maxwell, Stobaugh, & Walker, 2013; Global Education Cluster, 2010; Olin & von Schreeb, 2014; ODI, 2009, just to name a few), literature concerning implementation of the evidence-based approach and current practices to support humanitarian needs assessments with evidence, was found relatively scarce. To get an insight of the current status of practices relating to the evidence-based approach in needs assessments in cases of sudden-onset emergencies, this study reviews all FAs released in 2017 for a timely snapshot of inclusion of evidence within needs assessments. As the concept of evidence-based approach in the humanitarian field seemed to remain ambiguous, the study intends to provide a definition and a breakdown what the concepts could mean from a technical perspective, as of inclusion of components constituting evidence base.

The primary question is set as "how is the evidence-based approach to needs assessments applied in Flash Appeals?". The secondary question, that needed to be addressed first, is "what constitutes an evidence-base for needs assessments in sudden-onset emergencies?". The study also discusses, based on the research results, the following question: "is there a demand to further develop the concept of evidence-based approach in Flash Appeals, and if so, in what are the challenges and opportunities?".

Primary Research question:

How is the evidence-based approach to needs assessments applied in Flash Appeals?

Secondary Research questions:

1. What constitutes an evidence-base for needs assessments in sudden-onset emergencies?

2. Is there a demand to further develop the concept of evidence-based approach in Flash Appeals, and if so, what are the challenges and opportunities?

2. Background and Context

2.1. The Evidence-Based Approach

The evidence-based approach, or practice, has a long history in public health, tracking back to early 20th century (Spring, 2007). The well-known definition of the concept, given by Sackett, Rosenberg, Gray, Haynes and Richardson (as cited in Spring, 2007, p. 611), determines the evidence-based practice as a process that entails "the conscientious, explicit, judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients". Wennberg, Fisher and Skinner (2004) state that the catalyst for the evidence-based practice is to improve the quality of health services and advocate accountability to use resources impartially and on treatments of verifiable worth. According to Spring (2007), in the field of public health, evidence-based practice is commonly understood as a construct of three components: "i) best available research evidence, ii) clinical expertise and iii) patient values, preferences, characteristics, and circumstances" (p. 613). Implementation of the concept usually takes a form of practice or policy guidelines that are used to specify best practices for addressing a particular issue. These guidelines, based on review of research, intend to specify research-supported best treatment practices for disorders, biopsychosocial condition or life problem (Spring, 2007).

The word evidence has many roles in English language. Price and Djulbegovic (2017) state that evidence "is used 1) as ground to justify one's belief, 2) is inherent to rationality of thought as "rational thinkers respect their evidence", (3) is a guide to truth, and (4) serves as a neutral arbiter among competing views" (p. 972) and continue by claiming that in the evidence-based medicine, evidence often takes all four roles. In the humanitarian context many scholars and humanitarian

organisations define "evidence" as information which supports or challenges a given hypothesis or proposition (Christoplos, 2017; Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014). Christoplos (2017) states that while all evidence is information, information is not always evidence. Information can only be taken as evidence if the methods used to collect and analyse the information and the limitations to the methodology and information itself are made explicit. Moreover, evidence itself does not address the issue of concern directly but indicates the issue, and therefore the information to be used as evidence, it must directly link to a claim it aims demonstrate as truth or false. As Knox Clarke and Darcy (2014) exemplify, nutritional status or crop yields in a given location may indicate food insecurity, however they do not apply as a direct measurement for the issue. In the humanitarian context, evidence enables making critical sense of the data used to support propositions about needs arising from an emergency and why a planned response to address the needs is expected to work in practice. ODI (2009) and Darcy et al. (2013) identify three main categories of information and evidence used by the humanitarian decision-makers: i) pre-emergency contextual information, ii) information concerning the nature of an emergency and iii) evidence about the rationale of planned response to address the needs of a particular emergency.

Despite all the research and debate, based on the review of literature, it seems that a clear definition of the evidence-based approach in the humanitarian context has not been achieved. By taking the general concept from the field of public health and colliding it with the information needs for humanitarian action listed above, the author suggests the following definition: "The evidence-based approach in humanitarian action means the use of evidence, as of relevant, credible and transparent information, to identify and prioritize needs, and argument how the needs can be addressed and why the response works in a given context". This definition was used to contextualize the study.

2.2. Flash Appeals

2.2.1. What is a Flash Appeal?

A Flash Appeal is a document launched preferably within 5-7 days of an emergency's onset, or in case of sudden escalation in protracted emergency, that requires international humanitarian assistance (United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund [CERF], 2008; Inter-Agency Standing Committee [IASC], 2009b). FAs present an early strategic response plan and project

activities for the first three to six months to support those in need with humanitarian assistance in a timely, predictable and accountable manner. Most often, the FAs are coordinated by a UN agency and they serve as the basis for funding applications to the CERF[2] and bilateral funding (IASC, 2006a; IASC, 2009b). Smaller scale and usually sector-specific FAs have been launched by some INGOs[3], such as the International federation of Red Cross and Crescent Societies [IFRC], however they are not considered in this study. UN-led FAs are initiated and coordinated by a Humanitarian Coordinator, usually the Resident Coordinator[4] in an affected State, or by a body appointed by the United Nation's Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC). The leads of the humanitarian clusters[5], with support from the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), act as project leaders for assessments and response plans in their respective areas of responsibility within the parameters set by the Humanitarian Coordinator. The FAs are produced in consultation with humanitarian actors relevant to the emergency, which may include local government officials, NGOs, different UN agencies, donors, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the IFRC and the national Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies. Government ministries can be partners in UN or NGO lead projects but cannot appeal for funds directly in FAs. In large emergencies that span over areas covering several countries, the needs can be addressed through a Regional Flash Appeal, however due to difficulties to coordinate under urgency, only a few have been issued (IASC, 2009b).

There are no universal triggers that would launch an FA or types of emergencies it can be used for, but the threshold in general is determined by the needs that exceed the capacity of the local government or agency to respond. Given the time constraints of an urgent emergency, FAs are based on an iterative process, enabling the responders to adjust and revise the projects at any point, with a scheduled revision a month after the launch of the appeal. The purpose of the revision is to fulfil the information gaps of the initial FA with latest information and update the analyses and response plans to reprioritize the activities and requests for funding according to more comprehensively assessed needs, performed relief activities and received funds (IASC, 2006a; IASC, 2009b).

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[2] Funded by the Member States, CERF is the UN's emergency response fund, delivering quick funding to emergency responders (CERF, 2008).
[3] International non-governmental agency
[4] Humanitarian or Resident Coordinator is the senior-most UN official in a country affected by a humanitarian emergency
[5] The cluster system consists of the following sectors: Health, Logistics, Nutrition, Protection, Shelter, WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), Early Recovery, Education, Emergency Telecommunications, Food Securty and Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM)

The initial FA should be launched as soon as possible for a number of reasons. Firstly, the humanitarian system and especially the donors rely on FAs as proxies to initiate appropriate response protocols in respect of the nature, scale, severity and urgency of the emergency. Secondly, some donors can only access their emergency funds, or at least more quickly, if an FA has been issued. Lastly, a rapid take on a coordinated FA pre-empts development of appeals produced by individual agencies' that may lead into a fragmented response. In other words, by initiating the FA process in the early stages, a coordinated response is prompted from the beginning (IASC, 2006a; IASC, 2009b). Due to the great urgency to launch a first edition of an FA, the impacts and needs assessments are inevitably based on rough estimates. Even with all the expertise, the humanitarian system is incapable of providing a detailed overview of an emergency within a few days. But still, for the reasons aforementioned above, and to preserve the creditability of and confidence in the humanitarian response, it is still preferable to launch a FA as quickly as possible than delay the process for weeks for comprehensive information (IASC, 2006a; IASC, 2009b).

Despite the urgent nature of the appeals, an FA should at minimum include a situation overview, a needs assessment, sectoral response plans and a summary for each response project (IASC, 2009b). The situation overview should provide a narrative of the emergency context considering what has happened, what are the pre-event capabilities and vulnerabilities, what are the overall impacts and corresponding needs of the affected population and information about the on-going national and international response. Needs assessment should provide information who are the most affected people and why, what are the priority needs as direct results of an emergency disaggregated by specific groups and what are the priority sectors for response. Each humanitarian cluster, relevant to the scope of the emergency, should include their own plans stating the needs and the corresponding strategic response respective to their sectors. The project summaries simply state, which groups of people in need the agencies (as of UN agencies, local, national and international non-governmental agencies) intend to target, with what kind of response and how much funds are required to implement the activities (IASC, 2009b).

In principles, the FAs are issued to commence life-saving actions, whilst needs for recovery and preparedness are funded and coordinated through other mechanisms. However, projects for early recovery may be included in the scope of an FA if the needs are timely critical and have a strong rationale for a rapid impact on the affected population and/or relief activities. If the demand for inter-agency aid to meet the needs exceed beyond six months, the FA may be succeeded by a

Consolidated Appeal, shifting the focus from immediate response and early recovery to recovery. (IASC, 2006a; IASC, 2009b).

2.2.2. Flash Appeals launched in 2017

In 2017, five UN-led FAs were launched. Three appeals out of five were launched in the aftermath of powerful cyclone storms in the eastern coast of Africa and the Caribbean island Dominica. The other two were pushed out to alleviate suffering caused by floods in Peru and droughts in Kenya. While droughts are usually not considered as sudden-onset emergencies, in the case of Kenya, the rapid escalation of the situation led the Government of Kenya to declare the drought as a national disaster resulting in a Flash Appeal requesting immediate humanitarian assistance (United Nations, 2017b). Only in the case of Kenya, a revision was later launched. These FAs alone targeted around 2,685 million people with acute life-saving aid and with respective requests to fund response activities totalling in 205,7 million USD. In the same year, the total requirements for all humanitarian aid response plans and appeals was 23,57 billion USD (OCHA: Financial Tracking Service [FTS], n.d.).

The emergencies vary in scope, scale and severity, which are supposedly the main factors to determine and explain the different numbers of people to be targeted with aid and respective requests to fund activities in each emergency. Interestingly, also the ratio of requested and allocated funds, the total request for funding divided by the number of people to be targeted, and the number of people to be targeted out of all affected people vary significantly. As of March 2018, the Peru Flash Appeal had received only 29,5 % of the request, whereas in the other end of the spectrum, funds allocated to the Kenya Flash Appeal covered 116.7 % of the request (FTS, n.d.). If requests are divided by the number of people to be targeted with an appeal, representing an amount of money to be used to support per person, the difference even bigger. In Kenya the figure was 55,78 USD, whereas in Dominica the respective figure was 478, 46 USD. For an overview of the key figures of the FAs launched in 2017 see Table 3.

Lack of evidence base in needs assessments is sometimes given as a reason for the variability of funding the FAs (Hidalgo & Tamminga, 2009). The extent of this study does not allow generalisation based on the five evaluated appeals, but whether the variation has to do with the quality of needs assessments and use of evidence within the FAs or not, the key figures still shed

light to the variance in funding different emergencies and provided a reference point to reflect upon the results of the document analysis.

Flash Appeal	Request (USD)	Total n of PIN[6]	N of targeted people	Request/targeted (USD)	Funded (USD)[7]	Coverage
Dominica Hurricane Maria, September 2017	31.1m	65,000	65,000	478,46 $	19.6m	63.0 %
Peru Floods April 2017	38.3m	1.1m (stated as "severely affected")	320,000	119,68 $	11.3m	29.5 %
Kenya Droughts, March 2017	106m revised (original 165.71m)	5.6m revised (original 2.6m)	1.9m revised (original 2.6m)	55,78 $	123.7m	116.7 %
Madagascar, Cyclone Enawo March 2017	20.1m	Not stated	250,000	80,40 $	13.5m	67.3 %
Mozambique Cyclone Dineo, February 2017	10.2m	Not stated	150,000	68,00 $	4.9m	48.1 %

TABLE 1 FIGURES OF FLASH APPEALS LAUNCHED IN 2017 (FTS, n.d.)

2.3. HUMANITARIAN NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN SUDDEN-ONSET EMERGENCIES

The IASC (2012) defines an assessment as "a set of activities necessary to understand a given situation" (p. 6). According to ACAPS (2014), a needs assessment's purpose is to make good decision-making possible and should simply answer the question: "What assistance do the disaster-affected communities need?" (What is needs assessment? -section para 1). The process of assessing needs can be divided into six steps: preparedness, planning, implementation, analysis, sharing and decision making (ACAPS, 2014).

The first step has to do with ensuring capacities prior to emergencies to conduct the needs assessments when needed. The organisations carrying out assessments, should be prepared with adequate skillsets, staff and other resources to implement the assessments. This requires support from the senior management and predefined protocols that determine roles and responsibilities and respective points of entry for intervention (ACAPS, 2014).

[6] People in need
[7] As of March 2018

The next step, planning, is an essential phase as emergencies are context-dependent and as such there is no "one-size-fits-all" methodology that could be applied to every emergency. Therefore, every needs assessment should be planned and designed according to the information needs. When planning an assessment, a set of questions should be considered as put by ACAPS (2014): "What are the decisions that need to be informed?", "what information is needed to make those decisions?", "where will that information come from?", "who will make the decisions?" and "when will they do those decisions?". Needs assessments can be based on secondary and/or primary data. If time and access to the affected areas are limited, the initial assessments are usually based solely on secondary data, as of pre-emergency information, national authorities' and media reports, crowdsourcing and experiences from similar emergencies. Primary data, collected through field household surveys, key informant interview, visual observations et cetera, refers to data gathered on purpose from the respondents to inform the situation in a location affected by an emergency (IASC, 2012). In the planning phase, secondary data should be considered first to determine if collection of primary data is necessary (ACAPS, 2014).

The implementation step is about collecting the data that meets the information needs. In general terms, needs assessments must include information about where the impacts of an emergency are the greatest, who are the most affected groups and what are the needs of those people and what sectors need attention (IASC, 2012). IASC's Guidance Note (2006b) underlines that an approach that considers all the humanitarian sectors should be taken to every sudden-onset emergency requiring multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance to ensure consistent needs assessments and analysis. According to ACAPS (2014), these coordinated assessments can be divided into two approaches. Joint assessments utilize same tools and methods across all the participating actors, however carrying out their assessments in isolation. Harmonized assessments are based on constant information sharing between partners carrying out the assessments allowing comparison of results and a multi-agency joint assessment. The partners may still use their own tools and methods, but in a way enabling comparable results to identify overlapping and interlinked needs across different sectors (ACAPS, 2014; IASC, 2012). The difference between the two methods comes down to resources and achievable results. The former approach is more suitable for rapid assessments as it requires less coordination between the bodies and is thus mobilized quicker. Lack of harmonized coordination of different assessment bodies may, however, lead to siloed results making it more difficult to identify needs that are interrelated with other needs and concern more than one sector or agency. On the contrary, the latter approach takes more effort to initiate and conduct as the

bodies need to be coordinated from the beginning, but the harmonized procedure provides a greater chance to identify interwoven needs and gaps. Thus, this approach is common in months following the emergency or long-term complex emergencies (ACAPS, 2014).

The analysis-step comes down to interpretation of the aggregated data. While the aim of the analysis is to provide answers to questions set in the planning phase, individual analyses should also contribute to a shared picture for better understanding of overall situation of an emergency (ACAPS, 2014). In order to understand and analyse what are the needs for specific groups, the term "need" must be defined first. Watkins, Meiers and Visser (2012) define a need as a gap between current results and desired or required results. Benini (2013) clarifies that in humanitarian crises, the gap is about "unmet needs" as of shortages and deficits. In basic terms, needs analysis is about processing the finding from two perspectives, severity and priority, to identify what gaps should be considered as actual needs in the context and what needs are of highest priority. According to Benini (2013), severity is an intrinsic property of needs and indicates the degree of which the needs unmet. Priority, by contrast, is stated as a result of comparing one or more needs, given the needs are of comparable ingredients.

As in most cases it is impossible to acquire precise data over large geographical areas affected by an emergency, sampling is commonly used to extrapolate the findings (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; IASC 2009a). Proper use of valid and suitable sampling methods can increase the likelihood of legitimate generalisation from the household level to cover the entire affected population. On the contrary however, poor sampling may provide misleading information and have a major effect on reliability of a needs assessment (IASC, 2012). Validation of information should be an essential part of analysis. Validation is about judging how strong arguments as results of an analysis are, in other words how strong is the evidence to support the claims been made. Being the focus of this study, the topic is elaborated on in the chapters 4 and 5, but at simplest, validation means judgements about quality of methods used and quality of the information itself (ACAPS, 2014; IASC, 2012).

The last step of a needs assessment is to share the results for decision-making, usually in a form of an assessment report. An assessment report must at minimum include the findings in relation to the context, an analysis of such findings explaining what the findings indicate and lastly, the methodology used to carry the assessment. The final product should inform the last step of needs assessment, decision-making. Therefore, the report should refer back to the information needs of

decision-making and present findings and explanations that can answers the questions the decision-makers have (ACAPS, 2014).

ACAPS (2014) lists a few success-factors for a credible and reliable needs assessment: use of standardized and transparent process, such as the Multi-Clusteral Initial Rapid Assessment, that is well documented, use of recognized data collection methods, use of defined and widely accepted and terms, transparency about the presented information and possible gaps, and use of relevant and applicable technical standards and sector-specific indicators, for example the Sphere[8].

3. METHODOLOGY

The research builds on a qualitative multi-method approach. A literature review was used to construct the analytical frame of the research, contextualize the topic and to enable comparison between the results of the document analysis and expert interview. Interviewing was used to gain more understanding of the FA development process in practice and the use of evidence amongst the practitioners. The three methods were designed to complement each other and enable triangulation of findings. The most weight was given for the document analysis used to review the Flash Appeals. The methods and how they were used are described in the following chapters and in the Figure 1 below.

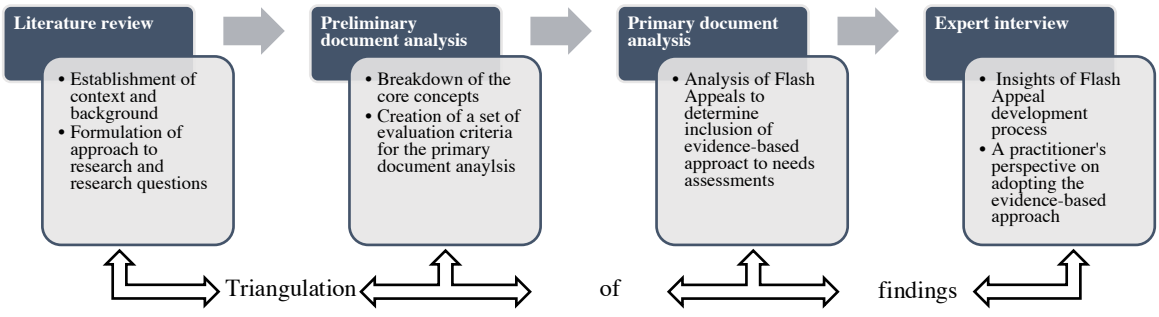

FIGURE 1 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

[8] The Sphere Project sets universal minimum standards in core areas of humanitarian response (The Sphere Project, 2011)

A literature review was used to establish the theoretical background and context of the research, formulate the research questions, contextualize the document analysis and form interview questions. The review was conducted by retrieving publications from Google Scholar and LUB database. The database search was limited to academic journals, reviews, reports, books and eBooks, news, electronic and non-print resources and conference materials. With the Google Scholar search, citations were not included. The used search terms, operators and search results are listed in Table 2 below.

Search term	**Number of retrieved results**	
	Database	
	LUBsearch	**Google Scholar**
"evidence" → ENTER	Approx. 9.42m	Approx. 3.25m
"evidence base" OR "evidence-based" → ENTER	846,951	Approx. 17,800
"evidence" AND "humanitarian" → ENTER	5,702	Approx. 403,000
"flash appeal" → ENTER	12	894
"flash appeal" AND "evidence" → ENTER	1	579
"flash appeal" AND "needs assessment" OR "needs analysis" → ENTER	39	325
"needs assessment" OR "needs analysis" → ENTER	134,838	Approx. 17,300
"needs assessment" OR "needs analysis" AND "evidence" → ENTER	85,323	Approx. 18,200

TABLE 2 SUMMARY OF DATABASE SEARCH

The database search shows that evidence and evidence-base is widely discussed in the literature, however vast majority of the retrieved documents considered either public health, medicine, education or psychology. Similarly, all the other used search terms retrieved mostly papers that discussed evidence-based medicine or health interventions in emergencies. Due to the enormous number of results retrieved with the search terms "evidence", "evidence base" OR "evidence-based", "evidence" AND "humanitarian", "needs assessment" OR "needs analysis" and "needs assessment" OR "needs analysis" AND "evidence", only the first 100 pages of results, sorted by relevance, were reviewed. Rest of the search results, with a significantly lower number of retrieved documents, were all checked. Interestingly, "flash appeal" AND "evidence" terms resulted only a handful of documents related to this study. The UN's, ACAPS', ALNAP's, and other humanitarian agencies', such as the IFRC's and European Commission Directorate General for Humanitarian aid and Civil Protection's [DG ECHO], resource databases were also used to directly search content specific to the scope of the research. References within retrieved documents were also used to

discover possible sources of information. The documents were determined relevant to the context if a document specifically considered development of flash appeals, conducting needs assessments in sudden-onset emergencies or evidence-based approach to humanitarian action. The selected documents are listed in "Annex 3 List of reviewed documents".

3.2. Document Analysis

According to Bowen (2009), a document analysis is a systematic review or evaluation of text or image documents of interest that have been created independently of a researcher's agenda. The method focuses on finding, selecting, making sense of and systematizing data presented in documents. Depending on the interest of the analysis, data is organized into themes and/or categories through an analysis of content. A document analysis can be applied as a stand-alone method but can be also be used to support or challenge findings from other sources (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis was used as a primary method for the study and chosen due to its applicability to qualitative research focusing on a single and very specific phenomenon (Yin, 1994) and moreover, due to the Flash Appeal documents' centrality to the study.

Document analysis as a method was sequentially used in two phases. First, the method was used to create the evaluation criteria that could be used as a proxy for the primary document analysis. In the second phase, utilizing the created criteria, the method was used to conduct the primary document analysis, with a purpose to determine if the Flash Appeals, as written in the documents, incorporate an evidence-based approach to needs assessments. In both phases, the process of the document analysis followed the structure of skimming, thorough examination and interpretation as suggested by Bowen (2009). For the analysis, all Flash Appeals from 2017, a total of six documents, were chosen for review. These documents were chosen as they provided a scope of a timely snapshot of current situation at the time of conducting this research and a relatively low number of documents allowed an in-depth approach to the document analysis. Findings of the analysis also contributed to construction of the interview questions as the documents do not disclose the development process of the FAs but only the outcomes.

3.2.1. Analysis for Creating An Evaluation Criteria

The criteria for the analysis of FAs was created through analysis of multiple guidelines and frameworks related to humanitarian needs assessments and development of FAs or evidence-based approach. Using the search terms given in chapter "3.1 Literature review", twenty-two of the retrieved documents were considered applicable to the context of the research (see "Annex 3 List of reviewed documents" for a list of reviewed documents). Utilizing the iterative process (Bowen, 2009), patterns with emerging themes were recognized in the content of the documents. Due to differences in wording, coding schemes were not applicable, and thus interpretation of the language was needed to organize the data. Once all the distinctive themes in all the documents were identified, the findings were tabulated. Then, the documents were, one-by-one, compared to the tabulation to note the inclusion of themes. This process was repeated until the documents sharing all the same themes, related to components of needs assessment and/or use of evidence, were identified. Most of the documents reviewed utilize the same terminology, which was found helpful for thematic categorization of the criteria. However, some themes and/or criteria were not explicitly stated in some documents but could be derived from the language used. Using the DG ECHO's (n.d.) "Needs Assessment and beneficiaries" as an example, the statement "information provided in the sections above has to be sufficiently self-explanatory" (para 3.1.4) was interpreted as a requirement for transparent terminology. Similarly, the statement "this section will allow ECHO to assess whether the selection and identification of beneficiaries are pertinent, in particular whether they belong to the most vulnerable groups. The partner has to briefly explain how the direct beneficiaries were targeted, identified and selected" (DG ECHO, n.d., para 3.2.3), was considered as a requirement for use of baseline data, as the relevant targeted beneficiaries can only be determined by distinguishing the population with particular needs from the total population affected by an emergency. Such analysis requires baseline data to enable the segregation. Finally, the criteria for the document analysis was created based on the themes common to all remaining documents. The evaluation criteria consist of seven themes, each having different indicators. For the analysis, the indicators were coded as YES or NO, in other words criterion included or not included in the document, to organize and analyse the data. The set of evaluation criteria is presented in chapter "4.1 The Evaluation Criteria for Document Analysis".

3.2.2. Primary Document Analysis

In the first step, the FA documents were skimmed superficially to identify themes coded into the criteria. Next, a thorough examination was performed for comparison of content and the set indicators. The last step was an in-depth content analysis, linking the content to the indicators through interpretation to conclude if the data presented in the documents fulfil the evaluation criteria. A criterion was determined as "YES" only if all the set indicators of a criterion were met. It is worth to note that in many cases the criterion was determined as "NO" even if some pieces of evidence were provided, but not all the indicators were met. Taking for example the theme of context analysis, a situation overview may have been provided in a document, but because pre-crises vulnerabilities were not considered within the overview, the result of the analysis was determined as negative. As the documents vary in ways presenting information, interpretation of the language was needed. The results of the document analysis are presented in chapter "4.2 Review of Flash Appeals".

3.3. Interview

An expert interview was used as secondary method for collection of data to provide understanding on what are the challenges in incorporating an evidence-based approach to the FAs. The objective of the interview was to complement the document analysis with practical insights and expert knowledge, as the written documents may not reflect the reality of the needs assessments presented in the FAs. Moreover, the theoretical framework of this study is mostly based on guidelines and best practices which are essentially either regulatory or technical documents that do not elaborate on the challenges in developing of FAs in real-world settings.

The systematizing expert interview, introduced by Bogner, Alexander, Littig, Beat, and Menz (2013), was chosen as an approach to the interview as it focuses on knowledge of action and experience derived from practice. From the methodological perspective, the interest is on the 'objective' and specialized knowledge the expert possesses that is not available to the researcher from other sources and the expert is considered as a source of information, not an object of interest itself. However, in addition to the systematizing approach, the interview also embodied elements of a theory-generating expert interview, as put by Bogner et al. (2013), with a goal of "communicative opening up and analytic reconstruction of the subjective dimension of expert

knowledge" (p. 48). Whereas the former approach was used to investigate 'how' the FA process in practice follows or opposes the guidelines from a technical and process perspective, the purpose of the latter approach was to focus on the expert's subjective conceptualization of the topic to gain understanding 'why' the challenges exist and 'what' could possibly be done to solve issues.

In acquisition of objective information and knowledge on a certain topic, the concept of expert and expert knowledge must be described. Bogner et al. (2013) identify the analytic and normative perspectives of experts and their knowledge as voluntaristic, constructivist and sociological concept of expert knowledge. A voluntaristic expert is considered as a person in possession of particular knowledge and capacities enabling oneself to cope with their own life. In other words, this approach considers everyone as an expert, in the field of their own meanings. Framing of an expert this way is not valid in conducting investigations if the person himself of herself and the interpretation of his or her own life is not of interest but the objective knowledge about a certain topic he or she is in possession of. As the expert knowledge in question is limited to one self's own narrative, the knowledge is very likely to have little or no specific social effects, which is social settings a central quality of expert knowledge. The constructivist definition of an expert suggests that someone's expertise can be divided into a method-relational and a social representational approach. The former approach is intertwined around a constructivist theory, meaning that an expert is, to some degree, a construct of a researcher's interest. This means that regarding the scope of a research, a researcher assumes that the expert chosen to be studied possesses relevant and objective knowledge about the topic of interest. To determine who is an expert on a certain topic, the method-relational approach designates an expert as a person who have established a reputation through publishing literature relevant to the topic, who is active in an associations and/or organization relevant to the topic or who have obtained reputable qualifications or are in reputable positions. The social-representational approach, tightly linked to the method-related, incorporates social parameters into the definition and states that anyone given the reputation through societal processes, that is to say anyone who is seen as an expert in social realty, can be taken as an expert. The sociological approach gestates the concept of an expert in terms of the specific structure of their knowledge. Schütz (as cited in Borges et al., 2013, p. 50) frames the structure of expert knowledge as "certain and unambiguous knowledge than can be communicated and reflected on at any time". The approach separates the knowledge of a layperson from an expert knowledge in terms of accessibility - without the rules of routine action and habits of an expert in his or her functional area, one cannot access the implicit knowledge.

Bogner et al. (2013) list three categories of the special knowledge of experts. Technical knowledge is defined as information about operations and events governed by rules, ways of applying routines to an expert's functional area, bureaucratic competences et cetera. Process knowledge, inter-related with the previous dimension, is described as knowledge on a process close to an expert's field based on practical experiences acquired from one's own context of activities. The dimension of interpretative knowledge has its foundations on an expert's subjective orientations, rules, points of view and interpretations. From an epistemological perspective, the dimension has theory-generating qualities, as in this respect information does not exist prior to interpretation and is always a result of an analytic construction.

In real world settings the three perspectives described earlier, and the three dimensions are most likely not exclusive but overlapping. Still, this study uses the method-relation definition of an expert which also was a primary contributor for identification of a potential interviewee. The second most important factor for selecting an interviewee was the dimension of expert knowledge a candidate was assumed to be in possession of. The interview was constructed around the following topics: "how the FA process works in practice in respect of the guidelines and best practices as regulations", "what are the challenges in the process of including evidence-based approach in FAs and why do they exist" and lastly, "from the expert's point of view, what could be done to enhance the FA process towards a more evidence-based manner". These questions implied that an expert to be selected for an interview, as guided by the theory, should be someone who a) is in a reputable position acquired through substantial experience or prestigious qualifications in the field of the FA process, b) is in possession of technical and process knowledge concerning this particular process and c) is capable and willing to share on one's own interpretations of the topic to enable the researcher to elaborate on the possible unwritten underlying challenges of the process and based on that, to generate new knowledge on how the FA process could be enhanced, if needed and possible. An expert, meeting the aforementioned criteria, representing a practitioner as OCHA's Coordinated Assessment Support Section (OCHA-CASS) was identified. At the time of this study, the expert had five years of experience in the field of humanitarian needs assessments and with the FA process as a specialist to the subject.

The interview was conducted via Skype on March 24th 2018. A semi-structured approach, utilizing a topic guide (see "Annex 2. Expert Interview Topic Guide"), was applied to the interview to enable open and in-depth discussions over the topic. Due to the author's own experience in the field of

humanitarian needs assessments and development of FAs as a former intern with OCHA-CASS, both the interviewer and the interviewee shared, to some extent, the same conception of the topic. As such, the role of the interviewer could be described as an associate, to whom the expert communicates not only in a formal but also in a personal way (Bogner et al., 2013). The Skype call was recorded and transcribed for analysis. The transcribed material was analysed to identify statements that either support or challenge the findings of the document analysis and literature review or introduce novel information. The findings are presented in chapter "4.3 A Practitioners view".

3.4. LIMITATIONS

The results of the study are limited by a number of factors relating to choices how to narrow down the scope and what methodologies were used, and by quality and incompleteness of the available information. The study only considers the UN coordinated FAs launched in 2017 to allow a timely snapshot of the current status of adoption of the evidence-based approach. As the definition of evidence-based approach in the humanitarian field is not well-established, the context of the study relies on the authors own understanding of the concept based on the literature review and the author's experience. This means that the study only provides one perspective how to define the evidence-based approach in the humanitarian field and how to evaluate the strength of evidence in FAs. The approach taken to evaluate strength of the evidence is rather technical as it aims to illustrate what components constitute an evidence base in practice, leaving alone discussions about the possible issues and success-factors with the enabling environment as of regulations, advocacy, incentives and so on.

The chosen qualitative approach and methodology posed limitations in the study in terms of reduced objectivity to the topic (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Firstly, qualitative research and especially the document analysis requires interpretation of the data to evoke meaning and generate knowledge, which is highly susceptible to the subjective conception of the researcher. As an attempt to control subjectivity, the document analysis utilized a framwork that was based on multiple frameworks and guidelines that all shared common principles about needs assessment and evidence. Still, the analysis was affected by subjective choices how to categorize the data in accordance to the evaluation criteria as analysis of written records entailed interpretation. The document analysis only provides a limited and incomplete representation of the subject as a whole,

as the analysis only considers transcribed records. Moreover, the FAs may vary in quality and might not necessarily be precise, accurate or complete representations of the particular events and processes they focus on.

The expert interview as a valid research method is also debated. As the process of generating knowledge relies on the setting created by the interviewer and the information the expert possesses is dependent on a relative concept of the expert, which will unavoidably lead to subjective outcomes relational to time and context (Bogner et al., 2013). This means, the study can hardly be replicated and, as such, it should be considered that the study represents a snapshot of the FA process bound to time and context of the research.

As reflected by the number of retrieved documents for the literature review (see Table 2), the existing theory of the scope is scarce. Thus, the study only uses a few key references, of which many are working papers or similar documents that have not been peer-reviewed, to establish the theoretical background. For some unknown reason, the Google Scholar database gave inconsistent results when the scope was narrowed down with "AND" and "OR" operators. In some cases, as shown in Table 2, the search resulted in a greater number of retrieved documents, however more filters were used.

4. Assessing the Strength of Evidence Base in Needs Assessments in Flash Appeals

Evidence is a multi-dimensional concept and attempts have been made to segregate the different components. ALNAP (2014; 2017) introduces six key attributes that can be used to assess the strength of evidence. "Accuracy" refers to how good of a reflection the evidence provides of the real situation if it represents a record of the issue being measured. "Representativeness" is linked to the degree of how accurately the evidence represents the condition of the entire population, the group of interest, the diversity that exists in the population and/or the main stakeholders engaged in the response. "Relevance" has to do with the extent of which information relates to a particular claim it intends to support or challenge. "Generalisability" refers to the degree of which evidence from a different situation can generalized beyond a specific context and applied to support or challenge the issue of interest. "Attribution" is described as the extent to which the evidence establishes a clear causality between two conditions or events. "Clarity" around context and methods is about transparency; how, why and for whom the evidence has been collected.

While the criteria provided by ALNAP breaks down the qualities of evidence, it only provides a few tangible indicators to measure the strength of evidence. Therefore, the evaluation criteria, based on multiple frameworks, with a clear set of indicators was created as described in the following section. The set of criteria was used for the document analysis and the results are presented in the chapter "4.2 Review of Flash Appeals".

4.1. The Evaluation Criteria for Document Analysis

In order to assess inclusion of evidence in needs assessments, the criteria that enabled analysis of the FA documents was needed as no existing and suitable frameworks were discovered. The set of evaluation criteria is based on available literature and was developed by utilizing a document analysis method as described in chapter "3.2 Document analysis". The evaluation criteria present seven interlinked themes of needs assessments that can either be considered as evidence or as prerequisites for an evidence-based approach. Each theme has a number of indicators as the information needed for evidence. The themes are explained in the following paragraphs. See chapter "4.1.7 Summary" for the complete evaluation criteria.

4.1.1. Context Analysis

Context analysis has a multi-faceted role. In order to transform data into information, data must be processed, organized and interpreted in a given context (ACAPS, 2013b). In terms of evidence, context acts as a narrative that determines what kind of information is relevant to the assessment and can be used as evidence. Context analysis establishes a logical relationship between all the information used, through describing the operating environment of the emergency based on environmental, social, economic, security and other pre-emergency vulnerabilities and capacities. While context analysis usually utilizes some baseline data, for needs analysis the baseline data works as inputs to generate information. The context analysis uses the data as information and evidence to establish the narrative. The other six themes, for instance transparent sourcing and referencing, contribute to the reliability of the context analysis. Moreover, context analysis itself, explaining underlying factors of an emergency, acts as evidence to the needs assessment by conceivably providing a rationale for the analysis results. The indicator for the criterion was set as: context analysis provides i) a narrative of the operating environment of the emergency based on

environmental, social, economic, security and other pre-emergency vulnerabilities and capacities, and ii) a description of on-going national and international response

4.1.2. Use of Baseline Data

The "use of baseline data" has to do with the robustness and transparency of the needs assessment. According to Clarke and Darcy (2014) baselines act as denominators for the analysis and especially as prerequisites for data disaggregation. Baselines as factors of spatial, socio-economic, legal political and environmental, existing capacities and vulnerabilities, population and demographics, health and nutrition and infrastructure, can be used as inputs to analysis but can also act as evidence in a form of figures supporting the determined scope and scale of the emergency. Prioritizing of needs based solely on direct observations without an analysis with baseline data lacks the link to the big picture and has thus less evidence to support the claims used for prioritization. How much value as evidence the baselines can generate, depends on relevance, completeness and creditability of the data and how it was used. In this sense, transparency about sourcing, methodological choices and limitations of the baseline can be seen as evidence to support the decisions why a particular dataset is preferable to use as input data to the analysis. The indicators were set as: use of baseline figures used to i) estimate the number of affected people, ii) conclude the targeted groups, and iii) provide rationale for the activities intending to address the needs.

4.1.3. Transparent Sourcing and Referencing and Transparent Methodology

The themes of "transparent sourcing and referencing", and "transparent methodology" can be considered as a characteristic of an evidence-based approach. Referencing the datasets and description of analysis methods can be seen as evidence for the analysis process by disclosing how and where from data was collected, and why and how this particular data was used for analysis. While not directly increasing the value of the data as evidence, transparency about sourcing and referencing and methodology provides reasoning linking the evidence to claims as results of the analysis (ACAPS, 2013b). This is also of importance as FAs are intended for sharing with a multitude of stakeholders that most likely have no information how the analysis was conducted. The indicator for transparent sourcing was set as: sourcing and referencing of baseline figures and other external data. The indicators for transparent methodology was set as description of i) methods used to coordinate the assessment and ii) collect and analyse data, iii) gaps in the data, and iv) level of confidence in data and analysis presented.

4.1.4. Terminology and Definitions

The theme "terminology and definitions" refers to clear and consistent definitions of the key terms used in a document. These include “affected people”, “targeted people”, “people in need”, severity scales and other terms that are central to present both the process of developing the FA in question and its findings. Clear terminology can be seen as a prerequisite for an evidence-based approach as ambiguous terms may lead to misinterpretations during the analysis process and of the results. Especially if the assessment is not based on a harmonized joint-approach, different sectoral needs analyses may result in incomparable or misleading conclusions, and as such, affect the prioritizing most urgent needs negatively. In other words, clear definitions act, to some degree, as evidence to support the consistency of inter-sectoral analyses and their collation for prioritization of needs. The indicator for the theme was set as: definitions provided for “affected”, “targeted” and “severity” or other terms of importance.

4.1.5. Data Disaggregation

“Data disaggregation” allows the needs assessment to prioritize the identified needs according to the most vulnerable groups. Typically, the data is disaggregated by age and gender (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014), but geographical areas or other factors relative to the scope of an emergency, such as internally displaced persons, can be used as denominators. As mentioned before, disaggregation of data contributes as evidence to the prioritization of needs, but also requires evidence to support the claims. The evidence to support data disaggregation links to the other themes: are baselines relevant to the scope used and is the analysis transparent about the used data and methodology it uses to process the data. The indicator for the criterion was set as: at minimum, data disaggregated by gender, age, geographical areas and sectors or other manner relevant to the particular emergency.

4.1.6. Data Triangulation

Credibility and accuracy of the data used for analysis have a major impact on the overall quality of an assessment. However, these factors of a single dataset may be hard to evaluate – data may be based on poorly designed studies resulting in consciously or unconsciously biased or simply incorrect information; or the data is intentionally generated to mislead (ACAPS, 2013b). A majority of the reviewed frameworks and papers (for instance ACAPS, 2013; Clarke & Darcy, 2014; International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies [IFRC], 2008) suggested

"data triangulation" or cross-checking of sources and findings against the baselines, other available sources and/or analysed data. In terms of evidence, data triangulation may be considered as tool to generate evidence to support the creditability of all the information presented in the FAs. To determine whether data triangulation was used as part of the FA developing process, two indicators were set: use of multiple-sources to support a single topic, use of joint-assessment approach (that entails cross-checking of references) or an explicit statement of use of data triangulation or cross-checking as part of the methodology.

4.1.7. Summary of Evaluation Criteria and Indicators

The following table presents a summary of the identified themes with respective indicators and the references for the source documents, constituting the evaluation criteria used for the document analysis. Two themes that emerged in many of the reviewed documents, joint-assessment and participatory approach, were deliberately excluded from the final criteria as individual themes. While these could have been identified as their own themes, in terms of evidence, they are essentially linked to themes of "transparent methodology" and "triangulation of evidence". Both of them have to do with methodological choices of a needs assessment and generating evidence by using multiple sources to triangulate data.

Evaluation criteria	Indicator(s)	Sources	
Context analysis	Context analysis provides: ▪ a narrative of the operating environment of the emergency based on environmental, social, economic, security and other pre-emergency vulnerabilities and capacities ▪ a description of on-going national and international response	▪ ACAPS, 2014, pp. 3 & 32 ▪ DG ECHO, n.d. ▪ IASC, 2009a, pp. 5 & 9 ▪ IASC, 2013, chapter 3 ▪ IASC, 2015, pp. 18 ▪ IFRC, 2008, p. 14 ▪ The Sphere Project, 2011, pp. 61-62 ▪ UNHCR, 2017, p. 52	▪ ACAPS, 2013a, p. 18 ▪ ACAPS, 2013b, pp. 4 & 18 ▪ Clarke & Darcy, 2014, p. 24 (ALNAP) ▪ Darcy et al., 2013, pp. 19 & 22
Use of baseline data	Use of baseline figures to: ▪ estimate the number of affected people ▪ conclude the targeted groups ▪ provide rationale for the activities intended to address the needs	▪ ACAPS, 2014, p. 3 ▪ DG ECHO, n.d. ▪ IASC, 2009a, p. 5 ▪ IASC, 2013, chapter 3 ▪ IASC, 2015, pp. 12 ▪ IFRC, 2008, p. 30 ▪ The Sphere Project, 2011, p. 61-62 ▪ UNHCR, 2017, pp. 73-77	▪ ACAPS, 2013a, p. 12 ▪ ACAPS, 2013b, p. 23 ▪ Clarke & Darcy, 2014, p. 19 & 23 (ALNAP) ▪ Darcy et al., 2019, p. 19
Transparent methodology	Description of: methods used to ▪ coordinate the assessment ▪ collect data (secondary and primary) ▪ analyse data gaps in the data presented and explained level of confidence in data and analysis	▪ ACAPS, 2014, pp. 6 & 30 ▪ DG ECHO, n.d. ▪ IASC, 2009, pp. 5 & 9 ▪ IASC, 2013, chapter 3 ▪ IASC, 2015, pp. 18 & 20 ▪ IFRC, 2008, p. 68 ▪ The Sphere Project, 2011, p. 65 ▪ UNHCR, 2017, pp. 91, 95	▪ ACAPS, 2013a, p. 19 ▪ ACAPS, 2013b, p. 16 ▪ Clarke & Darcy, 2014, p. 16 & 25 (ALNAP)
Transparent sourcing and referencing	Sourcing and referencing of: ▪ baseline figures ▪ other external data	▪ ACAPS, 2014, p. 26 ▪ DG ECHO, n.d. ▪ IASC, 2009a, p 5 ▪ IASC, 2013, chapter 3 ▪ IASC, 2015, pp. 15 ▪ IFRC, 2008, p. 68 ▪ The Sphere Project, 2011, p. 64 ▪ UNHCR, 2017, p. 65	▪ ACAPS, 2013a, p. 19 ▪ ACAPS, 2013b, p. 17 ▪ Clarke & Darcy, 2014, p. 16 (ALNAP)
Terminology & Definitions	Definitions on: ▪ affected ▪ targeted ▪ severity scales *and or* ▪ other key terms used	▪ ACAPS, 2014, pp. 17 & 30 ▪ Clarke & Darcy, 2014, p. 29 (ALNAP) ▪ DG ECHO, n.d. ▪ IASC, 2009a, pp. 3 & 5 ▪ IASC, 2015, p. 20 ▪ IASC, 2013, chapter 3 ▪ IFRC, 2008, p. 65 ▪ The Sphere Project, 2011, p. 65 ▪ UNHCR, 2017, pp. 82, 92	▪ ACAPS, 2013a, p. 20 ▪ ACAPS, 2013b, pp. 19, 20 ▪ Clarke & Darcy, 2014, p. 29 (ALNAP) ▪ Darcy et al., 2013, pp. 22 & 24
Data disaggregation	Needs assessment disaggregated by (at minimum): ▪ gender ▪ age and if applicable: ▪ geographical areas ▪ sectors *and/or* ▪ other manner relevant to the emergency i.e. IDPs	▪ ACAPS, 2014, p. 4 ▪ Clarke & Darcy, 2014, p. 27 (ALNAP) ▪ DG ECHO, n.d. ▪ IASC, 2009a, p. 13 ▪ IASC, 2015, pp. 11 & 20 ▪ IASC, 2013, chapter 3 ▪ IFRC, 2008, p. 41 & 73 ▪ The Sphere Project, 2011, p. 61 & 63 ▪ UNHCR, 2017, pp. 91-92	▪ ACAPs, 2013a, p. 7 ▪ Clarke & Darcy, 2014, p. 27 (ALNAP)
Data triangulation	Cross-checking of evidence, intrasectoral and/or intersectoral • Use of multiple sources to support single topics • Use of joint-assessment approach • "Data triangulation" or "cross-checking" explicitly stated as part of the methodology	▪ ACAPS, 2014, p. 28 ▪ Clarke & Darcy, 2014, p. 25 (ALNAP) ▪ DG ECHO, n.d. ▪ IASC, 2009a, p. 11 ▪ IASC, 2015, pp. 14 & 19 ▪ IFRC, 2008, p. 67 ▪ The Sphere Project, 2011, p. 64 ▪ UNHCR, 2017, pp. 76-77	▪ ACAPS, 2013a, p .20 ▪ ACAPS, 2013b, p. 16 ▪ Clarke & Darcy, 2014, p. 25 (ALNAP) ▪ Darcy et al., 2013, p. 8

TABLE 3 EVALUATION CRITERIA

4.2. Review of Flash Appeals

The following chapter and table present a summary of the primary document analysis. As described in chapter "3.2.1 Primary Document Analysis", the created set of evaluation criteria was applied to analyse the inclusion of evidence in each FA. For a breakdown of each FA, see "Annex 1. Breakdown of Document Analysis Results". None of the evaluated FAs completely fulfil all the criteria set to assess the inclusion of evidence within the documents. Only the FAs for Dominica and Kenya provide a context analysis that consider pre-existing vulnerabilities, such as poverty or conflict, and capacities as part of the situation overview or sectoral plans. Transparent use of baselines for the context analysis and to provide a rationale how the figures of people in need, affected and targeted were concluded, was found to be weak in all of the appeals. Baseline data was either used only occasionally or the used baselines were not exposed. It was also noted, that some sectoral plans use different baseline figures for example population data, which causes inconsistent and incomparable analyses between the sectoral assessments. While visiting the source documents may disclose the used baselines and provide rationale for the figures, in most cases this is not possible due to lack of transparent referencing. Only the appeal for Peru provides references to sources of information. In general, referencing of source data was found to be either non-existent or weak, in terms of no access or confusion of what source documents are referred to. For example, a reference "OCHA, 2016" does not uncover which particular dataset, produced by OCHA, was used. Methodological choices and limitations to both assessments and information itself was found to be weakly presented. Only the revised appeal for Kenya included a clear description of the methodological approach, that considered also data triangulation through a joint-assessment approach and identified limitations to the provided information. In five out of six appeals, the key terms are not defined and only the Peru FA is clear with the used terms. In some cases, terminology was found inconsistent and confusing. For example, in the FA for Madagascar, the term "affected people" is in some parts used as an overarching term to cover all the population impacted by the emergency, whereas elsewhere it takes a capacity of "people in need", which is a common term used to illustrate the portion of the affected people that are in need of assistance. Data disaggregation by sex and age at minimum, was also among the weakest points. Only the revision for the Kenyan FA provided a robust breakdown of figures. Cross-checking of information, or data triangulation, was explicitly considered only in the case of the revised Kenyan appeal. The appeal for Madagascar utilized a multi-sectoral approach to the needs assessments and used a separate

body to consolidate the generated data, which was interpreted as a process that implies cross-checking of information. The findings of the review are summarized in Table 4.

Criteria	Dominica	Peru	Kenya	(Kenya revised)	Madagascar	Mozambique
Context analysis	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Use of baseline data	No	No	No	No	No	No
Transparent methodology	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Transparent sourcing & referencing	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Terminology & Definitions	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Data disaggregation	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Data triangulation	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Time taken to issue the FA	11 days	14 days[9]	31 days	184 days[10]	13 days	13 days

TABLE 4 SUMMARY OF THE DOCUMENT REVIEW

4.3. A PRACTITIONER'S VIEW

The expert interview with an OCHA-CASS representative, Marcus Elten, experienced with Flash Appeals, both corroborated the findings of the document analysis and literature review, and also enlightened the process of developing an FA and the challenges that exist with the evidence-based approach. Elten says, OCHA-CASS is the unit within the UN system to consolidate data and look at the evidence base within FAs. The unit also develops the FA process by reviewing the document for quality and composing lessons learned exercises for improvement (M. Elten, personal communication, March 24, 2018).

Elten describes the main purpose of Flash Appeals as "a vehicle to defend and argue for a prize tag". As his definition reflects the centrality of evidence as an argument or explanation to justify the requests for funds, he defines the evidence-based approach as means to systematically understand what the issues are in the scope and scale of a problem and why the appealing agencies

[9] Calculated from deployment of UNDAC teams on 21 March - 10 April when issued

[10] Calculated from the release date of the first edition Flash Appeal

intend to respond in a way they have planned to, and why they are requesting x-amount of funds to do so. He also claims that understanding of concept amongst the humanitarian partners conducting assessments is a mixed picture. While a good number of responders understand what is meant by evidence, they still do not apply the evidence-based approach to their assessments. Still, there are also responders that do not understand the concept (personal communication, March 24, 2018).

According to Elten's experience, many responders, whether they are familiar with the concept or not, skip the step of building an evidence base and base their response activities solely on their own judgement. He enlightens that there are many reasons for this, including, but not limited to: lack of knowledge and training, challenges with information management and also because of expectations that funds will be allocated anyway. He also states that there is a lot of variance in quality of the needs assessments between different agencies, which was also noted during the document analysis. Some of the provided figures may be wild guesses, some are estimates that lack evidence to support them. He says that there should be a strong effort to collect as much data as possible and harmonize findings to improve the evidence base, but still, assessments are being done anyhow and anyway (personal communication, March 24, 2018).

The biggest struggle in terms of quality of needs assessments and evidence base in FAs, according to Elten, has to do with multi-sectoral assessments that provides a system-wide understanding of the situation. Even if OCHA planned for a multi-sectoral assessment with the partners, the assessments are still conducted in parallel rather than in a harmonized manner. Many agencies strictly focus on their own sectors and do the assessments in isolation, and there is also a tendency of government-led assessments to focus on impacts rather than needs (personal communication, March 24, 2018). Impact-driven assessments and lack of multi-sectoral approach was also found during the document review. Many reasons were identified to have an effect on the quality of evidence. Elten states that in cases of sudden-onsets, time is the biggest constraint as first editions of FAs are launched, in compliance with the policies, while the assessments are still on-going. Timely-response is often deliberately considered over quality of assessments to initiate the response. Another issue lies with responsibility. The agencies providing their claims and requests are responsible of providing the explanations. If an agency does not have the capacity or interest to invest in building evidence, OCHA, even if responsible for coordination, does not have the means to judge or decline the requests unless they are so much out of portion that would make the overall request seem unnecessarily high. That is one reason why unexplained figures may be given

in a consolidated document. Lack of skills and capacity among the agencies was also stated as a challenge. Elten claims that organizations are still in a phase of learning how to adopt the evidence-based approach, which still needs prioritisation and training. He also mentions that while there are much more available data nowadays, that can improve the evidence base, processing more information also requires more capacity and skills from the agencies. Assessments were not stated as the only issue, but also the analyses and feeding them into the appeals. Lastly, Elten argues that donor behaviour might also have a role in neglecting evidence. Donors may allocate funds even if the provided evidence is weak, due to urgency as time is often seen as more critical than evidence, but also for political reasons as also revealed in the literature (personal communication, March 24, 2018).

When asked, Elten uncovers that there are no specific protocols to evaluate the strength of evidence within an FA before launch. The satisfactory level of evidence is decided ad hoc by the OCHA-CASS. The criteria that applies includes, is there i) a sufficient explanation of scope and scale of the emergency, ii) rationale provided how the estimates of people affected, people in need et cetera were computed, iii) a distinction between the urgent problems and pre-existing problems and iv) an adequate description of the most vulnerable groups. Altogether, the intention is to understand what the figures are based on and if the rationales behind them are in fact evidence to support the claims. If claims are made without further explanations, that is considered as sign of weak evidence base (personal communication, March 24, 2018).

The expert lists a few steps and opportunities that have been or could be taken to improve the evidence base within FAs. He says that the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams' objectives now include a role in supporting the development of a FA, opposed to in the past, and the teams' capacities in this role have been strengthened by assigning an OCHA representative to the teams to ensure better coordination and management of information in and from the field. He also argues that the processes of secondary data review and remote analysis could be strengthened to support the needs analysis in a very short time frame, even before the field assessment teams have been deployed. The foremost important factor would be training around the FA development process to strengthen preparedness, especially in vulnerable countries where there is a UN Resident Coordinator as there is an obvious gap in knowledge when it comes to preparedness for FAs (Elten, personal communication, March 24, 2018).

5. DISCUSSION

The evidence-based approach was found to be a multi-faceted concept, a sum of multiple factors and characteristics. Its purpose in the humanitarian context is ultimately to enable effective decision-making on where, how and how much resources should be allocated to alleviate the suffering of the most vulnerable groups which in turn entails clear identification and prioritization of those people most in need.

The findings, based on the literature review, document analysis and interview, indicate that the evidence-based approach is poorly adopted in developing FAs. Lack of a well-established and acknowledged definition of evidence-based approach in the humanitarian field reflects that gathering, processing and representing evidence is not of highest priority in conducting needs assessments in sudden-onset emergencies. The results of the document analysis showed that all of the FAs lack many of the identified key components of providing a strong evidence base. The interview also confirmed, that there is indeed a mixed understanding among the humanitarian partners what the concept means and how should it be applied in practice.

A number of factors were discovered as possible reasons for low weight given for building a strong evidence base in FAs. Firstly, most of the reviewed guidelines and frameworks concerning humanitarian needs assessments rarely mention "evidence" explicitly. For example, the Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crises by the IASC (2012) does not include a definition of evidence in its glossary. Interestingly, also the document that can be seen as the primary guideline to develop FAs, The Revised Guidelines for Flash Appeals (IASC, 2009), does not consider many of the identified components of evidence. The guide does not mention that the methods used for coordination and collecting, and analysing data should be made transparent. Nor does it require or suggest data triangulation for better data transparency and reliability. If the content and structure that the guidelines for FAs and other needs assessment related documents suggest, with low weighting of evidence, is taken as a standard approach, it could be one of the reasons for lack of evidence in the evaluated FAs.

Secondly, as concluded by ODI (2015), information in general was found to only have limited relevance on donors' decision-making. Rather than purely responding to needs and risks, decisions on funding crises are dependent on availability of resources but also by political aspects, influenced

by a number of factors such as the context and nature of an emergency in respect to the donors' strategical priorities and media attention (Darcy, 2009; OECD, 2012). Darcy (2009) also reveals the centrality of trust in decision making, the tendency of the donors to value more the information produced by a partner with whom they had an on-going relationship. This may compromise objectivity and the evidence-based approach to needs assessments if trust is regarded over the evidence used to support the appeals and response plans. Even if the importance of robust argumentation is understood by the humanitarian partners, according to Elten (personal communication, March 24, 2018) the donor behaviour to discard information has led, to some extent, to a presumption from the implementing partners' side that funds will, or will not, be allocated anyway, whether strong evidence is provided or not.

Thirdly, time was found as a major constraint in sudden-onset emergencies. As Cosgrave (2008) and Elten (personal communication, March 24, 2018) argue, there is a contradiction between speed and quality. Both the donors and the responders may be under pressure to respond as quickly as possible even before assessments providing information about the situation have been carried out. Therefore, also the initial needs assessments may deliberately consider speed over quality to initiate and inform the response as early as possible with a cost of credible evidence. Indeed, time seems to improve the quality of evidence in FAs, although this finding is only based on one FA revision. The revision for Kenyan appeal showed significant improvements compared to the original release. It is also worth to mention, that none of the evaluated appeals were launched within 5-7 days from onset or declaration of an emergency as guided by the IASC (2009) and the time taken ranged from 11 days to 31 days.

Fourthly, as Elten (personal communication, March 24, 2018), argues there is still clear knowledge and capacity gap among the implementing partners, how to incorporate the evidence-based approach in needs assessments, however efforts have been taken. He also states that there are differences in quality and strength of the provided evidence between the agencies doing assessments. This was also noted during the analysis of the FAs. Whereas some agencies only list the planned activities and state the request for funding in their project summary, some agencies also present a breakdown of people in need, affected and targeted, also disaggregated by sex and age. The IASC (2012) states that one common problem that links to issues with assessment capacity, particularly with joint-assessments, is a fact that too much data is collected. Elten (personal communication, March 24, 2018) also brings up the issue with the large amounts of available data. Although an assessment can benefit from extensive data for improved evidence base, analysing

large amounts of information requires greater discretion about the data and thus more resources and technical skills from the agencies. This may pose a risk of basing analyses on inaccurate and/or non-relevant datasets if the capacities, as of both skills and resources, for information management are inadequate.

Lastly, there is no agreed protocols to evaluate the strength of evidence before the appeals are launched (M. Elten, personal communication, March 24, 2018). This may explain inconsistent figures, even in a consolidated document. Also, the needs assessments lack a standardized procedure, as listed by Mohiddin and Smith (2016), there is a plethora of different needs assessment tools and frameworks to use, which all have slightly different approaches. A well-designed common assessment approach that includes agreed-upon roles and responsibilities and considers procedures to gather evidence from the beginning may improve the quality and timeliness of emergency assessment information.

The FAs for Kenya (first edition), Cyclone Dineo in Mozambique and Cyclone Enawo in Madagascar were found to be impact-driven, rather than focusing on needs arising from the impacts. In these appeals, it was not a case of ambiguous terminology, but clearly a lack of proper needs assessments. For example, the appeal for Cyclone Dineo (United Nations, 2017e) does not identify or provide any figures for the "people in need" but only considers the population possibly affected by the emergency and the number of people to be reached with assistance. In a sense, this reflects that the actual needs were not identified and prioritized, and the response was planned on impacts rather than assessed needs. Elten (personal communication, March 24, 2018) also states that focus on impacts rather than needs is often the case with government or locally coordinated appeals. This may reflect lack of knowledge and capacities in the field. While the impact-driven assessments do provide some information on how the emergency has affected the communities located in the areas in question, they fail to address which groups are in need of assistance and which of those groups should be prioritized and targeted first. Elten (personal communication, March 24, 2018) argues that the purpose of FAs is mainly a vehicle to argue the requests for funding to initiate the response. In this sense, the donors may see it difficult to act based on the needs and discard the provided information if identification and prioritisation of needs do not exist.

While it was not an intention of this study to rank the FAs by strength or quality of evidence base and prove a correlation between strong or weak evidence and amount allocated funds, it was interesting to see if these factors were in line. It appeared that the revised Kenyan appeal provided

by far the strongest evidence base, seconded by the FA for Peru considering two factors out of seven. The FAs for Dominica and Mozambique and the first edition for Kenya included only one component of evidence base, whereas the FA for Madagascar provided no evidence as per the evaluation criteria. Compared to the funding figures, the Kenyan appeal indeed received the most funds, covering 116,7 % of the request. The appeals for both Dominica and Madagascar, that were determined as equal in terms of inclusion of evidence, received funds on a same scale, covering respectively 63,0 % and 67,1 % of the requests. However, "the second best" appeal, the FA for Peru received the least allocations, covering only 29,5 % of the requested funds, whereas the weakest appeal, the FA for Mozambique, collected more funds covering 48,1 % of the request (see table 1 for breakdown of the funding figures). As a summary, no consistent connection between the strength of evidence base and allocated funds can be seen, however three out of six appeals were in line with received funds and determined strength of evidence. The only conclusion that can be drawn from these findings is that evidence most likely has only limited importance for the donors' decision-making, supporting the claims given by Darcy (2009), ODI (2015) and OECD (2012).

Based on the findings, the author suggests two opportunities that could be taken to strengthen the use of evidence in FAs. Firstly, the humanitarian community, as of donors and responders, should define and agree upon what the concept of evidence-based approach means in the humanitarian context and especially in sudden-onset emergencies. As per literature, it seems that a consolidated definition is yet to be achieved, and thus, the author suggests that the definition established to contextualize this study, "the evidence-based approach in humanitarian action means the use of credible and transparent evidence to support identification and prioritization of needs, arguments for how the needs can be addressed and why the response works in a given context", could be used as an overarching concept. Despite the simple wording, the definition incorporates the principle of impartiality, responding according to the identified and prioritized need, and highlights the importance of credible evidence to support the planned response activities. All in all, a common understanding through a well-established definition would be the first step towards a standardized procedure.

Secondly, the single and most critical factor, in overall terms, to improve the documentation of needs assessments in FAs is transparency. In essence, transparency can be seen as an inherent property of evidence. By explicitly providing reasoning how the conclusions of a needs assessment were drawn, what information was used and what are the limitations of the assessment, credibility

of the FA could be increased. Taking for example the FA for Hurricane Maria, in the sectoral plan for education, the agencies state "the estimated children targeted for the intervention include 15,011 of whom 7,308 are girls, 7,703 are boys and 938 are teachers" (p. 17). Presentation of figures as exact numbers gives an impression of accurate information, even though they are stated as estimates. However, without a transparent reference to up-to-date data and clear description of methods used to analyse the data, questions about accuracy and reliability of information are most likely raised. This in turn, may have a negative impact to the credibility of the entire needs analysis, even if some figures are well-based. To enhance transparency of the FAs, the presented evaluation criteria, (see "Table 3 Evaluation criteria") could be used as a guideline to integrate the evidence-based approach in developing FAs and as a checklist to evaluate the strength of evidence base before publishing a FA document.

The intention of this study was to provide a timely snapshot of the current status how the evidence-based approach is applied in developing FAs, coordinated by UN agencies. Thus, the results cannot be generalized to cover all the released appeals before and after the year 2017, or FAs coordinated other instances, such as the IFRC. It has also to be noted, that the technical perspective, as of inclusion of components of evidence determined in the process of creating the evaluation criteria for this study, does not elaborate beyond what is written in the documents. Although an interview was conducted to get a general overview of the FA developing process and the opportunities and challenges that come with it, the findings do not directly apply to the FAs chosen for evaluation. A more in-depth analysis would have entailed interviews with people involved with developing the FAs in question.

The scope was deliberately limited to the document analyses, as the documents should present a realistic transcript of the situation, needs and planned response, supported by credible evidence. The approach, however, poses limitations to the findings, as the processes of developing the particular FAs were unclear. Firstly, the study cannot indicate, if the problems with including evidence has to do with processes of needs assessments themselves or with presentation of the assessments and analyses. Analyses may have been based on evidence, but poor presentation of the rationale of the conclusions resulted in an impression that the provided information is not based on evidence.

Secondly, the document analysis is susceptible for subjective interpretation of the provided information in the FAs. Although the documents analysis utilized "standardized" criteria to

evaluate each document, due to differences in wording and overall presentation of information in different FAs, the compliance with the evaluation criteria is based on the author's subjective discretion. Moreover, because existing and consolidated evaluation criteria was not found, although based on literature, the created set of criteria is ultimately a product of the author's own understanding of the concept.

Despite the difficulties in researching a relatively novel topic, the adopted multi-method approach resulted in triangulated findings that can be considered valid and reliable in the scope of this study. Although the results of the document analysis cannot be detached from the context of this study, the used evaluation criteria and the established definition for an evidence-based approach in the humanitarian context can be harnessed for further use and research.

6. CONCLUSION

How is the evidence-based approach to needs assessments applied in Flash Appeals?

The primary research question was set as "how is the evidence-based approach to needs assessments applied in Flash Appeals?". As per the findings, the evaluated FAs do not provide a strong evidence base. From the standpoint of the used evaluation criteria, five out of six evaluated appeals do provide pieces of evidence, depending on the appeal in question, but none of the FAs include all the components. Context analysis was found as a strongest point, presented in three out of total six evaluated documents. On the contrary, none of the appeals sufficiently use or expose the used baselines for data analysis. Disaggregation of data, by sex and age at minimum, was also found as a major gap, as also concluded by DFID (2014), Even though the findings indicate, that evidence-based approach is poorly applied in developing FAs, it does not necessarily mean that they do not provide any evidence. However, in overall terms, the provided evidence base was found to be weak. The results of the expert interview corroborate these findings.

Summary of conclusions for primary research question:

- In general terms, the adoption of an evidence-based approach to needs assessments in Flash Appeals was found to be weak
- None of the reviewed Flash Appeals fulfil the applied evaluation criteria completely
- However, five out of total six appeals provide pieces of evidence

What constitutes an evidence base for needs assessments in sudden-onset emergencies?

In order to address the primary question, a secondary question, as of "what constitutes an evidence-base for needs assessments in sudden-onset emergencies?" needed to be answered first. A clear and well-established definition of the evidence-based approach in the context of humanitarian needs assessments was not found in the literature. Therefore, a definition was needed to contextualize the study. By reviewing and analysing evidence and humanitarian needs assessment related literature, the overall concept of the evidence-based approach in humanitarian action was defined by the author as "use of evidence, as of relevant, credible and transparent information, to identify and prioritize needs, and argument how the needs can be addressed and why the response works in a given context". In terms of FAs, from a technical perspective, the concept was concluded as inclusion of seven different components that can support the claims about figures for people in need, people to be targeted with humanitarian assistance and what responses are preferable to address the needs. These components include context analysis, use of baseline data, transparent methodology, transparent sourcing and referencing, transparent terminology and definitions, data disaggregation and data triangulation. Within each component, a number of indicators were set to evaluate inclusion of evidence through the components. The components were found as very much interdependent, and taken together, they can be seen as a foundation for a strong evidence base.

Summary of conclusions for secondary research question 1:

- A clear and well-established definition of the concept of evidence-based approach in the humanitarian context was not discovered
- Based on the information needs of humanitarian decision-makers and the general concept of evidence-based approach adopted in the field of public health, the concept was framed as:

  "Use of evidence, as of relevant, credible and transparent information, to identify and prioritize needs, and argument how the needs can be addressed and why the response works in a given context."

- Evidence base in Flash Appeals was concluded as inclusion of seven interlinked components: context analysis, use of baseline data, transparent methodology, transparent sourcing and referencing, transparent terminology and definitions, data disaggregation and data triangulation.

Is there a demand to further develop the concept of evidence-based approach in Flash Appeals, and if so, what are the challenges and opportunities?

The study also aimed at discussing potential opportunities and challenges of the evidence-based approach in Flash Appeals. A question was set as "is there a demand to further develop the concept of evidence-based approach in Flash Appeals, and if so, in what are the challenges and opportunities?". The results show that there is a demand to develop the evidence-based approach in FAs to comply with the obligation of acting based on the needs and needs only, as implied by the humanitarian principle of impartiality. Without clear identification and prioritisation of needs, opportunities to target those groups most in need are hindered. It is also a matter of accountability - the donors and responders should be accountable to target the most vulnerable groups first. As concluded by previous studies (Development Initiatives, 2015; ODI, 2009; OECD, 2012) the donors are sceptical about the evidence provided in the appeals, and thus there is clearly a demand for improvement. The expert states that organisations are still in a phase of learning how to work with evidence and there are clear gaps in capacities and incentives to build a strong evidence-base in the field that leads to variability in the strength of the provided evidence. Sometimes, the step of gathering, processing and presenting evidence is even deliberately neglected due to lack of capacity and because of great urgency, but also because of presumptions that providing evidence makes no or little difference regarding the donors' decision-making (M. Elten, personal communication, March 24, 2018). Elten (personal communication, March 24, 2018) states that strengthening preparedness of the UN country offices to develop FAs by training would be the foremost important area of improvement. He also highlights the role of secondary data reviews and remote sensing analyses, which as capacities could be strengthened and benefit the needs assessments within FAs, as urgency is one of the biggest issues.

Summary of conclusions for secondary research question 2:

- Based on the findings, there is a demand to develop the concept of evidence-based approach in Flash Appeals to meet the humanitarian principle of impartiality
- The current challenges include lack of knowledge and capacity to produce strong evidence in a narrow time-window of sudden-onset emergencies, but also because of low weighting of evidence in decision-making
- Opportunities and potential steps for development include establishing a common definition of evidence-based approach in humanitarian context and increasing preparedness capacity by training responding and implementing agencies how to consider evidence in developing Flash Appeals

Further research could be done to examine a possible correlation between the allocated funding and strength of evidence of all the released FAs while utilizing the evaluation criteria. This study only considers five FAs, which only provides a snapshot of the given time, and as such, the results cannot be generalized to conclude a clear link between strength of evidence in needs assessment and funding allocations. Also, the study takes a technical approach to provide evaluation criteria and evaluate inclusion of evidence within FAs. Therefore, the evaluation criteria do not apply for evaluation of quality factors of the given pieces of evidence. These may include, for example, reliability and representativeness of the used baseline data for analysis, accuracy and completeness of the analyses and/or generalisability of the given information. As such, the framework itself could also be further developed to incorporate the quality factors of the evidence, described by Christoplos (2017) and Knox Clarke & Darcy (2014), to complement the indicators of the created evaluation criteria focusing on inclusion of evidence rather than on the quality of evidence itself.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. BREAKDOWN OF DOCUMENT ANALYSIS RESULTS

Dominica: Hurricane Maria

Hurricane Maria, a category 5 storm, hit the Caribbean island Dominica on September the 18th 2017. In total and estimate of 71,000 people were affected by the storm, resulting in 65,000 identified people in need of assistance. To address the devastating impacts on housings and livelihoods, the Government of Dominica made a call for humanitarian aid and a Flash Appeal produced in collaboration by UN partners, regional actor Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) and the Government, requesting 31,1 million US dollars, was eventually launched on 29th of September (United Nations, 2017a, pp. 2–3).

Context analysis

The situation overview provides comprehensive information on damage done by the Hurricane Maria, which is illustrated with a map and disaggregated by parish. It also provides facts about the initial impacts to the infrastructure and affected population. The economic environment is identified in terms of main livelihoods, being agriculture and tourism. Impacts on nature and environment are implicitly stated as Dominica's rainforests and crop fields were stated to be destroyed. As for pre-emergency vulnerabilities, Dominica is notified as on one of the poorest countries in its region with a poverty rate estimated at 28,9 per cent. Moreover, the impact of the Tropical Storm Erika in 2015 from which Dominica was still recovering, was identified as a factor negatively contributing to the local coping capacities. The overview also describes the efforts for ongoing national and international assessments and response activities (United Nations, 2017a). Security issues are not considered in the overview, which may, or may not, have been consciously left out as either the sectoral plans do not identify security as a problem. Overall, the context analysis in the document meets the evaluation criteria.

Use of baseline data

The figure used for total number of population is based on Census data from 2011. Most sectoral plans do not introduce a baseline figure that was used to estimate the needs. The shelter sector uses

the Census data to extrapolate satellite imagery estimates for total housing damage on the island to conclude 14,450 households to be targeted. The Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) sector relies on the shelter cluster's figures. While the education sector provides baseline figures of the targeted group, as of number of children and teachers, it still concludes a different figure for targeted people higher than the given baseline, without providing a rationale. Rest of the applicable sectoral plans, namely water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), early recovery, protection, health and food security, do not provide any a rationale how the numbers for affected and targeted people were composed.

Transparent methodology

The approach to assessments is not explicitly disclosed, however the initial assessments are stated as conducted in conjunction with UN partners and local actors. Both secondary and primary data are used for the analysis, but at most parts it is impossible to distinguish what information is based on data collected on purpose in the field and what is based on secondary data, such as local news or government releases. Regarding primary data, it is stated that satellite imagery was used to estimate impacts on housings, but the methods, (observation, surveys etc.) for collection of other data is not disclosed. The report is, however, clear about the limitations by stating that the figures are based on extrapolations and estimates which were the only possible way to analyse the situation due to lack of access and cloud cover that limited the satellite imagery analysis. No rationale for the overall figure of targeted people is provided, whether the number was derived from the highest number among the sectoral plans, a mean value or by other methods.

Transparent sourcing and referencing

While some efforts have been made to improve transparency of both primary and secondary data in the document, many claims and figures do not include any references or introduce the source of information. For example, the education, protection and WASH sectors provide figures for targeted people, without any references about where such numbers were retrieved or what datasets are they based on.

Terminology and definitions

The hurricane affected 71 thousand people, resulting in 65 thousand people in need of assistance, of which all were targeted. The early recovery sector estimates that 57 thousand people were

impacted. None of these terms, “affected”, “people in need”, “targeted” or “impacted” are explained. Severity scales are not adopted, or other ambiguous terms used and thus not opened.

Data disaggregation

The assessment disaggregates the baseline population figures by location and identifies the most-affected areas respectively. Each sectoral plan also has its own figures for targeted people. Only the protection and education sectors disaggregate the number of targeted people by gender. Consideration of possible vulnerabilities of different demographics are not included in any other but the education and protection sectoral plans.

Data triangulation

As references to sources of information are not provided, adoption of Multi-Clusteral Initial Rapid Assessment approach (MIRA) or similar methodology to conduct assessments as joint-process is not disclosed, it is impossible to get a clear picture if data was triangulated and figures cross-checked between the sectors. However, figures that include references, are only based on a single dataset (i.e. Census 2011, Caribbean Development Bank 2014 and Caribank 2009). In that sense, according to the evaluation criteria, data triangulation was not used.

Peru: Floods

The El Niño coastal phenomenon, caused increased rainfalls resulting in severe flooding in 24 of the country's districts. An estimate of around 1,1 million people were affected by the emergency, of which 320 thousand were identified as in need of immediate assistance. On April the 10th 2017, the UN and partners published a Flash Appeal, requesting 38,8 million US dollars to address the needs of the affected population (United Nations, 2017d, p. 3).

Context analysis

The situation overview of the emergency (United Nations, 2017d, p. 3) provides a picture of what happened, who have been affected and what response efforts had been initiated by the Government of Peru and the international actors. Nonetheless, the situation overview is mainly an impact analysis rather than a context analysis, as underlying factors and characteristics of the local operational environment that may worsen the impacts of the emergency, or vice versa, increase the coping-capacities. Also, the sectoral plans focus on the impacts and do not consider pre-emergency vulnerabilities.

Use of baseline data

The impact-driven approach, that characterizes the situational overview, applies to sectoral needs assessments and the figures of people in need and targeted people are mostly based on primary data as referenced in the document. No baselines, for example the number of people living in each district or pre-emergency figures for poverty or malnutrition, that would help to understand the scale of the emergency and numbers for targeted people, are provided. Moreover, none of the sectoral plans explain, how the figures for targeted people were concluded. While some numbers are given, it is impossible to see the rationale for the conclusions.

Transparent methodology

The Multi-Clusteral Initial Rapid Assessment approach was used for the assessments and clearly disclosed in the document (United Nations, 2017d, p. 9). The methods for data collection are not disclosed, however the references point out that the main source of data were preliminary assessments carried out by The National Civil Defence Institute (INDECI) and the UN partners. The rationale, for example extrapolation of direct observations based on secondary data, for estimates of people in need and people to be targeted is not provided in any of the sectoral plans.

The report acknowledges that the figures are only estimates, as complete information was not available at the time. The education sector also mentions its figures for the affected people are unconsolidated, because of contradicting information (United Nations, 2017d, p. 19).

Transparent sourcing and referencing

The figures for affected people are based on official preliminary reports by UN partners and local INDECI, and references are provided (United Nations, 2017d, p. 3). The sectoral plans do not explicitly provide links to sources of information, but presumably the figures are based on the same sources used and referenced in the situation overview as the numbers are matching. Sources of possible secondary data are not disclosed, however the assessments are stated as "based on preliminary findings and field observations" (United Nations, 2017d, p. 6), which implies that secondary data was not used.

Terminology and definitions

Clear definitions for affected people and severely affected, usually referred as people in need (PIN), are given in the document: "a person 'affected' when the individual suffers a disturbance in his/her surroundings due to a natural phenomenon and may or may not require immediate relief to eliminate or mitigate the causes of that disturbance and resume normal activity. A 'severely affected' individual is an affected person, who has suffered injury or damage to his/her health and/or property, particularly housing, and does not have the capacity to recover his/her goods and assets; hence he/she receives shelter and humanitarian aid" (United Nations, 2017b, p. 3). Definition of 'targeted people' is not explicitly stated, however it is rather self-explanatory as a proportion of 'severely affected' people. Severity scales are not adopted, or other ambiguous terms used and thus not opened.

Data disaggregation

The figures for affected people, that include the number of people in need, are disaggregated by location, gender, age (adults, adolescents, children under the of 5) and by sector. Other vulnerable groups as of persons with disabilities, lactating women, elder and people living in shelters were identified, but due to time constraints the figures were not retrieved (United Nations, 2017d, pp. 6, 9, 25 & 39). None of the sectoral plans disaggregate the data for their figures for the targeted people by any manner.

Data triangulation

The given figures provided with references are based on single reports. However, utilization of the MIRA approach entails data triangulation (IASC, 2015, pp. 11 & 20). The identified sectoral needs reflect cross-checking of information between sectors as interlinked and overlapping needs were discovered. The health sector recognizes that the health risks stem from, among other reasons, damaged housings, whereas the protection sector concludes protection was needed due to displaced people that had lost their homes (United Nations, 2017b, p. 6 & 15). These needs have their root causes on damaged housing, a need, addressed by the shelter and the CCCM sectors.

Kenya: Droughts

On February the 10th 2017, the Government of Kenya declared drought as national disaster. The drought was caused by low levels of precipitation in the sequent rainy seasons in 2016, dramatically doubling the number of people in need from 1.3 million to 2.6 million in 2017, overwhelming the local capacity to cope with the dry season. The drought eventually led to initiation of a Flash Appeal, produced by the UN partners and the Government, requesting 165,71 million US dollars to alleviate suffering of the people in need. The FA released in March 16th and revised September 7th (United Nations, 2017b, p. 3, 2017c, p. 3).

The Flash Appeal to respond to the droughts in Kenya was the only appeal in 2017 that was revised after three months from the launch of the initial FA in March 14th. As the emergency was caused by a weather-related phenomenon, a revision for the initial FA was planned from the beginning (United Nations, 2017b, p. 6). Since the first edition of the FA was launched after the Government of Kenya had declared the drought as a national disaster in February 10th, the revision in September enabled a comparative analysis to study if time as a resource contributed to the quality of the FA. The appeals were analysed together, and results are reported under the same sub headers as follows.

Context analysis

The overview of the emergency provides understanding of the context by disclosing events and vulnerabilities prior to the emergency that had in combination with the dry-season lead to the particular emergency. The analysis considers the impacts of drought from environmental and economic perspectives that have led to a negative re-enforcing loop where pastoral and agro-pastoral lands have deteriorated, access to drinking water have reduced but where food prices continued to rise, resulting in insecurities, and moderate and severe malnutrition across the country. Political impacts of the drought and security threats as of resource-based conflicts, human-wildlife conflicts and terror-related threats are also considered. Likewise, ongoing national and international responses to alleviate the suffering due to food insecurity and protection are described (United Nations, 2017b, pp. 6–13).

The revision builds on the situation overview provided in the first edition of the FA. Socio-economic factors, such as poverty and struggling free-markets, are elaborated on and the progress that had taken place within the three months is described. More elaborate analysis of the markets,

based on known indexes, such as the livestock-to-cereals terms of trade[11] and a correlation between human malnutrition and Forage Condition Index[12]. Security and political development are also given more weight, as the upcoming elections in Kenya were identified as a possible risk to cut down Government funds to the emergency. The revision also considers operational issues, such as nurses' strikes and problems faced by the International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGO) to obtain work permits, that had had an impact to the overall response (United Nations, 2017c, pp. 5–9 & 13). Overall, the resolution of the context analysis is increased in the revision, whereas more detailed information is still provided.

Use of baseline data

Baselines are provided for total population (49,5 million people), physical and sexual violence against women (38 % and 14 & respectively according to a Kenya Demographic Health Survey conducted in 2014), and historical trends are disclosed (for example, enrolment rates have historically declined by 20 % in regions affected by droughts) that may have been used to estimate the number of targeted people (United Nations, 2017b). However, none of the sectoral plans have made explicit what baselines or other datasets used to estimate the figures for the targeted people. The responses are, for some parts, determined and driven by the available capacity rather than need. As for example, the food security cluster mentions it can reach 700,000 people with food and cash transfers, while the number for targeted people is identified as 850,000. The activities to fulfil gap of 150,000 people are not explained nor the rationale for the figure for the targeted people (United Nations, 2017b, p. 20). De facto, none of the sectoral plans introduce figures for affected people or people in need, but only for people to be targeted. As such, little or no evidence is provided to support the claims, how many and what groups should have been targeted.

Whereas the quality overall quality of the analyses had been improved for the revision, the situation overview and the sectoral plans still lack baseline data, which could to some extent take a form of findings presented in the initial FA. The sectoral plans still introduce only figures for targeted people, without any link to identified figures of people in need or figures of the previous analysis.

[11] "The livestock-to-cereals terms of trade (ToT) is a measure of household purchasing power in terms of kg of maize from the sale of a goat" (United Nations, 2017c, p. 5).

[12] Forage Condition Index uses statistical forecasting methodology to provide accurate monthly forage condition estimates for livestock (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations [FAO], 13.02.2017.)

Transparent methodology

The methodologies for coordinating the assessments and collecting and analysing data are not uncovered. For the reader, it remains unclear, if the estimates are solely based on primary data collected through sectoral assessments or a mix of primary and secondary data and if a multi-sectoral approach was used to conclude the estimates for people in need and targeted people. Only the nutrition sector refers to 15 surveys conducted to assess the nutritional status in different counties (United Nations, 2017b, p. 11). None of the sectors state the level of confidence of the given numbers, however some of the figures are given as exact numbers. For example people targeted by the nutrition sector was 252,491 and 2,742,177 people targeted by the WASH sector (United Nations, 2017b, pp. 22 & 24).

In the revision, the approach to assessments and methods to process data are given more emphasis. The method to calculate the figure for people in need is disclosed, data was collected through a systematized, multi-partner SMART survey method[13], the assessments are explicitly aimed to support a joint, multi-sectoral approach and data disaggregation is considered "wherever possible" (United Nations, 2017c, pp. 5, 6 & 9).

Transparent sourcing and referencing

Only the key figures and the Kenya Demographic Health Survey (United Nations, 2017b, pp. 3 & 19) are referenced in the document. None of the sectoral plans disclose, from what datasets are the numbers retrieved from. Visiting the provided sources provide some rationale for the claims, however without a comprehensive analysis of the source documents, it is impossible to conclude which sources had been used to estimate a particular figure.

The least improvement was made in terms of sourcing and referencing. Whereas the original FA provided some references, the revision does not provide any. The only source given in the document is for the overall figures of the emergency, given as "OCHA and partners" without any reference to a source document (United Nations, 2017c, p. 2).

Terminology and definitions

The document uses the term "people in need" only to express the total number of people in need, determined as 2.6 million which represents, as stated, "20 per cent of the pastoral population and

[13] Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions

18 per cent of those living in marginal agricultural areas" (United Nations, 2017b, p. 6). Figures for total affected people, or by sector, are note provided. The term "affected" is used throughout the document, but a definition for the term itself is not given. In some cases, the term is linked to population figures (United Nations, 2017b, pp. 8 & 12), but it is somewhat unclear if it is referred as "people in need" or if it is distinct indicator. "Targeted people" are used in parallel with "people to be reached". Severity scales are not introduced, and as such not defined.

In the revision, the PIN figure is defined as a compound of all the sectoral needs and is based on the highest sectoral figures per county, whereas the PIN in the original FA only reflected food insecure people (United Nations, 2017c, p. 4). "Targeted people" are used consistently in the document without parallel expressions. However, the relation between "affected" and "people in need" is still unclear, and in some cases, they are used in parallel. For example, the statement in the document (United Nations, 2017c) "whilst the ongoing humanitarian response to the drought will bring immediate and urgently required lifesaving relief to the affected population, it cannot deliver the transformational changes required for a full recovery on a longer timeframe" reflects that "affected population" equals to "people in need" (p. 10) , however from an ideological perspective, the population may be affected by the emergency but are still not in need of assistance.

Data disaggregation

The data of identified people in need is disaggregated by sub-county and illustrated in a map (United Nations, 2017b, p. 2). The number of targeted beneficiaries is as total and by sector. Only the WASH, the education and the nutrition sectors distinctively targets marginalized groups, as of women and children (United Nations, 2017b, pp. 22, 24 & 27). From the individual agencies, Samaritan's Purse provides separate figures to target male, female and child beneficiaries and Plan International also disaggregates the figures by boys and girls, and elderly and sick people (United Nations, 2017b, pp. 41–43).

The foremost biggest improvement is achieved with disaggregation of data. Oppose to the original FA, half of the applicable sectoral plans (education, health, nutrition and protection) have a breakdown of figures for people in need and targeted people by sex and age (United Nations, 2017c, pp. 16–24). However, not all of the sectors provide a breakdown, it is explicitly stated that disaggregation was emphasized whenever possible (p. 9). The overall numbers of for targeted and people in need are disaggregated by county and sector.

Data triangulation

As the used approach to assessments and methodologies used to collect and analyse data are not uncovered, it was difficult to evaluate if triangulation of data took place or not in the process. However, the sectoral plans do not present any interlinked needs between the sectors, and the data that is referenced, only provide one source. In that sense, it was assumed that data triangulation was not deliberately utilized as a mean to consolidate information.

Although not explicitly stated, data triangulation, as cross-checking of figures, was incorporated as a standard procedure to prevent overlaps between the sectors (United Nations, 2017c, p. 4), as also reflected by the emphasis on a joint, multi-sectoral approach (p. 9).

Madagascar: Cyclone Enawo

A category 4 tropical cyclone, namely Enawo, landed north-east Madagascar on 7th of March 2017. With severe impacts on housings, livelihoods and basic infrastructure, 250 thousand people were estimated as directly affected by the emergency. The storm-affected country appealed the UN for humanitarian assistance, resulting in a Flash Appeal released March the 23rd, requesting 20 million US dollars to meet needs of the people in need (United Nations, 2017f, p. 7).

Context analysis

The situation overview of the emergency is mainly focused on the impacts of the cyclone. Information about livelihoods, sources of income, pre-emergency vulnerabilities such as poverty, conflicts or pandemic diseases or environmental characteristics (other than impacts on crops) that would determine the operational context of the emergency, is not disclosed. The initiated response activities by both Government of Madagascar and international humanitarian agencies are covered in the document.

Use of baseline data

Whereas the situation overview provides a baseline for the affected people, as of 433,985 individuals representing 2 per cent of the total population of the people living in the affected districts (United Nations, 2017f, p. 4), for other figures, baselines to reflect the scale of the emergency are not given. These could include for example the proportion of destroyed crops of total food production or income, percentage of lost education premises and equipment of out of total resources or the proportion of wells flooded out of all water sources. The sectoral plans do not expose baseline data to provide rationale for the calculated numbers for targeted population.

Transparent methodology

A field and aerial preliminary rapid assessment, the main source of information in the appeal, was based on a multi-agency approach led by the National Office for Risk and Disaster Management (Le Bureau National de Gestion des Risques et Catastrophes, BNGRC) and involving representatives from CARE International, FAO, OCHA, Madagascar Red Cross, MEDAIR, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. The primary data was collected through a "Multi-hazard Initial Survey" protocol called EIMA, prepositioned at community level and initiated immediately in any emergency, was used. EIMA involves partners operating in the field to fill in fiches based on direct

observation, which are consolidated by a local DRR committee and shared with the BNGRC coordinating the response. The data, consolidated by the committee is then shared with the BNGRC. An aerial analysis was also used to support the findings (United Nations, 2017f, p. 3). While the methodology used to approach assessments and collet data is well disclosed in the document, the sectoral plans do not provide any information on how the figures for targeted people, or "to be reached" as put in the document, were concluded out of the identified affected people.

Transparent sourcing and referencing

The only source provided within the document is the rapid preliminary assessment, conducted by the partner agencies and led by the BNGRC (United Nations, 2017f, p. 3). Although the source given for the assessment, there is no reference to a source document that could be visited for more information.

Terminology and definitions

Two terms are used to identify and prioritize the response: "affected people" and "targeted people". The former term is rather confusing. If assumed that all population is affected (to some extent), within a geographical area that is stated as affected, the term can be interpreted as "people in need" as per the following statement: "The total number of people affected – 433,985 individuals – represents 2 per cent of the total population of the affected districts" (United Nations, 2017f, p. 4). The statement implies, that the actual number for total of affected people, that may or may not need humanitarian assistance, is a much higher number (total number of all population in all affected districts) and the identified 433,985 people represent the share of the affected people that are in need. However, this can also be interpreted otherwise. If assumed that a geographical area is stated as affected, even if only a portion of its population is affected by an emergency, then the term refers to people affected by the cyclone, but not necessarily requiring assistance. As there are no distinction between the people affected and people in need, neither in terms of separate figures, it is difficult to tell if the if this number of people requires assistance or not. Out of those people, the FA prioritizes 250,000 people to be targeted, which reflects that the term in fact refers to people in need. Nonetheless, for the given reason, these terms cannot be considered as unambiguous or well-defined.

Data disaggregation

Breakdown of figures for either "affected" or targeted people are not provided.

Data triangulation

Use of secondary data is not uncovered in the document and thus, use of data triangulation cannot be evaluated. The primary data, though, was explicitly stated as collected and processed through a multi-sector approach which may or may not entail cross-checking of findings between the partners and sectors. Also, the role of the local DRR committees as a consolidator reflects that data triangulation took place, at least to some extent as of controlling possible outliers in the data (United Nations, 2017f, p. 3). In this sense, although not explicitly stated, it is assumed that data triangulation and cross-checking of figures were used to consolidate data.

Mozambique: Cyclone Dineo

On 15th of February 2017, Cyclone Dineo made landfall to coast of Mozambique affecting 550,691 people. The affected areas suffered heave damages on housings, livelihoods and infrastructure. On February the 28th, a Flash Appeal coordinated by the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Mozambique was released, asking 10.2 million US dollars to reach 150 thousand people with life-saving assistance and protection (United Nations, 2017e, p. 5).

Context analysis

Like most of the FAs launched in 2017, the situation overview of the emergency caused by Cyclone Dineo is mainly impact-focused. The scale of the emergency is reflected with figures of vulnerable people out of total population and affected people in the area. The response to date is described and was limited to provision of emergency supplies by the Government. Factors, such as poverty, previous emergencies, conflicts or food scarcity, that may hinder the local coping capacities are not uncovered. Furthermore, there is no analysis about the state of the local markets or domestic food production (United Nations, 2017e, p. 5). Overall, the overview, together with the response plan and sectoral plans, only provide an impact analysis without disclosing contextual factors.

Use of baseline data

The overview utilizes a baseline for total population in the affected areas to illustrate the scale of the emergency. Out of all people, 42.96 % were estimated as affected, and of those 6.5 % were identified as vulnerable, totalling a number of 7651 persons out of 1281734 (United Nations, 2017e, p. 3). For other estimates, such the sector targets, baseline figures are not disclosed or if such figures were used for analysis.

Transparent methodology

The document does not provide information about how the data for the preliminary assessments were collected or if a multi-sectoral approach was adopted. None of the sectoral plans provide a rationale, how the figures for "people to be reached" was computed out of the total number of affected people.

Transparent sourcing and referencing

The appeal does not provide transparent references to sources of information. The main source of information is referred to "provincial authorities of Inhambane" which is not accessible (United Nations, 2017e, p. 5).

Terminology and definitions

The terms used to identify and prioritize the people impacted by the emergency are "affected" and "people to be reached" , used in parallel with "targeted". The term "affected people" is ambiguous and it is not defined if it includes figures for both, people in need and people affected by the emergency, but not necessarily in need of assistance, or only the latter one. The protection sector uses yet another term, "directly affected people in need" (United Nations, 2017e, p. 12).

Data disaggregation

The figures for affected people are disaggregated by district and by sector for the targeted people (United Nations, 2017e, pp. 3 & 9). However, breakdown of figures by sex and age are not provided either for the sectoral targets or identified affected people.

Data triangulation

As the approaches to assessments or methodologies to analyse data are not disclosed, and only one source without a proper reference is given, the criterion was difficult to analyse. However as only one source was used, the reports by provincial authorities that are not explicitly consolidated with other information, it is assumed that data triangulation did not take place.

ANNEX 2: EXPERT INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE

Questions on the expert's background

- Age
- Nationality
- Education and working experience
- Number of years of experience with humanitarian needs assessment and flash appeals
- Role within the unit in terms of flash appeals and sudden-onset emergencies
- In what ways, other than practical experience, has the expert acquired his knowledge and understanding

What is your understanding of the concepts "evidence" and "evidence-based"? According to your understanding, how well is the concepts of "evidence" and "evidence-based" understood among the professionals involved in developing of FAs?

How do you see, is the evidence-based approach applied in collecting and analysing data for needs assessments in cases of sudden-onset emergencies? Is gathering evidence a priority in planning and conducting assessments?

Are there any protocols to assess the quality of evidence in FAs before launch? What sort of factors do these protocols consider? Relating to this question, on what basis is the "good enough" -level of data, and by whom, determined?

As per literature, (i.e. Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014) many of the humanitarian reports can be stated as insufficient in providing a strong evidence-base. In general, what are the challenges of incorporating evidence-based approach to needs assessments in FAs? (Does the problem have to do with the needs assessments themselves, or is it an issue with communication and representation?)

As per initial findings of a document analysis of flash appeals considering building blocks of a "robust" needs assessment, there seems to be quite a lot of variance in regard of information and the way it is shared. What do you think is the reason, bearing in mind there are standardized templates available?

What do think works well in the process of developing FAs in terms of needs assessments?

What do you think can be improved in the process of FAs? Relating to that, what are the opportunities to incorporate a more evidence-based approach into FAs? Especially in terms of revisions?

ANNEX 3: LIST OF REVIEWED DOCUMENTS

The reviewed documents concerning needs assessments included:

- Action Proposal: Section 3. Needs Assessment and Beneficiaries by DG ECHO (n.d.).
- A Guide to Assessing Needs: Essential Tools for Collecting Information, Making Decisions, and Achieving Development Results by The World Bank (Watkins et al., 2012)
- CARE Emergency Toolkit: Assessment Tools by CARE (n.d)
- Comprehensive Food Security & Vulnerability Analysis Guidelines by WFP (2009)
- Good Enough Guide: Impact Measurement and Accountability in Emergencies by Oxfam (2008)
- Guidance and template for initial flash appeal by IASC (2013)
- Guidelines for assessment in emergencies by IFRC (2008)
- Humanitarian Aid Initial Needs Assessment Checklist (INAC) by ECHO (2010)
- Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response by the Sphere Project (2011)
- Humanitarian Needs Assessments – The Good Enough Guide by ACAPS (2014)
- Initial Rapid Assessment (IRA): Guidance Notes by IASC (2009)
- LENSS tool kit - Local estimate of needs for shelter and settlement by IASC Emergency Shelter Cluster (2007)
- Multi-Sector Initial Rapid Assessment Guidance (MIRA) by IASC (2015)
- Needs Assessment Handbook. Part 2: Practical Guide To Needs Assessment by UNHCR (2017)
- Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crises by the IASC (2012)
- Rapid assessment for markets: Guidelines for an initial emergency market assessment
- Revised Guidelines for Flash Appeals by IASC (2009)
- The Short Guide to Rapid Joint Education Needs Assessments by the Global Education Cluster

The reviewed papers concerning evidence-based approach included:

- Assessing the Strength of Evidence by DFID (2014)

- Insufficient evidence? The quality and use of evidence in humanitarian action. ALNAP Study. Clarke & Darcy (2014)
- Humanitarian Diagnostics: The use of information and analysis in emergency response decisions by ODI (2009)
- Technical Brief: Compared to what? Analytical thinking and needs assessment by ACAPS (2013a)
- Technical Brief: How sure are you? Judging quality and usability of data collected during rapid needs assessments (2013b)
- The Use of Evidence in Humanitarian Decision-making, ACAPS Learning Paper by Darcy et al. (2013)

The reviewed Flash Appeals included:

- Flash Appeal. Hurricane Maria 2017 by the United Nations. (2017)
- Flash Appeal. Kenya 2017 by the United Nations. (2017)
- Flash Appeal. Kenya 2017. Revision for September - December 2017 by the United Nations. (2017)
- Flash Appeal. North Coast of Peru 2017 by the United Nations. (2017)
- Flash Appeal. Tropical Cyclone DINEO. Mozambique 2017 by the United Nations. (2017)
- Flash Appeal. Tropical Cyclone Enawo. Madagascar 2017 by the United Nations. (2017)

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