



MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENTS

LESSONS LEARNED FROM
THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST REGION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Multidisciplinary evidence-based decision-making has become increasingly important at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC),¹ including in the Near and Middle East (NAME)² region. A 2018 GPPi³ evaluation highlighted the need for ICRC units to cooperate in collectively gathering and analysing evidence. This data and analysis can then be used to inform the design of multidisciplinary responses, the monitoring and evaluation of programmes, and for accountability and learning. The How We Work initiative and the Outcome-Based Approach have also shown that organizational inefficiencies exist when it comes to collaboration and multidisciplinary work.

ICRC responses are multidisciplinary by nature, and therefore assessments should be conducted in a multidisciplinary manner. However, delegations often lack guidance about how multidisciplinary assessment processes should work in practice. This document aims to bridge this gap by identifying the challenges and best practice for multidisciplinary assessments, based on the experiences of delegations in NAME.

For the purposes of this document, we describe assessments as multidisciplinary when various teams in protection and assistance work together to assess the situation and identify the needs of affected populations. There are three different types of multidisciplinary assessment: joint, harmonized and coordinated. Collaboration is not only important for collecting data and generating assessment results, but also for building trust and understanding between units. A well-organized multidisciplinary assessment process can therefore help to create internal agreement within a delegation on the overall picture of the humanitarian situation.

Working together on multidisciplinary assessments takes time and requires effective management. The various units involved often have conflicting priorities, interests and approaches. Units can also differ in terms of the scope of their assessments and the extent to which they engage with communities.

This document identifies some of the challenges units have faced when conducting multidisciplinary assessments and some factors for success. A multidisciplinary assessment process is not easy, but the results are worth it. The most important benefit is the positive impact on the people we help. When specific units assess communities' needs according to their team's priorities, we may not get all the information we need. But if we carry out a multidisciplinary assessment, we get an understanding of all their needs and how they inter-relate, as well as identifying what requires further investigation. We can therefore provide a multidisciplinary response, rather than separate responses for each need.

Multidisciplinary assessments also boost team morale and have helped to strengthen coordination and evidence-based strategic decision-making in delegations.

¹ This is detailed in the [ICRC Institutional Strategy 2019–2022](#), which recognizes that the ICRC's information environment and capacities need to be more effectively and strategically managed.

² The NAME Regional Strategic Framework 2019–2022 identifies strengthening the multidisciplinary use of data and analysis as a regional priority.

³ Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi), *Evaluation of Diversity, Inclusion, and AAP in ICRC Operations*, GPPi, Berlin, 2018.

1. INTRODUCTION

Multidisciplinary evidence-based decision-making has become increasingly important at the ICRC,⁴ including in the NAME⁵ region. To inform the design of responses, the monitoring and evaluation of programmes and accountability and learning, we need units to work together to gather and analyse data.

The first step when designing any response is for teams to conduct assessments in order to understand the affected population's situation. It is important to identify humanitarian problems, their causes and consequences, and the needs, capacities and responses of the affected people and other stakeholders.

ICRC responses are multidisciplinary by nature, and therefore these assessments are ideally conducted in a multidisciplinary manner. According to the ICRC's guiding principles on assessments: "The protection and assistance mandate of the ICRC entails a multisectoral approach whereby situations are assessed, needs are identified, and responses are designed and implemented with the involvement of various disciplines related to protection and assistance, as well as cooperation with the other components of the Movement." The guiding principles outline the three different types of multidisciplinary assessment: joint assessments, harmonized assessments and coordinated assessments.

The guiding principles make it clear that multidisciplinary assessments are not limited to a few distinct activities, such as developing a questionnaire and collecting data; they are actually a process with a series of distinct but interlinked steps. Successful multidisciplinary assessments involve working together at various levels across units. The principles do not, however, prescribe how multidisciplinary assessment processes should work in practice. In most cases, it is up to individual delegations to adapt the multidisciplinary assessment process to make it work for a given situation.

Delegations often ask staff members in the NAME Regional Resource Network (RRN) to provide advice and support on multidisciplinary assessments, along with guidelines, tools and examples. Although several sets of guidelines, such as the [Strengthening Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Delegations](#) and the [EcoSec Handbook – Assessing Economic Security](#), help different units in delegations better plan for multidisciplinary assessments, practical advice on how to organize such processes is not available. This document aims to bridge this gap by identifying the challenges and best practice for multidisciplinary assessments, based on the experiences of delegations in NAME.⁶

More specifically, this document aims to:

- engage with delegations in NAME who have carried out multidisciplinary assessments
- make available the practical lessons learned about the steps in a multidisciplinary assessment process.

This document is for staff members from ICRC delegations who are planning or implementing multidisciplinary assessments and responses. This guidance will also be useful for regional and headquarters staff, as well as other humanitarian and development organizations that are interested in strengthening their multidisciplinary assessment practices, such as the United Nations, components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international NGOs.

⁴ This is detailed in the [ICRC Institutional Strategy 2019–2022](#), which recognizes that the ICRC's information environment and capacities need to be more effectively and strategically managed.

⁵ The NAME Regional Strategic Framework 2019–2022 identifies strengthening the multidisciplinary use of data and analysis as a regional priority.

⁶ A recent EcoSec analysis and evidence capacity self-assessment conducted by delegations in NAME shows that many teams were involved in multidisciplinary assessments during the past year.

2. METHODOLOGY

The lessons learned were collated by the regional economic security analysis and evidence specialist and the regional accountability to affected people (AAP) adviser as part of a project organized by the NAME Data and Analysis working group and the NAME Accountability to Affected People working group.

This document focuses on the multidisciplinary assessment process that was carried out as part of the Durable Returns Programmes (DRP) in Iraq and Libya. These programmes take a holistic approach to the situation of returnee communities. They incorporate protection, shelter, livelihoods and infrastructure, and involve staff members from units in protection and assistance.

In the first quarter of 2021, interviews were conducted with delegation staff who had recently been involved in a multidisciplinary assessment process. These staff members had experienced various aspects of the assessment process, including starting a multidisciplinary assessment, formulating objectives, management, methodology and tool design, data collection, analysis and report writing.

In the second quarter of 2021, the interviews were written up, analysed and consolidated. The draft was shared with all members of the working groups mentioned above and the interviewees, and their feedback has been incorporated into this final document.

It should be noted that this document is not representative of all the different multidisciplinary assessment experiences in NAME. Rather, it provides a snapshot of experiences, as shared by staff members who were involved in the selected case studies.

3. MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENTS: AN OVERVIEW

Significant guidance and research on multidisciplinary assessments already exists, within the ICRC and in other humanitarian organizations. In this section, we aim to further highlight the role that multidisciplinary assessments can play within the ICRC.

WHAT ARE MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENTS?

For the purposes of this document, we describe assessments as multidisciplinary when various teams in protection and assistance work together to assess the situation and identify the needs of affected populations. Inter-agency assessments, which involve the ICRC working with other Movement components or with other humanitarian, development or governmental organizations, can also be considered multidisciplinary if they involve different disciplines. The focus of this document is on the ICRC's internal processes. However, many of the lessons learned can also be applied to inter-agency assessment processes.

WHY MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENTS?

Existing discussions about multidisciplinary assessments often focus on the tools and methods used to collect and analyse data, such as questionnaires and interviews with affected people. However, this document will use practical examples to show that multidisciplinary assessments are part of a process. They do involve data collection, but they also create a consensus between various units over the outcome of an assessment, and they lead to actionable results.

A multidisciplinary assessment is not new in the sense that it follows the same principles as an assessment conducted by a single unit. The difference is that an assessment conducted by a single unit does not always provide the strategic or holistic view that the delegations need in order to inform their strategy and programming. A well-organized multidisciplinary assessment process can therefore help to create internal agreement within a delegation on the overall picture of the humanitarian situation.

HOW DOES A MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENT PROCESS START?

In order to conduct a multidisciplinary assessment and to yield results that can inform a delegation's operational strategy, the various units need to accept all steps of the process.

Multidisciplinary assessments usually come about because separate units have an incomplete picture of a humanitarian situation, or different perspectives on the same situation and because they have different priorities. In addition, a unit may have sound information, but its findings are either not trusted or understood by other units, or they are inconsistent with other units' findings.

Such divergence can cause us to provide an inadequate response because we are only responding to part of the problem. Time and resources are often taken up by units simply disagreeing on assessment results, which then limits the opportunities for joint planning or coordinating activities. Ultimately, the impact of an inadequate, ill-informed or uncoordinated response is felt by the people we are trying to help, particularly those most at risk.

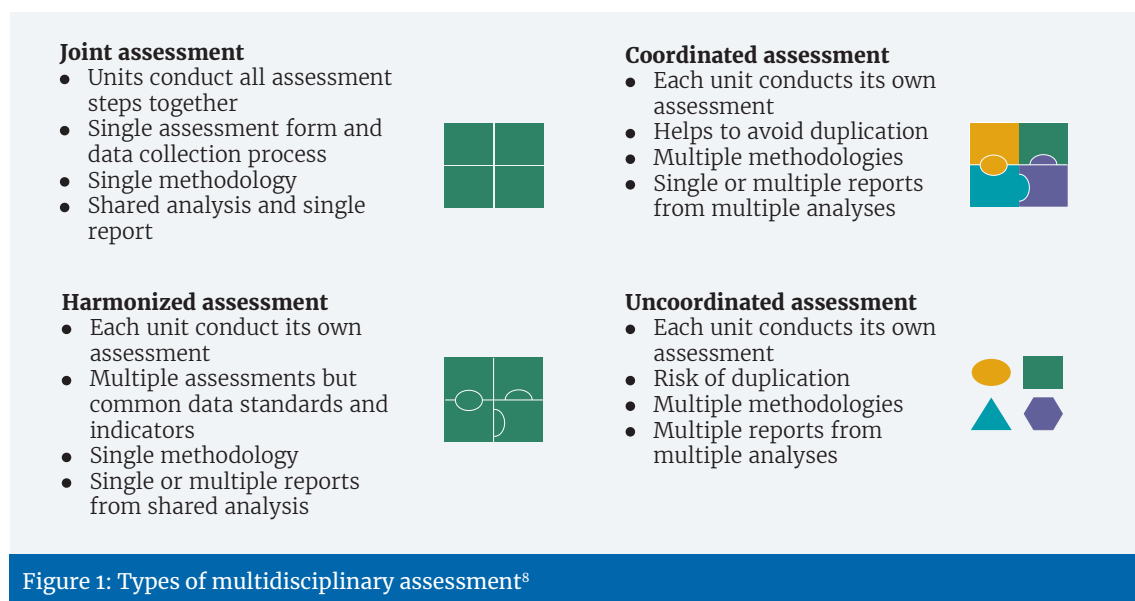
As a starting point, units need a set of agreed assessment results that they can use to address humanitarian problems collectively or separately. This means that the process through which assessment results are generated becomes important, not only for data and results but in order to build trust and agreement among units. Creating agreement and trust is central to successful multidisciplinary assessments and it must happen at every step of the process.

4. WHAT TYPES OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENT EXIST?

The ICRC guiding principles on assessments outline the three different types of multidisciplinary assessment:

- joint assessment – All the units concerned are involved in every step of the assessment. They all use the same tools and work together to produce a single report.
- harmonized assessment – Each unit collects its own data and produces its own report, but because the objectives and data standards are the same across all units, the results can then be jointly analysed and a single report produced.
- coordinated assessment – Each unit collects its own data, but in a coordinated way. Separate reports are produced, but there is the option of consolidating these into a single report, if necessary.

In contrast to these three types of multidisciplinary assessment, uncoordinated assessments⁷ are those in which data cannot be jointly analysed and results cannot be used to inform an overall analysis (see Figure 1 below).



⁷ This has been added for comparative purposes but is not part of the guiding principles.

⁸ Adapted from the IASC [Operational Guidelines for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crises](#), IASC, 2012.

5. DIFFERENT LEVELS OF SYNERGY BETWEEN UNITS DURING MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENTS

The extent to which teams work together on multidisciplinary assessments can vary. In the humanitarian domain, the principles of consultation, cooperation, coordination and collaboration are often used to classify levels of synergy across organizations, including in data collection and analysis processes such as assessments. They provide a useful framework for considering the different ways in which units across the ICRC could work together on assessments (see Figure 2).⁹ These principles could also be applied in other evidence-based data-collection activities, such as multidisciplinary monitoring, evaluation or learning activities.

Many factors influence how units work together and the types of multidisciplinary assessment that they organize, including the ICRC's mandate, crisis context, objectives, available resources, timing, access, etc.

The ICRC's [AAP Framework](#) highlights how important it is to have a multidimensional understanding of the context and people's different needs and capacities when planning or carrying out a multidisciplinary response. A multidisciplinary response makes our activities more effective and sustainable by addressing immediate needs, reducing the impact of a risk and preventing that risk from materializing. Therefore, when units have a high level of synergy, our response will be more effective and produce more sustainable results that meet all of the affected people's needs.

The ICRC's Economic Security Analysis & Evidence team has developed several tools that facilitate discussions on multidisciplinary assessments and serve as a starting point for multidisciplinary exercises. These include the [Economic Security Indicators Cookbook](#), Targeting, Selection and Prioritization Methods for Economic Security Programmes (forthcoming), [Strengthening Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Delegations](#), the internal EcoSec Analysis & Evidence Toolkit, and standard assessment forms. The ICRC's Global Survey tool and Economic Security Situation Monitoring Platform are good examples of how multidisciplinary issues are assessed and monitored in the ICRC's operational contexts.

CONSULTATIVE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Consultation is the basic level of synergy between different units working on an assessment. It involves sharing ideas and information between staff from different units. Units conduct their own assessments as separate processes but share the results of their assessments with each other. They may also seek input from each other on tools, methodologies, questionnaires, analyses and final reports. For example, one unit might conduct a household survey and share its draft questionnaire with another unit for feedback, but without interfering in each other's work, with the result that the quality of the assessment results improves. A consultative assessment process falls between an uncoordinated and coordinated assessment as described above.

⁹ This section refers to definitions used in research on collaborative assessments in humanitarian settings: C. Ansell and A. Gash, [Collaborative Governance in Theory](#), 2008; D. Saab et al., [Building global bridges: Coordination bodies for improved information sharing among humanitarian relief agencies](#), 2008; W. Chemaly, N. Krynsky Baal and K. Jacobsen, [Shaking the Box of Profiling IDP Situations](#), JIPS and Feinstein International Center, 2016; and JIPS, [Joint Analysis Guide](#), JIPS, 2021.

COOPERATIVE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The next level of synergy between units is cooperation. Each unit still conducts its own assessment, but alongside each other. In a cooperative assessment process, units inform each other about their tools, methodologies, questionnaires, analyses and final reports, and support each other without interfering in the other's work. For example, units share resources, such as a car or technical assistance or they support a capacity-building initiative like a training programme on mobile data collection. A cooperative assessment process falls between an uncoordinated and coordinated assessment as described above.

COORDINATED ASSESSMENT PROCESS

A stronger level of synergy between units is coordination. Coordination is more formal than cooperation and takes place when units work towards separate but compatible goals through a single or multiple assessment process. To coordinate assessments, units must dedicate more time to the planning stages, share resources and agree on roles and responsibilities. Each unit still has control over its own operations, but there is also a central facilitator, which adds complexity to the decision-making process. For example, units conduct their own assessments, but the methodologies and questions used make the data comparable and allow for a shared analysis. A coordinated assessment process falls between a coordinated or harmonized assessment as described above.

COLLABORATIVE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The strongest level of synergy between units is collaboration. Collaboration takes place when units share responsibility for planning and implementing an assessment. Units engage in a more interactive process, using shared rules, norms and structures to make decisions and take actions together. A more formal process is required because of the shared control, responsibility and risk. A typical collaborative assessment process would start with different units working together to plan the assessment. They would agree on a set of shared objectives, a methodology, a shared analysis process and recommendations, all of which would lead to a multidisciplinary response plan. A collaborative assessment process falls into the joint assessment category.

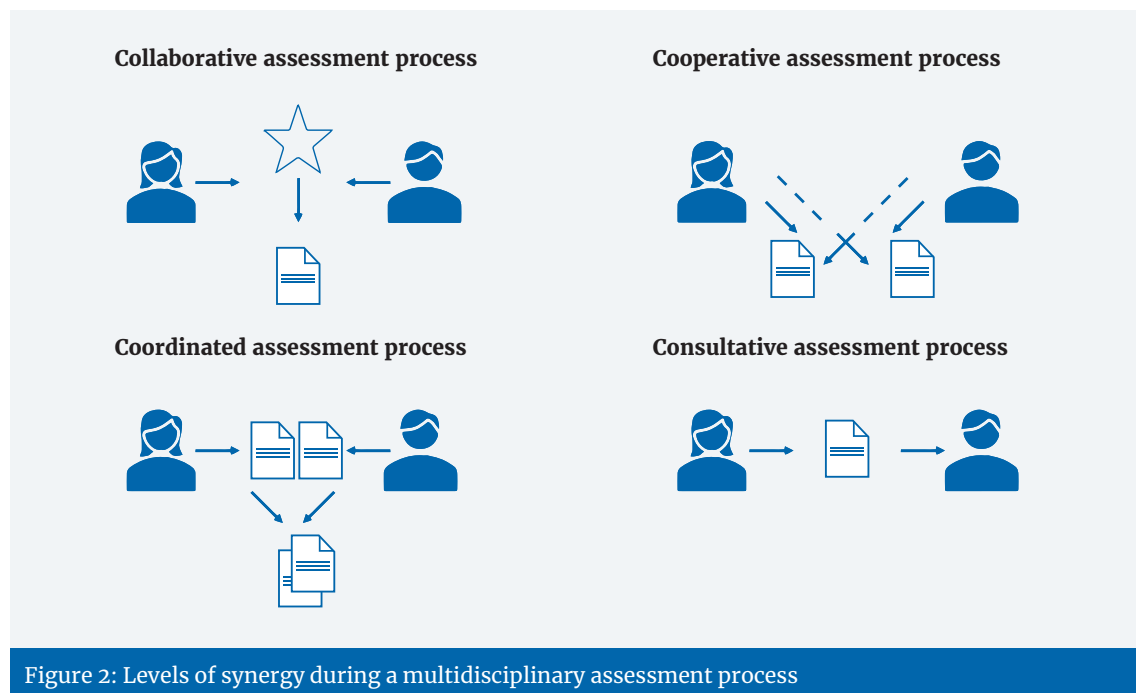


Figure 2: Levels of synergy during a multidisciplinary assessment process

6. WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT THE CHALLENGES

During our discussions with the teams in Libya and Iraq about their experience of multidisciplinary assessments during the DRP programmes, it became obvious that units encounter a range of challenges when trying to work together on assessments.¹⁰

The teams highlighted process-related challenges, particularly in relation to the operational realities of the emergencies and crises that form part of the ICRC's working environment. Working together on multidisciplinary assessments is time-consuming, requires effective management and involves multiple teams with different priorities and conflicting interests.

Working together on assessments also poses organizational challenges. The most frequently cited challenges are discussed below.

DIFFERENCES IN PRIORITIES AND APPROACHES

Units have different priorities and therefore approach assessments and responses from different perspectives. The staff members we interviewed referred to the fact that some units are more needs focused and, as a result, they aim to identify the needs of affected households and to establish responses that meet those needs. Other units are more area focused and aim to create change in a larger geographic area. Some units focus on structure or governance. Their aim is to understand how existing structures can be supported to create a positive impact on the population. Finally, some units focus on people's rights and statuses, and assess populations based on their access to rights, sometimes in relation to their status (e.g. displaced people).

DIFFERENCES IN SCOPE

Units may also assess affected populations at different levels. Economic Security (EcoSec) teams often assess situations at the household level, while Water and Habitat (WatHab) teams may be more interested in assessing infrastructure at the community level. Health teams may want to understand the capacity of the government and hospitals, while protection teams may want to focus on several different levels at once. As one of our interviewees said: "It became quite clear that every unit speaks their own language. Some units wanted to know about everything. As a result, we ended up with a questionnaire of 180 questions that had to be conducted by field officers who had never done household interviews. That didn't work very well."

INTERACTING WITH COMMUNITIES

Some units are used to interacting directly with affected populations, while others are not. One interviewee gave us the following explanation:

Some units were not used to dealing with individuals or households, or to talking to or receiving feedback from the communities. To solve this issue for the DRP, our team developed some speaking points in English and Arabic that every field officer from every unit had to read before going to the field. This meant everyone was on the same page when speaking to the communities. "What is the DRP? Why did we choose the location? What are the criteria?" Otherwise, some field officers felt lost when interacting with the community.

¹⁰ This section refers to the challenges identified in research on collaborative assessments in humanitarian settings: C. Ansell and A. Gash, *Collaborative Governance in Theory*, 2008; D. Saab et al., *Building global bridges: Coordination bodies for improved information sharing among humanitarian relief agencies*, 2008; W. Chemaly, N. Krynsky Baal and K. Jacobsen, *Shaking the Box of Profiling IDP Situations*, JIPS and Feinstein International Center, 2016; and JIPS, *Joint Analysis Guide*, JIPS, 2021.

OUTCOME-BASED APPROACH

Units often inform responses based on their own priorities. This means they can sometimes be more focused on achieving an outcome that suits their own goals, rather than focusing on the communities' real needs. One interviewee summarized this as follows:

Multidisciplinary assessments need to be more than just an administrative exercise that involves combining individual questionnaires into one. They are about conducting a shared analysis for a shared outcome. The focus should be on the affected people's range of needs, and the desired outcome should be to use the skills of the different units to meet these needs. The focus should not be on meeting the unit's data and output goals.

FLEXIBILITY AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

Multidisciplinary assessment approaches cannot be standardized. They need to be reviewed and adapted to every context, which takes significant time and negotiation. For example, in Iraq, the multidisciplinary DRP programme started as a pilot and the whole multidisciplinary assessment and data-management approach was continually adapted with new learning. This was not only applied to the technical process, but it also had the result of increasing teams' understanding of how their work contributes to the overall approach.

7. WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

From our research, we have learned that there are many factors that can influence whether a multidisciplinary assessment is successful or not. In this section, we outline the factors that, if taken into account, can result in a successful multidisciplinary assessment.¹¹

ACKNOWLEDGE A COMMON PURPOSE

Staff members need to understand that multidisciplinary assessments add value to our responses and allow us to work towards a common purpose. This may sometimes evolve over time. One of the interviewees told us that it took time before people from different units started working together “because they were not aware of the added value that this would bring to the community. Once they started to see the benefit and purpose, they began to collaborate more effectively”.

IDENTIFY CLEAR COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

The multidisciplinary assessment process must be transparent and everyone involved needs to receive regular updates. Teams in Libya and Iraq achieved this with regular newsletters, email updates, team meetings, etc.

RECOGNIZE THE PROCESS

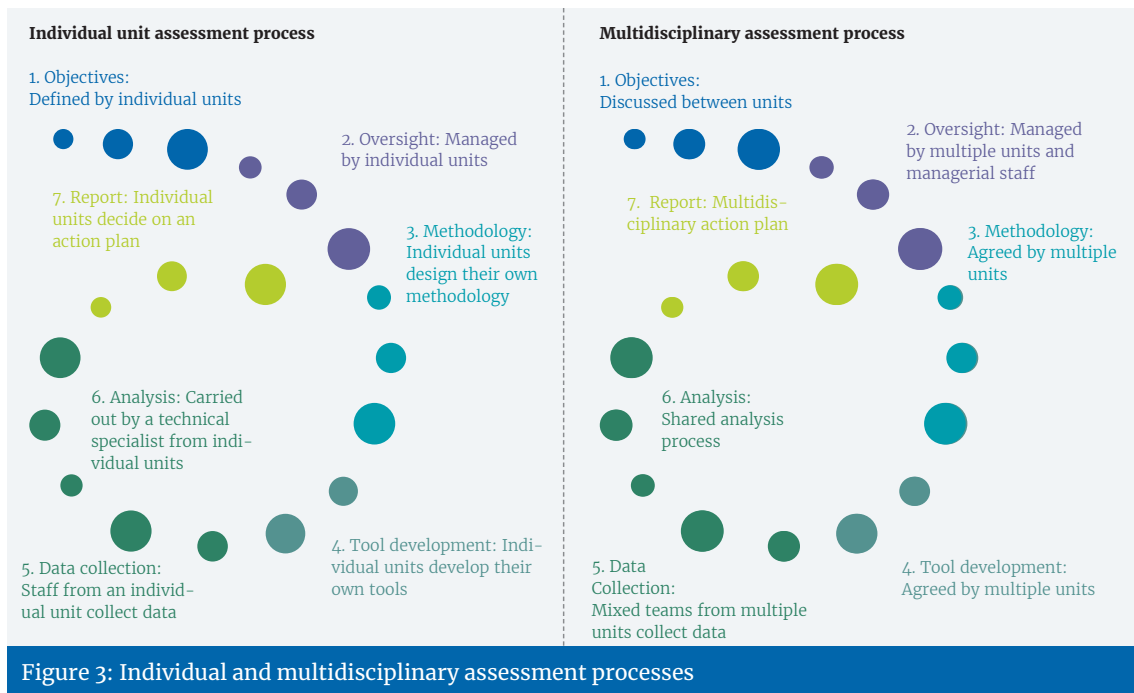
It is important for staff members to recognize that assessments are not one-off data-collection activities, but a process with various steps. For multidisciplinary assessments, coordination or collaboration become very important at certain stages throughout the process.

When an assessment is conducted by one unit, that unit determines the assessment objectives according to their own interests. They also manage the assessment. Technical specialists from the unit design the methodology and tools, collect data and conduct analyses. Units themselves are also the main consumers of the assessment results.

For a multidisciplinary assessment process, the objectives of the assessment are discussed between different units. A head or deputy head of delegation should probably facilitate the overall process, in collaboration with a technical multidisciplinary assessment coordinator and the units. Units agree on the methodology and tools and they collect data together. The process is finalized with a multidisciplinary analysis, report and operational plan (see Figure 3).¹²

¹¹ This section refers to the success factors identified in research on collaborative assessments in humanitarian settings: C. Ansell and A. Gash, *Collaborative Governance in Theory*, 2008; D. Saab et al., *Building global bridges: Coordination bodies for improved information sharing among humanitarian relief agencies*, 2008; W. Chemaly, N. Krynsky Baal and K. Jacobsen, *Shaking the Box of Profiling IDP Situations*, JIPS and Feinstein International Center, 2016; and JIPS, *Joint Analysis Guide*, JIPS, 2021.

¹² Adapted from W. Chemaly, N. Krynsky Baal and K. Jacobsen, *Shaking the Box of Profiling IDP Situations*, JIPS and Feinstein International Center, 2016.



ELECT A FACILITATOR

When conducting a multidisciplinary assessment, you need to have a strong leader with the right level of authority to oversee and own the process. This individual (or team) coordinates the assessment and should be independent of the units and have leadership skills. If they are associated with a specific unit, they might have limited authority over the other units.

A multidisciplinary assessment facilitator helps to create common ownership of and accountability for the assessment. They also facilitate discussions between units and bring them together. A facilitator can engage with the various units throughout a multidisciplinary assessment process with bilateral meetings. They help units understand how assessment results can affect their programming, humanitarian dialogue, etc. In addition, a facilitator is a consistent driver of the process, moving it forwards, particularly when there is a high turnover of staff.

For example, a head of operations, or someone of a similar level, has both the credibility and the skillset to coordinate credible and convincing decision-making that all the units accept. The facilitator is independent of the different units and can promote active participation or break down barriers to communication that may be preventing the different units from working together on the assessment.

As well as being independent, managerial-level staff members have the authority to secure commitment to the multidisciplinary assessment process and to ensure that participants from different units abide by the results. They can also prompt a shift away from decision-making based on separate units' priorities towards a collective decision-making process.

Some tasks within the facilitation role may also be assumed partly or fully by a multidisciplinary assessment facilitator who, in addition to the coordination work, also focuses on guiding the assessment implementation and ensuring the technical integrity of the assessment process.

From one of the interviews, it appears that collaboration on assessments is often the result of strong personal relationships between staff members, rather than because a facilitator oversaw the process. As one interviewee said:

Only managerial staff members can push for things to happen. Our facilitator did not have the authority to give orders to the coordinators of other units or to tell their staff to contribute to the report. They could only send reminders to try to encourage people to move the programme forward, but they did not have the authority to oblige people to do so. For the household assessment, it was hard for people to commit to being in the field every day for a week to do household interviews. This process required strong leadership from a neutral facilitator with multidisciplinary decision-making authority.

When one person at management level has full ownership of the multidisciplinary assessment, it takes less time to build relationships and gain the units' respect and trust, and to engage each unit when needed.

ENSURE SHARED OVERSIGHT

A steering group consisting of representatives from different units serves as a forum where the multidisciplinary assessment facilitator can share information and the group can take decisions jointly. It also provides oversight of the multidisciplinary assessment implementation. Managerial staff who clearly understand operational plans, priorities and indicators should take part in the steering group.

Multidisciplinary assessment processes do not work if only the technical staff from each unit are involved. Ideally, every unit should have a representative who can check daily the preparation and implementation of the assessment on a technical level. However, if there is no strategic oversight of what each unit wants to achieve, the results will not lead to any actionable analysis. Coordinators or deputies should therefore have an active role in the multidisciplinary assessment process. They need to provide their input during key stages of the process. For example, they could help to design the assessment objectives, point out relevant indicators or advise on the analysis and interpretation of the analysis.

As one of the interviewees said:

In terms of oversight, it could be helpful to identify the people who will provide technical input and those who will oversee the process. Each delegate should first discuss with the coordinator about what they think they can do in terms of durable returns and what resources are available to commit to the assessment. It does not make sense to assess something if they already know they cannot do anything about it. Usually, coordinators and deputies know more about the Planning for Results process, operational strategy, etc. Therefore, the coordination team should be more involved.

ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED PEOPLE

A multidisciplinary assessment process is a beneficial experience for staff members who do not typically have any direct interaction with the community. In our interviews, we saw how multidisciplinary assessments made affected people and their needs the main focus, and the communities themselves highlighted what their needs were. This is not how some units traditionally work; some units work more directly with ministries. A mixed approach that brings the two viewpoints together (ministries and communities) has the most positive impact and is the most beneficial for continued access. A mixed approach also helps in terms of monitoring and accountability. For example, if the community is aware that the ICRC has donated a number of items to a facility, the users of these facilities can be included when assessing the impact.

DETERMINE CLEAR ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES

Clear assessment objectives that all units are on board with are crucial. An example shared from one of the multidisciplinary assessment experiences was that when the objective and the scope of the assessment were unclear, selecting the indicators for the household survey became complicated. As one of the interviewees said:

We made the mistake of sharing the list of indicators from the IASC framework on durable solutions, which is a very long list with more than 100 indicators, with all units involved for feedback. The intention was to first agree on some indicators for each unit, and based upon what they wanted to measure, to come up with the questionnaire. However, because the objectives of the assessment were not clear, one unit selected around 90% of the indicators. As a result, we ended up with a questionnaire of 140 questions. Another lesson learned was that because of a high turnover of staff, staff from different units got involved in the assessment without understanding what it was going to achieve.

LINK DATA-COLLECTION TOOLS TO AGREED COMMON OBJECTIVES

Tool development (e.g. developing a questionnaire) becomes complicated when many units are involved. This process is easier if the objectives of the assessment have been clearly established and agreed beforehand.

The teams in Libya and Iraq learned that a multidisciplinary assessment is a good place to start when trying to understand the main issues and problems within a community. This should then be followed by a very technical unit-specific assessment. During an initial multidisciplinary assessment, a limited number of sensitive questions could be asked; for example, to find out if security incidents occur, but more detailed information on these security incidents can only be collected during a unit-specific assessment once trust has been built with the community.

The teams also learned that a long and technical questionnaire is difficult for multidisciplinary teams to administer. Very technical questions may reduce the quality of the data collected, particularly if field officers have to be trained in the questionnaire and time is limited. One of the interviewees mentioned that data-collection officers had to be trained for the multidisciplinary assessment through Skype because of a lack of time and access. A simple questionnaire with less technical questions would have helped multidisciplinary teams to better prepare for and implement data collection, and to ensure that the data collected were of a higher quality.

ORGANIZE A COMMON TRAINING PROGRAMME

At the beginning of the process, enough time should be set aside to train the multidisciplinary data-collection team. The training programme should not only cover data collection, but also best practice for joint, harmonized or coordinated assessments. In addition, staff need to be able to explain the technical terms from different units. We recommend writing some speaking notes in the local language about the objective of the assessment and other relevant information so that there is a common and clear message for field staff to use when communicating with the community.

MAKE SURE STAFF ARE AT EASE WITH EACH OTHER

The level of synergy between units during an assessment differs depending on the context and the delegation. Multidisciplinary work between different units does not always come naturally. Any form of collaboration across units takes time, energy and additional resources. This also requires a shift in mindset, which is often easier when staff are comfortable with each other. It helps if staff members already have a connection, perhaps because they worked together on a previous assignment. Staff from different units who have spent more time together – either because they work closely together, share a guesthouse or a car to the field – tend to find it easier to work together. Although staff may work in different units, if they already have a connection and feel at ease with each other, they will understand each other more easily when designing a multidisciplinary assessment.

AGREE ON ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE ENTIRE PROCESS

When roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, the multidisciplinary assessment process runs more smoothly. In one of the case studies shared, the first step was to create a multidisciplinary team, which included a representative from each unit (a main representative and a back-up). From the outset, they organized team meetings and created a mailing list in order to share information with everybody, including the back-ups. Once the team was set up, they had a meeting about what was expected from each representative and the DRP project manager, so that everyone was clear about what their role entailed. It also became clear that every unit needed to understand what they were committing to. Some units were involved from the beginning, but then dropped out because they could not provide the time or resources. The data that had been collected could then no longer be used as part of the analysis.

It also takes time for people to understand each other's roles, and people need to talk to each other to understand these better. Ultimately, the goal is to benefit from the expertise of different units in order to support the community and to meet their needs.

ENSURE REAL COMMITMENT

Units that are clear about what is expected of them and can contribute time and resources from the beginning are more likely to still be involved at the end of the assessment process than units playing a passive role. So, it is about doing more than just sharing documents with other units for approval. For example, one unit could take the lead in developing the sampling approach, while another could be involved in getting access to the field.

This also means that it is important to understand what different units can realistically handle before starting a multidisciplinary assessment process. Is a joint assessment realistic at this stage, or do units not have the time and resources to invest in such a process? Would a harmonized assessment approach make more sense?

ENHANCE A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH BY BUILDING ON EXISTING STRENGTHS

Units have different approaches to assessments. Interviewees shared that it might help to build on existing strengths and structures, such as the technical skills and know-how within units that regularly conduct assessments or monitoring exercises. There is often a willingness to work together but carrying out a multidisciplinary approach is difficult if there is no mutual understanding of how it will work in practice. Instead of starting from scratch and reinventing new tools and approaches, it might be better to start with existing unit-specific systems, such as assessment templates or indicator frameworks, which could then be adapted for a multidisciplinary assessment.

ENSURE SHARED ANALYSIS AND PLANNING

Collaboration is important during the different stages of the multidisciplinary assessment process. The shared analysis stage is often the most visible, as this will be the first time that different units look at the data and develop findings and recommendations together. It is, however, important to remember that the other assessment stages are equally important. For example, if units disagree on the objectives of the multidisciplinary assessment, it is likely they will also disagree on the overall picture of the situation during the shared analysis phase.

Shared analysis involves representatives from the different units coming together, sometimes literally in one room to analyse and interpret the data. At this stage, the data have most likely already been processed by one of the analysts, and mainly descriptive analysis has been provided. As part of the multidisciplinary analysis process, technical specialists and coordinators from the different units, as well as management, come together to start explaining and interpreting the findings.

Shared analysis is not an easy process because different units look at problems and needs from their own perspective. A shared analysis framework would be useful here, which could be used to analyse needs by unit, but also to understand the connections between units, for example, the effects of protection incidents on access to water, livelihoods, etc. Such frameworks need to be developed to keep the assessment objective clear and to inform the data-collection process.

While units may be assigned to different stages during the multidisciplinary assessment process, all units need to be involved in and contribute equally to the analysis and reporting stage. One of our interviewees mentioned that analysis and report writing was rushed because management would not allow activities to start without reading the report. This left one person with the responsibility of analysing the data and writing the report, which was an onerous process. If representatives from the different units had been involved, it would have simplified the interpretation process. And the multidisciplinary assessment facilitator should be the person who forms the complete picture of the situation and tries to bring everything together.

USE THE ASSESSMENT RESULTS

A well-organized multidisciplinary assessment process should result in unity and agreement between units over the assessment findings. The assessment results should be used to analyse potential responses and to develop a strategy about what actions could be taken. Recommendations that arise from a multidisciplinary assessment should trigger in-depth technical assessments from units where necessary.

8. THE BENEFITS OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENTS

A multidisciplinary assessment approach has many benefits and in this section, we detail the most important of these.

BENEFITS FOR THE TEAM

Team morale and motivation is a real benefit of multidisciplinary work. For example, staff members who do not usually work directly with communities can see the positive impact of their unit's programmes on communities.

BENEFITS FOR THE ASSESSMENT IMPLEMENTATION

Multidisciplinary assessments have a practical benefit, as working together is often necessary to make an assessment happen. From an operational and logistical perspective, different units need to be involved to gain access to the field, negotiate with contacts and share human and financial resources.

BENEFITS FOR THE IMPACT OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Multidisciplinary assessment processes strengthen the quality of data collected and the endorsement of results. Technical expertise from different units is being used, particularly in situations where rapid assessments need to be carried out. The engagement of different units in the multidisciplinary assessment process facilitates a multidisciplinary response.

BENEFITS OF UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE'S NEEDS FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES

Our interviewees highlighted that the multidisciplinary approach simply makes more sense. It gives a sense of direction. It encourages subdelegations to adopt a comprehensive strategy for the area of responsibility, rather than each unit adopting their own strategy. Our interviewees gave us an example of when an EcoSec team joined a WatHab team on a shelter visit. The affected person was part of the shelter programme, but the teams then learned that he was unemployed.

It did not make sense that the ICRC was organizing so many different programmes. We met this person who does not have windows in his house, or a job, and we just gave him windows. We didn't think about his other needs. We do not need to do a full multidisciplinary assessment every time, but we need to at least encourage units in the ICRC to work in a multidisciplinary way. It's about talking to the person and understanding all their challenges. Then we can see what we can do as an organization.

Multidisciplinary assessments encourage subdelegations to have a plan for their area of responsibility based on all of the affected populations' needs, rather than each unit having their own strategy that is then applied to all areas.

BENEFITS OF A MULTIDISCIPLINARY OUTCOME-BASED APPROACH

A multidisciplinary assessment can be more time-consuming during the planning phase, but it saves time during the implementation phase. If a community is reluctant to accept us, the multidisciplinary assessment approach is a good way of building acceptance and gaining access to the community. It is much more effective than conducting lots of separate assessments and programmes in the community.

The multidisciplinary approach to a programme like the DRP highlighted a new way of working. Field officers liked it; they were motivated by both the teamwork and the increased interaction with the community.

Beyond the DRP multidisciplinary assessment experience, the culture of collaboration across units has extended beyond assessments to include common outcome-based approaches and data sharing.

BENEFITS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED PEOPLE

In Libya, the community really appreciated the multidisciplinary assessment process. The ICRC looked at all of their needs at the same time, meaning they did not get assessment fatigue. As a sign of their appreciation, the community awarded the ICRC their first Certificate of Appreciation after the process was complete.

When individual units assess community needs according to their own priorities, as an organization, we are unlikely to gain all the information we need. But with a multidisciplinary assessment, we gain an understanding of all of the community's needs, and we identify areas for further investigation. The purpose of this kind of initial multidisciplinary assessment is to raise red flags. We can probably quickly establish that there are missing family members in the community, but a more detailed protection assessment is then needed to find out more.

9. CONCLUSION: WHAT WE LEARNED

FOR MANAGEMENT

- Staff morale and motivation are positively impacted. Field officers are motivated, and the renewed sense of collaboration between field staff from different units means staff look forward to going to the field.
- The collaborative approach helps to gain access and build acceptance within the community. When we are coordinated, it shows the community that we respect them.
- It takes longer to plan a multidisciplinary approach, but it saves time in the implementation phase.
- Feedback on the process from the community is positive. The community appreciated not getting assessment fatigue and that the ICRC was looking at all of their needs.
- Platforms enhance information flow between teams. If one team goes to the field, they can share assessment data with other teams, but they need to have formal channels to do so.

FOR FUTURE MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENT FACILITATORS




- Multidisciplinary field teams are a great advantage in terms of gaining a better understanding of technical/unit-specific considerations (e.g. protection red flags, WatHab increasing community interaction). These teams are particularly positive for staff who do not typically interact directly with the community.
- A top-down approach initially ensures that representatives are selected from each unit to be involved in the multidisciplinary assessment process and it also maintains momentum throughout. Clear roles and responsibilities are essential.
- Assigning a facilitator or a representative is a requirement. This person should not belong to a specific unit, so that there is common ownership and accountability. In the cases studied, units did work together, but it was because staff had strong personal relationships, rather than because a facilitator oversaw the process.

FOR THE RRN IN NAME

- Explore the potential for a multidisciplinary regional centre of expertise to support delegation operations in analysis and evidence-based programming, learning and accountability. Harness the competencies and thematic expertise within these regional support centres to match delegations' increasing needs in terms of multidisciplinary assessments, analysis, monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning.
- Invest in upskilling field staff in existing guidance, tools and templates that facilitate discussions on multidisciplinary assessments and serve as a starting point for multidisciplinary exercises. These include the [Economic Security Indicators Cookbook](#), Targeting, Selection and Prioritization Methods for Economic Security Programmes (forthcoming), [Strengthening Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Delegations](#), the internal Analysis & Evidence Toolkit, and standard assessment forms. In addition, the ICRC's Global Survey tool and Economic Security Situation Monitoring Platform are good examples of how multidisciplinary issues have been assessed and monitored in the ICRC's operational contexts.

We help people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything we can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with our Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. We also seek to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

People know they can count on us to carry out a range of life-saving activities in conflict zones and to work closely with the communities there to understand and meet their needs. Our experience and expertise enable us to respond quickly and effectively, without taking sides.

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ICRC

International Committee of the Red Cross
19, avenue de la Paix
1202 Geneva, Switzerland
T +41 22 734 60 01
shop.icrc.org
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