Humanitarian
Outcomes

# State of the Humanitarian System, 2015 (Second Edition)

## Progress Report

## May 2014

An independent team
of professionals providing
evidence-based analysis
and policy consultations
to governments and
international organisations
on their humanitarian
response efforts.

Submitted to ALNAP by SOHS 2015 Research Team

# 1. Introduction and overall progress

Work on the second full edition of the State of the Humanitarian System study began in September 2014. This report charts the progress made to date, eight months along on the 22-month project timeline, and highlights emerging issues and modifications to the workplan. It is not intended to provide a substantive review of research findings, which would be premature, but rather an account of project inputs and benchmarks achieved so far.  It is presented to the Advisory Group for information purposes, and not as a request for any specific input or decision-making.

The AWSD Research Team consists of Abby Stoddard (team leader and coordinator for  descriptive statistics and aid recipient survey), Adele Harmer (field research coordinator), Katherine Haver (coordinator for interviews and online survey), Glyn Taylor (evaluation synthesis coordinator), Paul Harvey (reviewer) and Morgan Hughes (cross-component research associate). The team held a day-long methodology conference on 3 September, where the research framework and case study countries were agreed upon.

The Inception Report captured and expanded on the results of that conference, setting out objectives for the next two years. It recapitulated and elucidated the definition of the humanitarian system used for the purposes of the study, and, in a departure from past iterations, it delineated four principal roles or functions of the system against which its performance would be evaluated (using the same humanitarian-modified OECD DAC criteria as in previous iterations):

- **Disaster response**. Providing rapid relief in response to major sudden-onset disasters that overwhelm the capacity of the state and local actors to respond;
- **Chronic crisis relief**. Supporting the basic humanitarian needs of populations undergoing chronic crisis conditions caused by conflict, repeated natural disasters, failures of development or governance, or some combination thereof;
- **Capacity-building for preparedness and response.** Supporting and strengthening national actors in crisis-affected states to increase disaster resilience and enable greater independent response capability;
- **Advocacy and information**. Promoting humanitarian priorities and principles in the wider international community, and facilitating the flow of information for and about affected populations.

These four functions form the organising principle of the study, and will shape the presentation of research findings in the 2015 SOHS Report. The four emergency case studies were chosen in part to highlight the different functions, as well as for geographical and contextual diversity.   The Inception Report was submitted to ALNAP for a first review on 16 September, during which time the Advisory and Support Group (ASG) was still being constituted.  A second draft was shared with the members of the ASG on 22 October, and the Inception Report was revised to incorporate their inputs and finalized on 30 November.

This report follows the format of the IR, noting progress and challenges across each of the research areas.  At present, a little before the midpoint of the project timeline, the research is mostly on track with the original workplan. Interviewees have been targeted and the first round of interviews has

begun. The global web-based survey was refined, translated and is now live online, with dissemination efforts to begin shortly. Data matrices were built and are in the process of being populated for the descriptive statistics and the evaluation synthesis. One of the four field visits, (Mali) has been completed, with the second (Philippines) taking place in the coming month, and the other two (CAR and Syria) planned for the Fall, 2014,

# 2. Descriptive Statistics

During the first eight months of the project, the team has worked to expand, refine and further populate its database of humanitarian providers, the Global Database of Humanitarian Organisations (GDHO), which tracks data on staffing, geographic scope of operations, budget size/market share, and other organisational information. This is the data that allows the SOHS reports to track growth and composition across the broad spectrum of organisations, national and international, that participate in humanitarian response.

The GDHO (formerly NGOList) is currently being readied for a transition from its current spreadsheet format to an online database platform.  The team is working closely with the website designers, Enabled Labs, to resolve technical and formatting issues, with the expectation that the site will be launched online (in alpha stage) by end of May.  Once in beta stage (expected August 2014), this data will be made publicly available through the Humanitarian Outcomes and ALNAP websites. The GDHO will be maintained by Humanitarian Outcomes' data team, noting the contribution from ALNAP's State of the Humanitarian System project in its development. Plans for future fundraising for the continued upkeep of the database in years beyond the project will be developed by Humanitarian Outcomes during 2015, in consultation with ALNAP.

In an effort to increase the speed and scale of the research, the team has been consulting with data experts to explore software tools in conjunction with large-scale web-based data archives to potentially automate parts of the data collection process.

In addition to the team leader and research associate, Humanitarian Outcomes has an intern specifically dedicated to GDHO research, working 15 hours per week. An additional two to three interns are planned to join this effort during the summer. (As this exercise serves multiple research strands of Humanitarian Outcomes, the staffing inputs will be covered from other budgets  rather than the SOHS project budget.)

## 2.2 Financial analysis

As noted in the Inception Report, the study will refer to the humanitarian financing figures provided by Development Initiatives' Global Humanitarian Assistance project for the years covered by the study, rather than performing our own primary analysis on overall humanitarian financing figures.  In addition, global figures from UN OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (FTS) have been downloaded and compiled for the pertinent years of the study (2014 figures will be added next year), to use as a reference and research tool for any specific issues and additional questions for the

report to explore that may emerge from the research. These emergency-specific numbers will also be applied to the emergency caseload database (see below.)

## 2.3 Caseload analysis

In order that the system's performance can be properly situated against the context of global humanitarian needs, the project has created an additional database comprised of all complex emergencies and natural disaster events occurring in mid-to-low development countries from 2001 to 2014. Although the timeframe of the study covers 2012-2014, data from prior years will be valuable to show longer term trends. The data categories included are:

- Year
- Country
- Crisis (Emergency Name)
- Type (Natural Disaster, Complex Emergency, Regional, Other)
- Total Affected Population
- Total Affected Population—Cluster (e.g., Education, Health, Emergency Shelter/Non-Food Items, WASH, Food Security, Multi-Sectoral, Nutrition, Protection, etc.)
- Total Population
- Percent Affected (National)
- Magnitude
- Number of Provinces
- Funding Requested
- Funding Committed/Disbursed
- Percent of Affected Targeted

To date, completed categories include Year, Country, Crisis (Emergency Name), Type (Natural Disaster, Complex Emergency, Regional, Other), Total Population, Funding Requested, and Funding Committed/Disbursed. All other data fields are still in process of being populated.

The dates, locations, and names of the emergencies, in addition to Funding Requested and Funding Committed/Disbursed were sourced from FTS. The World Bank provided data on Total Population, and Total Affected Population for complex emergencies is currently being gathered from CAP documents. Data on Total Affected Population for natural disasters were obtained from EM-DAT (the International Disaster Database), maintained by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED).

The caseload dataset also contains separate sheets that include subnational populations for the four case study countries plus: Afghanistan, Somalia and South Sudan. Sources of subnational populations are as follows:

- Afghanistan: Statoids (2006), Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization (2011, 2012)
- Somalia: *Population Statistics of Somalia* (1995), World Food Program's Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (2005)

- Syria: City Population (1981, 2004, 2011)
- South Sudan: Statoids (1983), Southern Sudan Commission for Census, Statistics and Evaluation (2008)
- Central African Republic: Division of Statistics, Economic, and Social Studies of Central Africa (1988, 2003)
- Mali: National Institute of Statistics (1987,2009)
- Philippines: Philippine Statistics Authority (2000, 2010)
- East Timor: General Directorate of Statistics (2004, 2010)

One of the chief goals of the caseload dataset is to provide better estimates for crisis-affected populations than currently exist within the system, in order to track trends in caseload. Currently there is no standard formula for calculating the figures for total affected population that are sometimes cited in appeal documents and public statements. These are usually soft estimates (and at times politically fraught). Typically each cluster in an emergency will produce a number of total beneficiaries, which could be a simply be an adding up of the beneficiaries targeted by each planned project, and may or may not be presented as a subset of the total people affected/in need of aid. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee and ACAPS have been developing more sophisticated methodologies and guidance to determine the number of people in need. But none are used uniformly across countries, and there is a wide variation in methods used across clusters even in the same country setting. Determining affected population on a cluster basis allows for a more precise assessment of needs, but introduces the problem of double counting, since a large number of affected people have needs for food as well as shelter and health interventions, etc. so may be included in the counts of multiple clusters.

The SOHS will study this particular problem as it relates to needs assessment and information management in the system, and will attempt to derive a formula for making comparable estimates across countries. This will enable us to compare the relative severity of emergencies in terms of people affected using the overall population numbers as a denominator.[1] The team is currently working on an alternative or synthesis methodology provide a rigorous estimate of people in need in emergencies, using case-specific information on malnutrition rates and displacement. At a bare minimum the caseload dataset will allow us to compare the number and types of emergencies during the study focus years and compare them to the previous time period. At a maximum, it is hoped that this methodology will provide for a reliable way of estimating crisis-affected populations that is comparable across emergencies and years.

---

[1] This work is complemented by other Humanitarian Outcomes research related to a DFID commissioned study on Secure Access in Volatile Environments, as noted in the Inception Report

# 3. Assessing Performance

## 3.1 Evaluation synthesis and literature review

After a review of the previous synthesis matrix, a number of modifications were made for this round. The biggest single modifications have been:

- the addition of a more formal 'quality scoring system'
- a tighter approach to the classification of evaluations and scoring against performance criteria.

*Quality scoring*: The team undertook a brief review of 'quality scoring' approaches, including work on the evaluation of evidence by ALNAP, UNICEF and DFID. Given the type and of volume material under review, it was decided to use a short form of weighting, taking indicators from other approaches and scoring evaluations according to:

**Conceptual framing:**

- Does the study acknowledge existing research?
- Does the study construct a conceptual framework?
- Does the study pose a research question?

**Openness and transparency:**

- Does the study present or link to the raw data it analyses?
- Does the author recognise limitations/weaknesses in their work?

**Appropriateness and rigour:**

1. Does the study identify a research design?
2. Does the study identify a research method?
3. Does the study demonstrate why the chosen design and method are good ways to explore the research question?

**Cogency:**

- Do the conclusions and recommendation clearly follow from the study's documented results?

Each evaluation will be given a score against these criteria (1-4) and a cumulative quality score which will be used to weight the final results.

*Classification and scoring:* Each evaluation will also be scored (1-4) against each performance criteria (e.g. against the 'effectiveness' criteria, each evaluation will be scored on the basis of the degree of effectiveness it identifies.) This is a more formal approach to scoring than in previous years, designed to facilitate a less subjective, more quantitative approach to the analysis and the use of pivot tables.

***Work completed to date and forward plan:*** The first target for the evaluation synthesis was to complete the first set, those published in 2012 and 2013 by August 2014. This was based on an estimation of 100-120 evaluations, predominantly from the ALNAP data base. At the time of writing, the running total is 30 and the target of 120 by August is achievable. Given the changes to the scoring system, and the need for regular cross checking of scores, more time has been spend on the first set. Before the end of June, a review of the scoring and quality weightings will be undertaken and the review process will go at a faster pace.

## 3.2 Key informant interviews

Based on the matrix provided in the Inception Report, the component lead has produced a spreadsheet with the number of interviewees to be targeted from each organisational type. Within each category, specific organisations/entities (and in many cases individuals) have been identified. The numbers within a few of the minor categories have been slightly refined to better reflect the likely added value of these interviewees (e.g. 'donor government military' reduced from 5 to 3, while 'academic/independent/other' increased from 5 to 8).

To guide the selection of field-based personnel to be interviewed by phone, nine 'mini-focus' countries were selected. These were selected so that each of the four functions of the system as outlined in the inception report would feature in at least one context, as indicated in parentheses as follows, with the understanding that of course multiple 'functions' are at play in all contexts: Haiti (major natural disaster, and a follow-up to SOHS 2012); DR Congo, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Somalia (chronic crisis support); Mauritania and Indonesia (preparedness/resilience); and Yemen and Myanmar (advocacy and information). From each, one UN, one INGO, one Red Cross/Red Crescent and/or one donor interview will be conducted. While it will not be possible to draw firm conclusions on the performance of the response in any of these countries, given the small number of interviewees, it may be possible to point to a few key issues if mentioned by all three or four interviewees.

The team has revised the global level interview guides to make the questions clearer, more succinct, and more likely to yield the specific information being sought. As before, the guide will be adapted slightly for individual interviewees according to their specific areas of expertise. Drawing from FTS, the team drafted a list of major emergencies in 2012 and 2013 that can be used for reference when asking global-level interviewees about the broad performance of the system. In addition, the team has developed a matrix with basic ratings for a few of the questions (e.g. enter 'B' if the interviewee thought that 'efficiency' is getting better, 'W' if it's is getting worse, etc.) that interviewers can fill out after the interview is complete; this is being piloted now to assess its utility. Team members have been assigned interviewees and the component lead is working to ensure that the first round of interviews is completed by end of August 2014.

### 3.3 Online survey of humanitarian actors

In early April, the HO team discussed with the team undertaking the OCHA/CDA study for the World Humanitarian Summit regarding whether to combine surveys, but it was ultimately decided that the benefits of a separate dissemination and analysis outweighed the drawbacks of potentially having two competing surveys. The team will continue to collaborate and share information with the OCHA/CDA team regarding our respective surveys.

Based on a thorough analysis of the utility of the 2012 and pilot surveys, the online survey questions have been amended, with some questions added, others dropped, and many remaining the same (to ensure comparability). The three surveys have combined into two, one for international and national aid practitioners and the other for host governments. Professional translation has been carried out in French, Spanish and Arabic, and entered into Survey Monkey. The surveys will go live the week of 12 May and will remain open until the end of October.

A thorough dissemination plan is currently being developed. This includes all of the actions undertaken in previous years (disseminating through ReliefWeb, etc.) as well as some new efforts. Several key Advisory and Support Group members have been identified along with a possible 'ask' of them in terms of how they can help disseminate the survey. Over 25 highly relevant humanitarian blogs, networks, forums, journals, consortia etc. have been identified and the component lead plans to reach out to them individually (in many cases with a request for an initial phone call) to explain the importance of the survey and discuss how they might promote it. For the host government survey, the team, in coordination with ALNAP, will reach out again to the Disaster Response Dialogue to see how their network might be tapped into. ASEAN and INSARAG/UNDAC will also be approached. All interviewees—at the field level and HQ levels, including the field case studies—will receive a personal email from their interviewer that includes the survey links and asks them to complete the survey and distribute it to their colleagues and associates.

### 3.4 Surveys of humanitarian recipients

The team leader has held several conversations with Mobile Accord GeoPoll on prospects for remote telecoms surveys of aid recipients in the four featured emergency countries. The template questionnaire has been revisited, with minor changes made in language to increase clarity while not departing from the meaning of the last survey and threatening comparability.

Since the last SOHS study, where this approach was piloted in East DRC (pro bono), prospective costs per respondent have risen considerably. This is partly due to greater demand for these services, which have only recently become available in many countries, and still more recently been discovered by humanitarian actors other sectors. In addition, the costs quoted to Humanitarian Outcomes three years ago did not factor in the higher unit costs of Interactive Voice Recorded surveys (necessary in some countries as an alternative to SMS-based surveys due to low literacy rates) and for surveys in areas where telecoms carriers are fragmented and difficult to penetrate. The result is that the SOHS project does not have a sufficient amount budgeted for this component. While it is not an indispensable component of the research, the aid recipient surveys are valuable as

a means for a direct insight into beneficiary perspectives (too often omitted or included on a tokenistic basis, with small focus groups, etc). In consultation with ALNAP, the team has decided to focus the survey on CAR and Philippines only. CAR and Philippines can be seen as opposite types of emergencies – on an natural disaster with a relatively well-functioning national and regional response apparatus and a healthy level of private funding, and one a long-running 'neglected emergency, where financial resources and deployment capability of the international system remain strikingly low. The budget will allow for the perspectives of the affected population of these two different cases to be examined using  a sample size of approximately 270 each, and both have better network penetration by the survey implementing agent than Mali or Syria. Moreover, the risk and feasibility of running the survey over telecoms lines in Syria is not clear, which makes it prudent to omit.

While the sample sizes will be representative only at a low confidence level, the responses will provide some interesting anecdotal comparisons between cases, and the broader scope will add to the experiential learning to inform future iterations of SOHS.

## 3.5 Field-based research

SOHS field-based research has begun and will continue through to the end of November 2014. As outlined in the Inception Report, the selection of countries is based on the overall methodological typology of differing functions of the humanitarian system (preparedness/resilience, rapid response, long-term support where state and development funding absent, advocacy). Hosts for the field work have been determined for three of the four missions, and include Solidarites (Mali and CAR), and IRC (Syria). The team attempted to coordinate with the OCHA/CDA study (World Humanitarian Summit) for the Philippines mission, but due to issues of timing and approach it's been agreed the missions should take place separately. We're currently in the process of determining host support, primarily for the field element of the mission (Tacloban).

The research team has agreed ToRs for each mission, field questionnaire and established an outlined for internal reporting. The field questionnaire was revised following initial testing with interviewees in the first case study, Mali. The focus of each mission is on in-person interviews of key informants, particularly national level stakeholders and aid recipient focus groups, as opportunity allows. The field studies will support all of the study's objectives and aims to expand and deepen the data set for each component of the study.

An outline of the field missions and timing can be found below:

| Emergency | System function | Host organisation | Timing |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mali | Disaster preparedness and broader support to resilience | Solidarites | May (mission took place 30 April – 7 May) |
| Philippines | Rapid response | TBD | June |
| Syria | Advocacy and information | IRC | September |
| Central African Republic | Supporting people in chronic crisis | Solidarites | October/November |

# 4. Coordination with other research initiatives

The team is staying abreast of other relevant research initiatives and maintains a dialogue with the teams and individuals conducting the ones with the greatest potential for overlap and/or opportunities for collaboration. These include:

- Effectiveness Study for the World Humanitarian Summit
- WHS preparatory events
- ACAPS and REACH initiatives
- Ground Truth
- Discussion around the proposed effort to create Humanitarian Goals (HuGos)

The purpose is to minimise duplication and find synergies where possible. Helpfully in this regard, some of the individuals involved in the above initiatives have agreed to sit on the SOHS ASG, and the SOHS team members have done likewise (Effectiveness study, HuGos discussion).

# Annex: Workplan

| | Tasks | 2013 | | | | 2014 | | | | | | | | | | | | 2015 | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul |
| **Administration/Inception/Management** | Prepare team member TORs and contracts | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Coordinate research components and supervise admin | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ |
| | Finalize ALNAP contract and pay schedule | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ALNAP and AG liaison | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ |
| | General admin, managing schedule and expenses | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ |
| | **Team methodology conference** | 🟦 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Methodology design | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Inception paper drafting | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Inception paper revision finalization | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | **Inception Report submitted 16 September 2013** | 🟥 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | **Mid-term consultation and progress report: May 2014** | | | | | | | | | 🟦 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Descriptive Statistics** | Prepare 2015 organisation mapping matrix | | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Research, compile and enter data in matrix | | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | | | | | |
| | Supervise data entry | | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | ▒ | | | | | |
| | Website design and beta testing | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ▒ | ▒ | | | | |
| | Website up May 2015 | | | | | | | | | █ | | | | | | | | | ▒ | ▒ | | | | |
| | Financial analysis and write up | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ▒ | | | | | |
| | Cross check stats - DI, others | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | **Stats finalized w analysis 30 March 2015** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 🟥 | | | | |
| **Field research** | Research framework and interview guides | | █ | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Field research TORs and recruitment | | | █ | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Trip admin and programming | | | | █ | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Supervise trip admin and programming | | | | | | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | In-country research (incl pre-trip prep and post trip write-up) **- Mali** | | | | | | | | █ | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | In-country research case – **Philippines** | | | | | | | | | | ▒ | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | In-country research –**Syria** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ▒ | | | | | | | | | |
| | In-country research - **CAR** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | ▒ | ▒ | | | | | | | |

11

| Category | Task |
|---|---|
| | **Synthesis of field study findings 1 March 2015** |
| Surveys | Finalize web-based survey instrument |
| | Launch and collect feedback from pilot |
| | Revise and disseminate final version |
| | Coordination of survey translation |
| | Open web-based survey |
| | SMS/voice bene surveys structure instrument |
| | Compile results |
| | **Analysis of results/write-up summary 1 March 2015** |
| Evaluation synthesis | Finalize evaluation matrix redesign |
| | Compile and categorize evaluations and other literature to be examined |
| | Review, code , and enter information into matrix |
| | Supervise data collection |
| | **Analysis of results/write-up summary 1 March 2015** |
| Interviews (150) | Interview targetting rationale/matrix |
| | Supervise interview admin/programming |
| | Telephone and in-person interviews |
| | **Analysis of results/write-up summary 1 March 2015** |
| Report drafting and revisng | Report outline/structure and schedule of inputs |
| | **Pre-drafting conference 1 April 2015** |
| | Draft sections |
| | Bibliography, citations, review and compile sections |
| | Editing for first draft |
| | **First draft to ALNAP and PRs 15 May (rtn 5/22)** |
| | First draft revised with peer review& ALNAP  input |
| | **Rev first draft submitted to AG 31 May (rtn 6/19)** |
| | AG feedback and peer reviews incorporated, editing |
| | **Final draft submitted 1 July 2015** |
| | **Dissemination** |