UNIT 2: RAPID NEEDS ASSESSMENT

This unit highlights the importance of conducting a rapid needs assessment to inform response efforts. Different approaches have been explored, with emphasis on trying to combine secondary data with primary research to obtain a snapshot of how the population is responding to the emergency in a specific point in time.

Importantly, needs assessments should occur in partnership with stakeholders to guarantee coordination and minimize duplication, and with community members to engage them and involve them in response activities. This Unit explores some of the ways in which communities can be engaged effectively.

Having completed this unit, you will have the following tools to assist in conducting a rapid needs assessment to inform communication activities.

- Worksheet 2.1: Gathering Existing Data Sources to Inform the Needs Assessment
- Worksheet 2.2: Reviewing Secondary Research
- Worksheet 2.3: Rapid Needs Assessment Questions for Consideration in Emergencies
- Worksheet 2.4: Identifying Further Research Needs

What Is a Rapid Needs Assessment?

Performing a scoping exercise and a desk review about key health behaviors, knowledge, beliefs and norms should be carried out as part of emergency preparedness. In this way, communication experts have quick access to important data that can guide a rapid communication response. Should this information not be available prior to the start of an emergency, **Worksheet 2.1** provides a checklist of some key information sources to consider in support of the communication response.

It is highly recommended that a scan of available information sources and an initial desk review be conducted every few years in the preparedness phase so as to access epidemiological and social data rapidly when required. Even once the emergency erupts, a systematic approach should be adopted when reviewing secondary research.
Building on the preliminary needs assessment conducted during the preparedness phase, due to time constraints in an emergency, secondary research – data that has already been collected by other researchers or organizations – is a good place to start for a rapid needs assessment.

A rapid needs assessment involves carrying out primary and secondary research quickly to gain an understanding of key information that can steer program design and implementation. Primary research is firsthand data, gathered through the direct investigation of a topic or situation of interest. Secondary research is information that is already available about an issue such as studies, reports, peer-reviewed journal articles, gray literature and other documents. Both are recommended in emergency situations. Although rapid, the needs assessment conducted during the emergency phase requires nonetheless a systematic approach to the collection and study of data, findings and contextual information to understand the issue being addressed.

Why a Rapid Needs Assessment Is Important

A rapid needs assessment can give insights and understanding about a range of factors that affect behaviors related to the emergency and about how to best support the population to reduce their risk. Dedicating even just a few days to a needs assessment is important to obtain information about how households and communities perceive a potential or existing emergency, what they know and do about it, what barriers and facilitators exist to the adoption of protective behaviors, and how cultural and social dynamics influence them. Equipped with this knowledge, program managers and implementers can develop targeted interventions to support the success of all response efforts.

Key Steps for Conducting a Rapid Needs Assessment

1. Gather Existing Data and Secondary Research
2. Identify Further Information Needs and Conduct Primary Research
3. Continuously Review Information

Gather Existing Data and Secondary Research

Insightful information may already exist about demographic, geographic, behavioral and social factors that affect how people respond to the emergency. Data reviewed may be available in country or elsewhere, and it should be as recent as possible, ideally within the past five years. Examples of useful secondary data include demographic health surveys (DHS), multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS), knowledge, attitudes and practice surveys (KAP), media consumption studies and project reports from organizations working in the affected areas. Below is a list of sources that can be approached for identifying information for an initial desk review:

- National and regional government departments in the country that may have existing information about demographics and household behaviors. Examples of relevant ministries include the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Transport to review movement between borders, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources in the case of emergencies caused by zoonotic diseases.
- Relevant TWGs in the country.
- International, national and local NGOs that have implemented interventions or conducted assessments and evaluations of KAPs relating to the issue causing the emergency or other relevant areas.
- Global agencies such as the UN and bilateral institutions.
- Research organizations, universities and statistics offices, and associated anthropologists working in the field.
- Service delivery organizations that may have information about how populations access and perceive services.
- Media, telecom and Internet provider organizations that can provide data on media, telecom and internet habits and other formative research carried out to inform their products and services.
- Peer review journals addressing similar outbreaks in the country or elsewhere, or about relevant practices within the country.

Secondary research can provide both quantitative and qualitative information. Examples of the type of information to look out for when conducting a secondary review include:

Behavioral Information

- Information regarding health practices such as vaccination and health seeking behaviors that can affect how the population responds to the emergency.
- Household behaviors such as hygiene practices, nutrition, agricultural and animal rearing and hunting practices in the case of zoonotic diseases, and religious and cultural practices that may affect health outcomes.
- Additional information on KAP indicators related to the emergency.
- Barriers and facilitators for protective behaviors at the individual and household levels, and within the environmental and social contexts.
- Use of mass media (listening habits) and social media (connectivity and use as a credible information sources.

Epidemiological Information

- Epidemiological data regarding the health issue linked to the emergency.
- Inter-border exchanges that may affect how the disease spreads.

Contextual Information

- Literacy levels and media habits.
- Social, cultural and religious beliefs, norms and practices.
- An analysis of the market and supply chain in the case of zoonotic diseases.

Exercise: Gathering Existing Data Sources to Inform the Needs Assessment
Worksheet 2.1 will help you identify where to start your search of relevant documents for the desk review. At the onset of an emergency, time will be limited to conduct a detailed needs assessment; however, the importance of having robust and reliable data to inform the communication response cannot be underestimated.

Worksheet 2.2 provides a template to support you in reviewing secondary data in a systematic way and to highlight important information that can guide the communication response. The first part of the worksheet provides a template to summarize the data obtained through a desk review. The second part aims to help you make sense of that data and asks some key questions that relate to behaviors, perceptions, knowledge and attitudes that impact how the affected populations perceive and respond to the emergency.

Please note that the worksheets in this section are followed by completed examples in the Appendix .The completed examples will likely include information about an emergency that during an actual event might not be immediately available. This was done to illustrate the full range of information to inform a strategic communication response. As more data becomes available, update this worksheet.

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WORKSHEET 2.1: GATHERING EXISTING DATA SOURCES TO INFORM NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Purpose: This worksheet is a checklist that aims to help you identify any information that is easily and quickly available to commence your rapid needs assessment.

Directions: Complete this checklist together with other stakeholders. This will allow for a broader view of what has already been done and exists in country. Discuss with stakeholders which of the information sources are available and the actions required to obtain and review the source. Please note that this list is not exhaustive and you may find in your discussions with stakeholders that other relevant information sources exist and should be considered.

Please note that this worksheet is followed by a completed example that you can use as reference if necessary.

Possible data source	Available (Yes/No)	Description / Comments	Action	Responsible
Demographic & Health Surveys (within the last five years, if possible)				
UNICEF's MICS (most recent publication)				
Reports from National Statistics Offices				
Reports from Ministry of Health				
Reports from Ministry of Education				
Reports from Ministry of Transport				
Reports from Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources				
Qualitative studies from Academia, Anthropologists and others				
Baseline studies from relevant interventions by IPs				
Mid-term & final evaluations from relevant interventions by IPs				
Media consumption studies				
Telecom and internet reports or consumption studies				
Other				

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WORKSHEET 2.2: REVIEWING SECONDARY RESEARCH

Purpose: This worksheet will help you adopt a systematic approach to reviewing secondary data and highlight important findings that can inform the communication response.

Directions: Using existing data, determine which populations are most at-risk of an emergency and then gather data on knowledge, attitudes and practices related to the emergency, including cultural and religious practices and gender disparities that may affect an emergency response. Complete questions one to four with the information obtained. If an emergency has already started, fill out the table with the data from the documents that have been reviewed. Whenever possible, note the citation(s) for the secondary research and where the document(s) or data source(s) can be found.

Please note that this worksheet is followed by a completed example that you can use as reference if necessary.

Date: ___________________

1. What is the emergency?

2. Which populations are more vulnerable and at risk of being affected by the emergency?

3. If the emergency is already underway, which populations/individuals appear to be most affected by the problem? (insert percentages if known)

4. Describe the demographics (age, gender and education level) of those most affected by the problem?
   Age:
   Gender:
   Education:

Type of Secondary Research	Location	Target Group Addressed by the Secondary Research	Relevant Key Findings	Barriers & Facilitators	Implications for Emergency Response	Citation and Date

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WORKSHEET 2.3: RAPID ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION IN EMERGENCIES

Purpose: This worksheet will help you evaluate what the secondary research tells us about knowledge, attitudes and other important considerations for the population regarding the emergency issue. If you do not find information about some of the factors, note it down as this may indicate a need for further research.

If you are unfamiliar with any of the terms listed in the table below, you can find definitions in the **Glossary** section at the end of this I-Kit.

Directions: With other stakeholders, brainstorm to determine the questions that primary research will need to include including on knowledge, behavior, attitudes and practices, and complete the table.

Knowledge:	
Attitudes & Beliefs:	
Risk Perception:	
Self-efficacy:	
Norms:	
Culture:	
Behaviors & Practices:	
Sources of Information & Media Habits (Including Telecom and Internet Use):	
Geographical Disparities:	
Other Observations:	

Identify Further Information Needs and Carry Out Primary Research

Although secondary research is likely to provide a good overview about knowledge, attitudes, practices, norms and demographics relating to the emergency, you may find that some important questions remain unanswered. Additionally, during emergencies communities may deviate from their habitual practices and behaviors, making it hard for secondary research alone to fulfill the information requirements of a communication response. It is recommended, therefore, to accompany the desk review with primary research to obtain data that can help inform a targeted SBCC intervention. As a preparation step, countries can begin identifying types of information they would want survey questions to address for a particular emergency.

Primary research involves gathering firsthand information about the problem being explored. A range of data collection methods exist, and some examples are provided below. It is important to note that a combination of several methods is recommended to obtain a more complete perspective of the situation. The methods listed below are further described in the **Table 3** on the next page.

Qualitative

- Observation (with possible quantitative components)
- Ethnographic studies
- In-depth interviews
- Key informant interviews
- Focus group discussions (FGD)
- Participatory learning and action
- Stakeholder meetings
- Content analysis of existing mass media, including social media

Quantitative

- Surveys, including phone surveys using calls or SMS
- Content analysis of existing mass media, including social media

Participatory learning and action is an approach to research that can be incorporated into many of the methods, both qualitative and quantitative, listed above.

Find more information on participatory learning and action at http://pubs.iied.org/6021IIED/.

Data Collection Methods

These methods, including further information on participatory learning and action, with details of how each can best be used are described in **Table 3** on the next page.

If primary research is to be conducted using any of the methods described above, it is necessary to obtain approval form the nationally recognized Institutional Review Board (IRB), that ensure that required ethical procedures are followed. Obtaining approval from the IRB may be a lengthy process, which is not suitable for an emergency communication response. It is therefore recommended to highlight the fact that the research is necessary to guide response effort in the IRB approval request, which may support a more expeditious approval process.

Table 3: Data Collection Methods

Method	Goal	Description	Key Considerations	Use
Observation	Collect information on naturally occurring behaviors in their usual context.	The researcher goes to the location of interest and stays among the people whose behaviors he or she wants to observe, taking note of what happens. Data gathered can include information on individual behaviors, relationships and dynamics within the household and in the community. Even one or two days of observation can provide helpful insights into what people do and how, and into some of the norms governing their practices.	• Requires observers who know and understand the culture of the community being observed. • People being observed may not act as they usually do because they are aware of being observed. • There is a risk that during an emergency people may be more distrusting and observation can become harder.	To obtain insights into the physical, social, cultural and economic environment where people live, while exploring their behaviors, relationships and activities.
In-depth Interviews	Elicit individual perspectives on the issue being investigated.	The person being interviewed is the expert on the subject matter and the interviewer is the student, learning from what the respondent has to say. Open-ended questions need to be asked in a neutral manner and the interviewer needs to listen carefully to the responses, asking follow-up questions based on the answers received. The interview can be recorded so as to allow for a natural feel to the conversation.	• Interviews need to be conducted in local language and translation may be expensive. Requires proper training of interviewers. • Can be time-consuming to transcribe the data for analysis.	To collect data on individuals' personal stories, perspectives and experiences, which are particularly useful when exploring sensitive or personal topics.
Key Informant Interviews	Elicit information from a wide range of people who have firsthand knowledge of the community and/ or of the issue being explored.	Qualitative, in-depth interviews with people who have firsthand knowledge about the topic of interest. This can include relevant professionals, service providers, leaders or residents. The interviews tend to be loosely structured, relying on a list of issues to be discussed rather than on standardized questions. Key informant interviews resemble a free flowing conversation with the interviewer framing questions spontaneously, probing for further information where necessary and taking notes or recording what is being discussed.	• Requires careful selection of key informant to ensure representative information is gathers. • Can be a quick way of obtain key information during an emergency.	To obtain an understanding of the motivations, behaviors, attitudes and perspectives of the community of interest. They can provide insights into general practices, behaviors, norms, culture and expectations within the community.

Method	Goal	Description	Key Considerations	Use
FGDs	Elicit group perspectives on an issue or topic.	They involve working with small groups of individuals (8 to 12 people) and asking open questions to the group. The group dynamics stimulate conversations and reactions. FGDs are not a method used to conduct multiple in-depth interviews in a group setting.	• Requires significant planning and introduction of the activity to the community and leaders beforehand. • Can be more expensive for fewer participants. • Can be time-consuming to transcribe data for analysis.	To elicit data on cultural norms of a group and generate a broad overview of issues of concern. FGDs are particularly useful to explore normative beliefs and attitudes and to discover a variety of perspectives within the population.
Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)	Facilitate learning about communities by actively engaging with them.	This approach to research involves community ownership of the research process and can be incorporated into both qualitative and quantitative research designs. Often, it combines the use of visual approaches created by the participants with group discussions. An example could be asking participants to draw a map of the community and then discussing it as a group both qualitatively and quantitatively. The process facilitates collective analysis and learning, and as such engages participants more actively in defining and resolving the issue being addressed.	• Requires trained facilitator. • Requires planning and introduction of the activity to the community and leaders beforehand.	To learn about and engage with communities. PLA is intended to facilitate the process of collective analysis, learning and ownership.
Stakeholder Meetings	Gather knowledge and ideas from relevant stakeholders and keep them engaged.	They consist of engaging with those who are involved with or have an interest in the issue. Stakeholders (discussed in **Unit 1**) are brought together in a meeting to discuss the issue being explored, share findings, and exchange knowledge, ideas and strategies.	• Provides limited perspective and should be combined with another method. • Can be useful during an emergency to gain trust of community members and identify how best to enter communities with a communication response.	To support stakeholder ownership and engagement and to assist with coordination and harmonization of activities, messages and approaches.
Surveys	Obtain information about what most people think/do/ know about the issue through a questionnaires that can be conducted in person, online or over the phone.	Using questionnaires with a large number of respondents. Surveys are generally time-consuming and therefore not always an appropriate method in an emergency. In Liberia, SBCC practitioners initially used GeoPoll to gather data as folks were not allowed into the filed because of the virus.	• Allow for larger sample size but do not provide qualitative data. • Household based surveys can be time-consuming and expensive to conduct and analyze and may therefore not be appropriate for an emergency. • Telephone or SMS surveys exclude people without access to a phone (typically women or older people).	To gather quantitative information about the population being surveyed, such a sociodemographic characteristics, knowledge, attitudes and practices.

Primary Research Beneficiaries

Remember that much of the primary research you conduct will require close collaboration with the affected communities in order to know how the emergency is affecting them and their behaviors. Involving the communities from the early stages of your communication response can also increase their engagement and support for your activities. Beware of "survey fatigue," or "participation fatigue," where affected communities are repeatedly surveyed by multiple organizations who come to deliver response activities. As communities see more and more actors approaching them but no concrete changes, they can become frustrated, disillusioned, disengaged and even resistant.

What's more, having been asked the same questions multiple times, interviewees might repeat answers they believe are "correct." One way to avoid this issue is to ensure coordination of studies with the government and other organizations. The tips in the box below should help you address some of the common challenges associated with carrying out primary research in an emergency.

Tips for Conducting Primary Research

- **Be mindful of ethical considerations,** including in-country requirements. IRB approval is required in most countries to carry out research; although some review boards have special procedures for emergency situations, obtaining ethical approval can take a long time and may not be possible during an outbreak. You must ensure that you respect ethical requirements for whatever primary research you plan to conduct. Discuss these with the IRB in the country and other relevant institutions (such as universities and research institutes).
- **Look for partners who may have strong research expertise** and can support the primary research that needs to be conducted.
- **Involve the community** and its members in the research process. They can contribute to developing the approach and the questions, recruiting participants and conducting the research.
- **Train data collectors and enumerators** in the research methodology and ethical considerations (e.g., confidentiality and informed consent).
- **Ensure confidentiality** and put systems in place that protect the confidentiality of any data collected.
- **Obtain informed consent**, ensuring that participants know exactly the purpose of the research, how the information will be used, and that they may opt out of the process at any stage with no consequences.

Continuously Review Information

Once further needs assessment questions have been addressed, it is important to continuously monitor how the emergency is evolving and how the population is reacting to the outbreak and to response activities. This will allow for consistently appropriately tailored interventions and messages.

Making use of existing communication structures (discussed in **Unit 1**) and of community networks on the ground (see **Unit 3**), will allow for the regular monitoring and flow of information about behaviors, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of the communities affected by the emergency. Below are some tips of how regular monitoring can occur to ensure that your communication response remains on target. As previously mentioned, involving communities from the early stages of your communication response can also increase their engagement and support for your activities.

Tips for Continuous Monitoring of Data to Inform the Communication Response

- **Consider community surveillance applications.** For example, an SMS-based system might allow community members to report and speak out on what is happening in their communities. It can be used to report observations, program activities and ideas about the issue being addressed, and it can be developed so that important information relating to the emergency and response activities is solicited from members of affected communities. Some examples include RapidPro, UReport, Geopoll, mHero and others.
- **Develop a reporting template for implementing partners** to complete regularly. The template can identify any evolution of the emergency; how communities are responding; any response activities that have been conducted; the reach and community reactions; dominant behaviors and practices linked to the emergency; and any other relevant information that can guide response efforts.
- **Establish a system that allows regular information sharing** between the communication pillar and the communities affected by the emergency. This can be done by setting up focal points and sub-committees at the community level. More information about these can be obtained in **Unit 1** and **Unit 3** of this I-Kit. Once the system is in place, ways in which information will be shared can be defined.
- **Agree on how and when information is shared.** This can be done through face-to-face meetings, regular phone exchanges or email, if reliable connections exist. It is recommended to have a pre-defined schedule on when these information sharing sessions will take place to ensure that they occur as planned.

Exercise: Identifying Further Research Needs

Worksheet 2.4 will help you identify if and what further research you may require to develop adequate communication interventions to respond to the emergency. It asks questions to help you identify further information needs that can be investigated through primary research. When completing the worksheet, consider the methodologies described in **Table 3** to decide on the most appropriate approach to answer the remaining questions.

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WORKSHEET 2.4: IDENTIFYING FURTHER RESEARCH NEEDS

Purpose: This worksheet will help you identify if and what further research you may require to develop adequate communication interventions to respond to the emergency.

Directions: Complete this worksheet referring to the information that you collected from the desk review. Consider the primary research methodologies described earlier in this unit to determine the most suitable approach for answering further information needs.

Please note that this worksheet is followed by a completed example that you can use as reference if necessary.

	Yes/No	Notes
Is there anything else you would like to know about the behaviors, attitudes, knowledge or perceptions of how the population is responding to the emergency?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Do you need to know more about the barriers and facilitators of behaviors related to the emergency?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Do you need to know more about the culture, norms and traditions that govern behaviors related to the emergency?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Are there vulnerable and at-risk groups that have been omitted by the secondary research you reviewed?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Do you need to know more about the people of influence in the lives of the affected populations?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Do you need to know more about the programs and organizations operating in the affected areas?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Have you identified any contradictory information from your secondary research that	☐ Yes	

requires further investigation?	☐ No	
Do you think that the information you collected from the secondary research may be biased in any way?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Are there any questions that could help you design your emergency response that remain unanswered from the secondary research?	☐ Yes ☐ No	