

The H2H Fund and Nagorno-Karabakh Activation

Case Study: June 2021

This case study explores how the H2H Fund activation for Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 contributed to an improved humanitarian response. With a focus on ‘how’, it examines a chain of ‘humanitarian value’ beginning with H2H Fund inputs, through to the products and services delivered by grantees, and onto key users and any discernible contributions made to responses. The study was conducted over a few days in March 2021 for the H2H Network by [Itad](#) MEAL advisers, and seeks to triangulate evidence from four key informant interviews, two project reports, and some external documents. The Nagorno-Karabakh case was selected among [10 activations](#) during 2017-2021 to understand how the Fund was able to rapidly fill gaps in a humanitarian response. It is limited by the absence of documented evidence and learning about the response, a lack of feedback from some intended users, and the limited time available.

1 Sudden crisis and displacement

The Nagorno-Karabakh activation responded to a sudden conflict and displacement crisis.

In late September 2020, Azerbaijani and Armenian forces clashed in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, a contested region of Azerbaijan controlled by an ethnic Armenian administration since the 1990s. Shelling and rocket fire hit cities, populations, and civilian infrastructure in the region and also parts of Azerbaijan. More than 50 people were reportedly killed, hundreds more were wounded, and hundreds of homes were destroyed or damaged.

In early October 2020, ACAPS produced a ‘[Short Note](#)’ compiling information from a range of available sources. It cited reports that up to 50% of Nagorno-Karabakh’s population, around 70,000 people, had left the region and were heading towards Armenian cities, such as Goris. In Azerbaijan, several cities along the border with Nagorno-Karabakh had been shelled, leading to hundreds of thousands of displaced people, but little information was available on where they had gone.

During this time, humanitarian actors lacked the information needed to plan a response. In the Short Note, ACAPS anticipated needs across various sectors and highlighted important information gaps, about the needs of the population remaining in Nagorno Karabakh, the scale of displacement and locations of people affected in Armenia, and the impact of shelling on Azerbaijani cities.



Source: Aivazovsky, Wikipedia

2 H2H Fund activation

The Fund selected a service package focused on needs assessment by two H2H members.

Service package: On 10 October 2020, the H2H Network activated its Fund in response to the crisis with a call for proposals to focus on collecting information on the needs of displaced people, with a view to informing and strengthening the wider humanitarian response. The H2H Fund used its activation process and conceived of a service package focused on needs assessment support during November to December 2020. On 1 November 2020, it decided to provide GBP 65,000 for the service package selecting projects by two member agencies who specialize in needs assessment, IMPACT Initiatives and ACAPS. The H2H Network's Head of Network Development, Helen Kearney, considered this activation a model of how the Fund can add value to a humanitarian response, by 'addressing a specific gap, providing rapid funding, and delivering niche services'.

Project design: The IMPACT project, 'Rapid Needs Assessment and Information Management Support for the Humanitarian Response to the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict', aimed to provide humanitarian organizations with 'a better understanding of the humanitarian needs of displaced populations and host communities in Armenia.' It would do this by giving them access to quality, reliable, and timely information on areas most affected and the ability to jointly define priority needs of conflict affected populations and host communities, through data analysis and mapping support for the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) and conducting a rapid needs assessment in one province of Armenia. It was implemented by IMPACT Initiatives' REACH initiative with GBP 50,000 from the H2H Fund.

Project design: The ACAPS project aimed to support the assessment and analysis of needs resulting from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. It would do this by dedicating a team of analysts to work remotely with stakeholders on the ground to understand key analysis requirements and focus the preparation of an updated situation analysis accordingly. ACAPS had already prepared the Short Note and received requests for forward-looking crisis impact analysis to support planning.

3 Rapid funding

The rapid activation enabled the two projects to make relevant, timely and useful contributions.

Technical input: The H2H Core Team identified the problem, a lack of needs assessment, and identified an opportunity for its expert members to respond. Initially, the Nagorno-Karabakh

response was complicated by the complexity of the crisis, a confused media narrative, and minimal humanitarian attention. A member of the H2H Core Team, Claire Finas, who knew the context well from previous work, reached out to contacts in the region to understand response gaps and immediate needs. An absence of needs assessments was hindering the ability of actors on the ground and large humanitarian actors to plan activities and fundraise accordingly. In response, the Team convened H2H members to see 'who can do what' and decided to fund a joint service package prepared by ACAPS and IMPACT to do needs assessments.

Financial input: The H2H Network activated the Fund very quickly, enabling two members to address a time-sensitive problem. In October 2020 while large humanitarian agencies were slow to react, 'it took us 14 days from assessing proposals to releasing funds,' noted Kearney. 'H2H can get funding out the door faster than others.' IMPACT and ACAPS team leaders agreed, noting the process was 'by far the quickest financial mechanism I've ever seen' and 'super-efficient'. Although small in amount, the funding enabled both members to move quickly and begin work by early November, each building on existing capacities, and fill identified gaps.

Financial input: The H2H Fund allowed important flexibility in project designs and completion dates. Instead of requiring rigidly predefined commitments in advance, the Fund allowed the Member grantees to define and shape their projects dynamically as they learned about what was needed. And a cost extension of one month was agreed with IMPACT to complete its assignment, in the face of reported logistic and security constraints.

Technical input: The H2H Network's service package mechanism fostered synergies between IMPACT and ACAPS. Recognising that H2H promotes the benefits of its Members working together as a 'joint service package', IMPACT and ACAPS devised a coordinated approach and then a practical division of labour that proved complementary. IMPACT deployed to do primary data collection and analysis in two locations and ACAPS remotely conducted secondary desk-based analysis for the whole crisis. For ACAPS, the arrangement increased access to information on the ground, in a way that would not otherwise have been possible. For IMPACT, it provided better access to secondary data through biweekly exchanges, especially from Azerbaijan where the political context did not allow IMPACT primary data collection.

Learning point: While the service package is a useful mechanism for the H2H Fund and worked for the grantees on this occasion, collaboration among them was limited in project delivery. They focused on different areas in different countries, worked separately and delivered project outputs to different users. Noting the H2H Fund encouraged such partnerships, mention was made of a 'forced marriage' promoted by donors which might not be relevant in other contexts. The most important collaborations needed for delivery seemed to be among H2H grantees and their users, the coordination and response actors.

4 Needs assessment in Armenia

The IMPACT/REACH information management deployment helped to strengthen coordination in the Armenia response and its rapid multi-sector needs assessment provided a foundation for the inter-agency response plan.

Service delivered: From deployment in November 2020, REACH provided ongoing support to the Information Management Working Group (IMWG) established by the RCO to coordinate the response in Armenia. A REACH Assessment Specialist and a GIS/Database officer supported the IMWG, by co-chairing meetings weekly, providing support to the mapping of collective centres, and processing the Migration Services' data on the displaced population. 'We deployed capacity to help

with information management and mapping, data collection tools, mobile data collection tools, site assessment tool, GPS points, data processing, questionnaires and forms for 3W, geographic terminologies,' said Jeremy Wetterwald, the IMPACT/ REACH project lead in Armenia. 'This reinforced the IMWG's capacity and helped the information coordination system to work.' IMWG tools, meeting minutes, and datasets were made available on UNHCR's [operational portal](#).

Service used: Response coordinators in Armenia reportedly used REACH's analytics expertise to strengthen information management. 'Having REACH as co-chair, the IMWG strengthened information management for the CSG and working groups,' said Wetterwald. Data is 'the lifeblood of the coordination system,' he explained, highlighting the IM function's importance in humanitarian coordination and an effective response. Despite reaching out to the UNHCR coordinators and information manager for confirmation, no response was received.

Service used: Humanitarian donors, such as DG ECHO, USAID, large UN agencies and others accessed REACH's data analysis products and needs assessments. These key response actors downloaded information products from the IMWG and attended briefings on the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) conducted by REACH. On the REACH platform the data analysis products were accessed more than 100 times, and some 25 organisations participated in presentations.¹ Donors went on to fund further needs assessments and contribute funding to meet immediate needs in the response plan and appeal.

Service delivered: REACH also implemented a [Rapid Multi-Sector Needs Assessment](#) aimed at understanding priority needs and vulnerabilities. It focused on households in refugee-like situations and host households in seven regions and across multiple sectors in Armenia. Working with UN and NGO partners in the sectoral coordination 'working groups', REACH carried out the design, implementation, analysis, and reporting. 'This was a full-scale assessment that provided a comprehensive non-biased view of what's happening,' said Wetterwald. 'It used a proper approach including respondent selection, structured questionnaire, and 40 enumerators in 10 cars going across the country to collect data.' It also went beyond agency needs assessments which typically focus on specific populations or areas using convenience sampling.

Service used: Response coordinators used the rapid MSNA to produce a needs assessment and inform response planning. It provided the basis for the [Inter-Agency Response Plan](#) which was published in January 2021. By conducting the rapid MSNA, REACH established a baseline allowing for tracking of the situation and needs and represented the first systematic effort to get a full picture of humanitarian needs, said Wetterwald.

Response contribution: The MSNA was used as the primary source of information about the needs of both people in a refugee-like situation and host communities in the Inter-Agency Response Plan. The Plan brings together 35 appealing partners and a total of 85 partners working through the coordination structure under the leadership of the RCO and UNHCR. No evidence was found about the effectiveness of the response.

Services used: The assessment reportedly provided critical 'site data' about the needs of displaced persons in each location. 'Without geographic needs data, humanitarians are essentially blind and typically focus efforts on cities and information routes, which greatly complicates coordination,' said Wetterwald. 'With the site data UNHCR was able to deliver NFIs and winter materials to the right places.'

¹ Including representatives from UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO, RCO, UNDP, WASH/Child Protection, Health, Protection, Education, Save the Children, PIN, ACTED, CARE, ECHO, USAID, Sweden, Canada, EU, Germany, ICRC, United Kingdom, Czechia, Denmark, Netherlands, Poland

Learning point: Providing data to responders was an important service before delivering the final report. While the formal output was the report published in December 2020, REACH's ongoing data analysis, frequent interactions, and weekly presentations provided a flow of analytical data to inform partners in working groups, decision-makers, and donors. 'The data flow into the clusters and decision makers is an important output,' said Wetterwald. 'A week after data collection we were able to make weekly presentations, interact with decision makers, and brief clusters and donor groups.'

5 Secondary crisis analysis

ACAPS's initial needs analysis helped responders and coordinators across the crisis understand the crisis and plan programmes, and its Secondary Data Review provided a key input to the Azerbaijan response plan.

Product delivered: ACAPS published an [Updated Needs Assessment](#) report 19 November 2020, intended to give users 'a deeper understanding of the crisis' and to improve programming design to match needs across the crisis. Having previously produced a Short Note (see above), ACAPS prepared the report using its secondary data review technique and key informant interviews, supported by information exchange meetings with REACH. According to Helene Lafferty Smith, ACAPS's Senior Analyst, ACAPS reports enabled responders to base decisions on well consolidated reports instead of multiple sources, saving them effort to find, translate, review, and expertly analyse dozens of documents.

Products used: Response actors in Azerbaijan, including UN actors, donors and a limited number of NGOs, also used the ACAPS documents to inform their responses, benefiting from expert analysis and saved effort. According to feedback received, the FCDO representative in Baku at the start of the crisis found the SDR very useful from a donor perspective, and a small NNGO addressing local needs in one town also found it useful, given lack of IDP info in the national news media.

Product used: Humanitarian response coordinators in Azerbaijan in particular used ACAPS analysis to support coordination work, including needs assessment, situation analysis and response planning. 'The first aim was to understand the needs, the issues, the situation to be addressed collectively,' explained Ivane Bochorishvili, an OCHA coordination expert, who was deployed to Baku to manage the humanitarian portfolio in response to a request from the UN Resident Coordinator. He established a cell involving UN agencies in the country, most of them development actors without in-country capacities for such analysis.

Response contribution: In the early days of the crisis, ACAPS's analyses were useful for responders in the absence of needs assessments. 'Assessment capacity on the ground was very limited, so it was extremely useful to have expert support from IMPACT and ACAPS in the process,' noted Bochorishvili.

Learning point: ACAPS perceived its secondary analysis technique and multisectoral analysis approach as adding value to the response. 'Most documents are written by an NGO or UN organization focused on one sector or issue,' explained Lafferty Smith. 'We got feedback that a holistic overview is useful to understand what's happening and where to focus efforts.'

Product delivered: ACAPS published a [Secondary Data Review](#) (SDR) on Azerbaijan 21 December, intended for OCHA and other partners to determine areas most impacted by the conflict. ACAPS prepared the report using its secondary data review and key informant interviews methodology to

understand crisis impact, by comparing the pre-crisis and post-crisis situations in Azerbaijan. The report aimed to provide baseline information for the response coordinator, allowing humanitarian actors to make resource allocation decisions, explained Lafferty Smith.

Product used: The OCHA coordinator and UN partners used the SDR to complement their own primary data collection (Interagency Rapid Needs Assessment) and provide a holistic picture, in particular by providing pre-crisis baseline information that could be compared with primary data when no other information of this nature was available. 'ACAPS supported us in secondary data analysis, which is what we needed to complement the primary data and provide a holistic picture of how the crisis evolved.' said Bochorishvili. 'And they did it very well.' In practice, the UN Country Team used three iterations of the SDR to inform the assessment and analysis needed for the response plan, which was developed and used but not published due to political sensitivities.

Response contribution: Although the Azerbaijan Response Plan was not developed using the typical IASC-recommended Humanitarian Programming Cycle, it was informed by a holistic analysis of primary and secondary data. This provided a suitable way forward (a 'quick fix') to meet immediate needs, in a way that combined humanitarian and development action, and allowed CERF funding to be mobilized for the response. No evidence was found about the effectiveness of the response.

Learning point: ACAPS recognized the decision to focus the SDR on Azerbaijan ensured its utility to partners seeking to address immediate needs, and that establishing relationships with OCHA (and other actors) was critical for this and also for obtaining necessary data in context where access to data was limited and politically sensitive. The response coordinator also noted that ACAPS's contribution required working in close coordination with OCHA, balancing an interest in publication for wider stakeholders with an interest in serving people affected by 'delivering information in the right way at the right time' within government constraints. This meant publication later than usual, but reportedly ensured utility.

6 Key outcomes

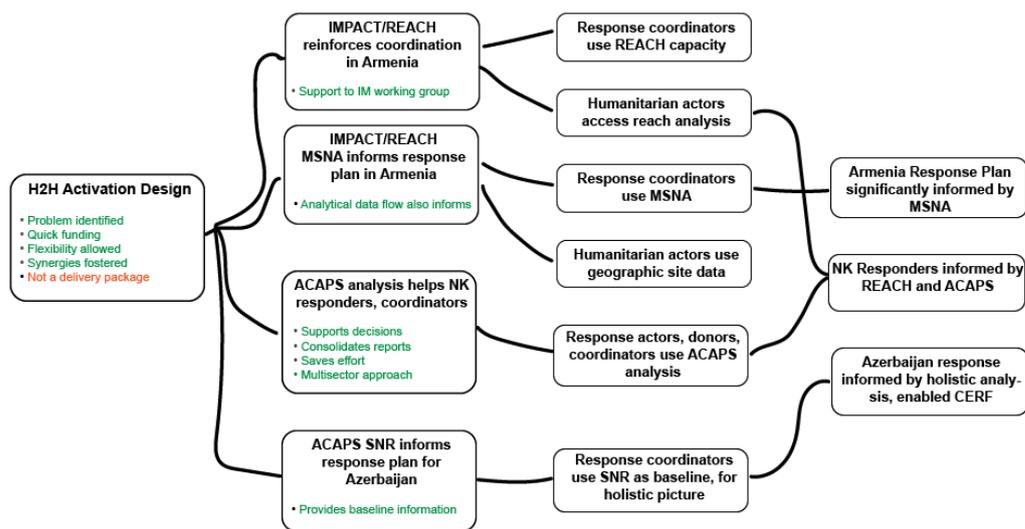
In Armenia, IMPACT/REACH's needs assessment provided a primary source for the inter-agency response plan. REACH conducted a Rapid MSNA which provided critical data for responders, response coordinators used it to produce a needs assessment and inform response planning, and it provided the basis for the Inter-Agency Response Plan. Humanitarian donors, such as DG ECHO, USAID, large UN agencies and others used the MSNA and REACH's data analysis products in several ways. In addition, IMPACT/REACH support strengthened information management and coordination in Armenia. It provided information management support to reinforce response coordination, and coordinators used REACH's analytics expertise to strengthen information management.

In Azerbaijan, ACAPS's Secondary Data Review significantly informed the response plan. ACAPS published an SDR on Azerbaijan intended for OCHA and other partners to identify areas most impacted by the conflict, the OCHA coordinator and UN partners used SDR to complement their own primary data collection and as a pre-crisis baseline information that could be compared with primary data. Response actors in Azerbaijan, including UN actors, INGOs, national NGOs and donors also used the ACAPS documents to inform their responses, benefiting from expert analysis and saved effort. More broadly, ACAPS's initial needs analysis helped responders and coordinators. ACAPS published an Updated Needs Assessment report, and humanitarian response coordinators used ACAPS analytical expertise in general to support coordinated needs assessment.

These specific outcomes may not have occurred at all or would have been very different without the H2H Fund activation. The activation enabled REACH and ACAPS to provide relevant, timely, and

useful contributions to both humanitarian responses. The Fund did this by identifying the problem and seeing an opportunity for members to respond; activating the Fund very quickly so that REACH and ACAPS could address the problem on time; allowing important flexibility in project designs and completion dates; and fostering synergies between IMPACT and ACAPS.

Figure 1. Humanitarian value map: H2H Fund Activation for Nagorno-Karabakh



Notes

REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT). Its purpose is to facilitate the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. Since 2016, IMPACT/REACH has been working to strengthen multisector needs assessments, in line with the commitments of the Grand Bargain. It also co-chair of the Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework.

ACAPS is a 'start-up' initiative, launched in 2009, which provides data analysis support to humanitarian responders in order to strengthen their understanding of crises and contribute to more effective humanitarian action. It does this by providing high-quality, independent and multi-sectoral analysis and strengthening the needs assessment 'ecosystem'.