The HPC: what is useful – and for who?

Summary of survey findings[1]

In preparation for discussions on the future of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC), NRC, IMPACT Initiatives (REACH), and ICVA conducted a short survey in May 2025 to better understand which parts of the HPC are used by who, and for what purposes. The survey took a holistic view of the HPC – its *processes* of dialogue and consensus-building, as well as its *outputs* – in the needs analysis, strategic planning, and response monitoring phases.[2] 73 respondents from operational INGOs and NNGOs, Cluster Co-Coordinators, NGO forums, and donors gave feedback on their experience of contributing to, and using, HPC elements. This document summarizes these findings.

Donors

Donors highlighted the following HPC outputs as most important to inform their decision-making:

- Overall PiN – of vital importance to inform funding allocation decisions *between* crises, based on overall magnitude and severity of need.
- Overall & sectoral severity – to understand those in most severe need.
- Area severity – to inform partner selection based on capacity to support people in most severe need.
- Target figure plus overall funding and gap analysis – to understand the level of (under)funding.

Donors commonly mentioned HNO/HRP documents being overly long. While contextual (narrative) analysis, in addition to data, was highlighted as important to inform funding decisions and partner choices, donors stated preferring this be presented in brief overviews that do not duplicate with other available documents.

The donor respondents reported varied use of HRP indicator monitoring; some use response-level but not necessarily sectoral indicator reporting ad-hoc, and not necessarily in a structured way to inform decisions.

Going beyond the scope of the current HPC, one donor strongly emphasised the desire to see 'independent and objective analysis' of root causes (and protection risks) form the basis of collective, integrated planning between humanitarian, development, and peace actors – allowing a more tightly defined humanitarian plan to be set out within a wider planning framework.

Coordinators

For coordinators, *processes* to build consensus among members can be as important as the *outputs* produced. Coordinators need to understand comparative needs to be able to guide partners to critical areas, and have sufficient information to be able to effectively monitor the response and advocate on gaps.[3]

For NGO cluster/sector (co-)coordinator respondents, of particular importance were:

- Needs assessment reports (e.g. MSNAs) – forming the basis of understanding of need and severity.
- Area severity classifications and sectoral severity figures.

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[1] The perspectives shared in this document do not represent the views or positions of ICVA, NRC, and IMPACT. All views expressed in this document are the summarized perspectives of the survey participants.

[2] Covering participatory elements, use of HPC outputs, and reflections on the overall process.

[3] This finding (unsurprisingly) suggests that analysis and agreed response approaches *according to the coverage of the coordination mechanism* is helpful to fulfil coordination functions. However, it was not asked whether these need to be a formal output of the HPC.

- Cluster/sector needs analysis (both the data, and the process of discussing with cluster members) – to inform cluster members' own sectoral planning and collective planning.
- Cluster/sector strategy – workshops with cluster members to agree on collective and technical approaches. As an output, cluster strategy documents were considered more useful than the HRP.
- Severity analysis, targets, and ongoing gap analysis are used for funding advocacy.

Notably, while response monitoring and gap analysis are core cluster functions – requiring information on partners' presence and reach – coordinators did not widely rate cluster HRP indicator monitoring as helpful.

Operational NGOs

For NGOs as operational actors, the process elements can similarly be as useful as the HPC's outputs.

NGO respondents highlighted the following as the most useful to them, and their organizations:

- Needs assessment reports (e.g. MSNAs).
- Area severity classifications and sectoral severity figures.
- Cluster/sector needs analysis workshops, and documents.
- Cluster/sector strategy workshops, and documents.
- HNO and HRP documents.[4]
- Reporting submitted to a cluster/OCHA – and subsequent use of 3/4/5W when these are accurate.
- Overall funding analysis.

None of the process elements of the HPC were highlighted by respondents overall as *not* being helpful. A higher proportion of global and regional respondents reported finding HCT and area-level strategic planning useful than country-level respondents. Of less use to NGO respondents were the overall and cluster/sector target, and overall gap analysis and indicator monitoring. The overall PiN figure was reported as useful for NGOs at global level, but much less so at country level.

NGO respondents generally highlighted the HNO/HRP as being important advocacy tools, but several emphasised that most NGOs' own planning (and donor granting) have different timelines than the HRP – and that this isn't fully understand by the HRP system.

Many NGO respondents expressed frustration at either being excluded from the planning process (especially for L/NNGOs), and at feeling their inputs were not listened to. When asked how their work would be impacted if the HNO and HRP no longer existed, some operational NGOs – particularly those who felt more excluded by the process – replied that this would have little impact on their work. Others highlighted:

- Lower visibility of the response.
- That fundraising would be more difficult.
- Risk of fragmenting humanitarian actors' efforts into uncoordinated initiatives not collective goals: *"a shared understanding of needs, priorities, and geographic focus helps prevent duplication and gaps"*.
- Lack of credible data and needs analysis to inform programming decisions and prioritization.

'Heavy for who – and why?'

It is often repeated that the HPC is 'too heavy'. This survey asked for who, why, and what the implication is.

- The HNO/HRP process is seen as time-consuming for Cluster and OCHA staff, not for operational actors – but the knock-on effect on coordination is a concern. Some of this "time burden" was attributed to

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[4] Based on respondents' answers to other survey questions, potentially used for advocacy and fundraising purposes.

changing calendars, tight deadlines, and lack of technical capacities to conduct the needed analysis. *Concise description* is preferable to lengthy documents – especially when multiple review rounds and consultations are held to find compromise on language, rather than on strategic content.

- HNOs/HRPs often dominate ICCG and HCT agendas – with space for other strategic and operational issues lost while decisions on HNO/HRP content are made. One respondent recounted HCT members requesting separate meetings on the HRP to free up HCT agendas for critical issues, which was denied.

- Regular reporting can be heavy for operational actors when it is too detailed (and data is not then used) and duplicative between levels of coordination.

Perceptions of 'heaviness' focused on how analysis and planning are conducted, format of HNO/HRP outputs, and reporting. No respondents identified the needs assessment phase as being a 'heavy' component.

Some respondents unpacked 'heaviness' further, describing how the HRP – clear in its earlier iterations to be a fundraising tool and topline strategic plan – has sometimes become seen (by some cluster and OCHA staff) as *de facto* the centre for *operational* coordination and planning. While coordinators describe using HNO and HRP outputs to *inform* their operational coordination, this expansion, or conflation, created an increased emphasis on the HRP. One cluster coordinator consulted described how in one response a request to develop an operational plan for an incident was dismissed in the ICCG 'because we have the HRP'; in another, lack of government approval for the HRP being *"all we talked about"* months after humanitarian actors finalized their planning. Another respondent emphasised that *"coordination must continue without finalized HRPs"*.

Transparency and trust

A significant proportion of respondents – from operational NGOs, NGO forums, clusters, and donors – perceived the HNO/HRP process as un-transparent and reported a lack of trust in it. Just 11% felt that the process is consistently managed well and transparently. Nearly half (43%) felt this is rarely or never the case.

Low levels of trust were driven by:

- Lack of consistent adherence to the JIAF methodology undermining comparison *between* crises – including questions around *"why lifesaving criteria seem to differ across contexts".*

- Lack of transparency in decision-making and in methodologies used.

- A low level of trust that inputs were valued and listened to. Only half of respondents felt their inputs were *sometimes* valued and listened to, only 9% that this was consistently the case. A quarter of respondents (27%) felt that their inputs were rarely or never listened to and valued.

One in three respondents raised concerns about how decisions on HNO/HRP content are made. Multiple respondents noted concerns that the PiN does not reflect actual needs, with a widespread perception that the PiN and targets were manipulated because of either government sensitivities or system interests. Some described perceiving that the UN and particularly OCHA adjusted numbers or over-rode inputs of other actors in content of planning. This lack of trust was reported to change decision-making patterns: one donor recounted *not using 2025 PiN figures for several crises* – despite highlighting that ordinarily this is critical for their decision-making – due to concerns that they significantly underestimated actual need.

Despite the above, most respondents reported feeling that the HNO/HRP process is important for discussing overall strategic priorities, and that they valued the opportunity to discuss priorities with other organizations.[5]

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[5] A third reporting this often being the case, and a third this sometimes being the case, for both questions.