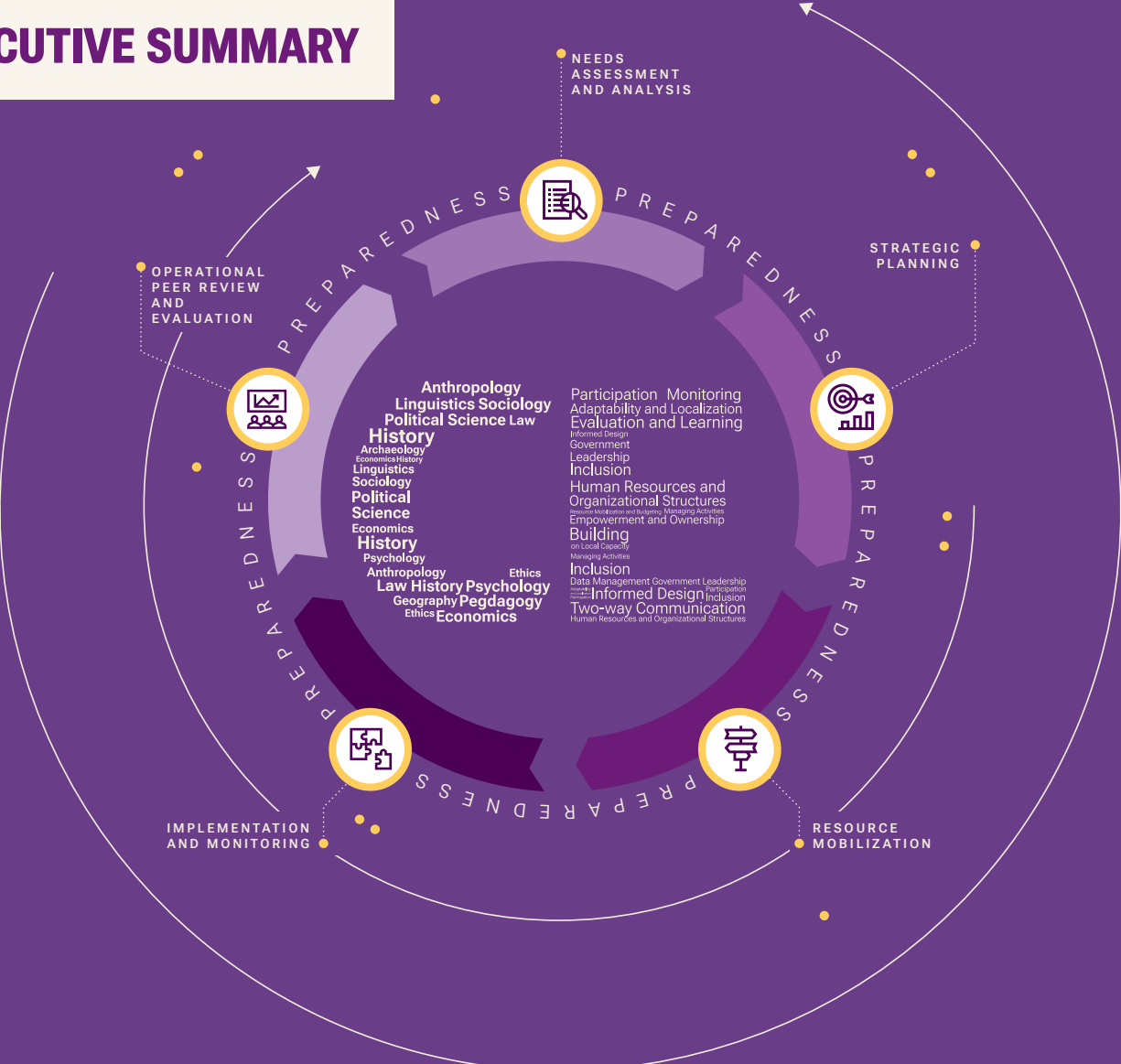


SOCIAL SCIENCES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

CAPACITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND MAPPING OF SOCIAL SCIENCE TRAINING FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN CONFLICT AND HAZARDS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Social Sciences for Community Engagement in Humanitarian Action

Capacity needs assessment and mapping
of social science training for community
engagement in humanitarian action in
conflict and hazards

Executive Summary

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Introduction

Social science methods, skills and insights can make valuable contributions in humanitarian action that centers the needs and challenges of communities affected by conflict and/or hazards, potentially making the impact of humanitarian interventions more inclusive, effective and sustainable. But several operational, institutional, and structural challenges need to be addressed for social science to be systematically integrated in community engagement in humanitarian action. This report presents the findings of a capacity mapping and needs assessment, gaps and capacity resources for integrating the social sciences in community engagement in humanitarian action and programming. The mapping and assessment were conducted by Sonar-Global partners AIGHD and Institut Pasteur for the Social Sciences for Community Engagement in Humanitarian Action (SS4CE in HA) project led by UNICEF's Social and Behavior Change section, with funding from the U.S. Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance. The focus of this collaboration effort has been on integrating social science approaches for community engagement in conflict and hazards settings.

The project is part of a larger collaboration initiated by UNICEF to enhance the social sciences' application for community engagement in humanitarian contexts, called "Social Science for Community Engagement in Humanitarian Action", or SS4CE in HA. Stemming from the signaled need for humanitarian action to be more guided by community experiences, knowledge and leadership, as well as (local) understandings of the contexts of humanitarian crises and the humanitarian system and responses, the SS4CE project seeks to gain insights into how social sciences can systematically form part of community-centric humanitarian action.

The project mapped and analyzed existing trainings developed to integrate social science approaches for community engagement in humanitarian action. Additionally, a needs assessment comprising interviews, a survey and focus group discussion explored what social scientists and humanitarian practitioners need for effectively integrating social science methods and approaches in community engagement. A detailed report describes the findings of the capacity needs assessment and mapping and provides recommendations to strengthen the integration of social sciences for community engagement in

humanitarian action and programming in the context of conflicts and hazards. The full report can be consulted here.¹

The comprehensive report covers eight chapters. It describes the contributions the social sciences can make to community engagement in humanitarian action, implementation and reporting of research during and after emergencies and disasters. The report further describes the challenges to the systematic uptake of social sciences in engaging communities in humanitarian action and programming, and provides recommendations to address these challenges. The findings intend to inform the process of integrating and mainstreaming the social sciences in community engagement in humanitarian action and programming. The findings and recommendations are aimed at humanitarian practitioners and programmers at all levels (field, senior, HQ), donors, and social scientists working in applied humanitarian as well as academic settings.

Methods

The research was led by the Amsterdam Institute of Global Health and Development (AIGHD) in coordination with UNICEF's Social and Behavior Change Section, supported by a Technical Working Group comprised of expert practitioners and social scientists in the humanitarian field, and specifically in contexts of conflicts and disasters.

The research methodology was based on a mixed-method approach and included a preliminary scoping of peer-reviewed literature, interviews, a survey, a focus group discussion, and a mapping of training resources. In addition, throughout the project, there was ongoing consultation with social scientists, community actors, and humanitarian practitioners working on different levels of humanitarian system. These different methodologies and participant perspectives helped to understand needs from different key stakeholders with different disciplinary, professional, organizational and geographic backgrounds to get a diversified perspective on what are needs and gaps to integrate the social sciences for community engagement in humanitarian action.

¹ Link to Bridging Theory and Practice Integrating Social Science in Community Engagement in Humanitarian Action in Conflicts and Hazards

Findings

The project brought forth insights into how social science approaches can help unlock community perspectives, needs and capacities, and what institutional structures and mechanisms facilitate community participation in humanitarian action. Social science methods can generate operational knowledge and inform the redesign of methods and objectives of humanitarian interventions by giving a central role to communities, shifting power dynamics and demanding accountability. By making visible community experiences and resources needed for solutions mobilizing community knowledge and networks, they can encourage institutional actors to center these in programming. The main findings are briefly described below.

Existing trainings including social sciences approaches, community engagement and conflicts and hazards

Of the 1377 potential trainings identified through a comprehensive internet-based search and examination of trainings suggested by participants and in the technical working group meetings, only 60 trainings had a title or description containing social sciences, community engagement and/or conflicts/hazards. Many of these were relatively superficial in either social science or community engagement content. An overlap or duplication of efforts in trainings was noticeable in the analysis and mentioned by participants. After analyzing their content, only eight promising trainings were identified with high relevance to CE, social sciences and humanitarian content. These trainings appear to be dominantly focusing on public health, communication, and legal-oriented trainings.

The social science 'lens'

Specific values were expressed that social scientists mention as key for purposeful community engagement, such as sensitivity, empathy, and communication skills, along with a critical understanding of a broader cultural, economic, and sociopolitical context that was referred to by many as "the social science lens". SS4CE is viewed as foremost about supporting community participation in decision-making and data collection, ensuring a people-focused response, and including in-depth contextual knowledge in humanitarian action. Besides specific knowledge and skills from the social sciences, soft 'human' skills and competencies are as important in applying SS4CE in humanitarian action. These soft skills are considered to some extent person-driven and harder to teach or develop.

Usage of different social science disciplines

Among survey respondents, Sociology and Anthropology were the social science disciplines listed to have been used most frequently in community engagement in humanitarian action, followed by Psychology and Communication Sciences. Political Science is seen as beneficial mostly by social science researchers. Law and Journalism are seen as beneficial by humanitarian practitioners and program managers. Law and Economics were noted as more relevant to disaster work, Political Science as relevant for conflicts. In general, SS4CE could be particularly important during the "Needs Assessment & Analysis" and "Strategic Planning" phases of the Humanitarian Program Cycle, and less important during the "Operational peer review & evaluation" phase. It is implicit that if SS4CE is integrated in the analysis and planning it will be articulated and integrated in the implementation of humanitarian programmes.

Different understandings, perspectives and language – a need for translation and a common space

While social sciences focus on comprehensive knowledge production, information collected in humanitarian action in time-pressed contexts needs to be 'fit for purpose', or 'good enough'. In other words, while information needs to be of high quality and collected through systematic methods, it needs to be (made) digestible for application in humanitarian contexts. This makes for a difficult transition from social science training to the language and operational speed of humanitarian action. The use of social science jargon could be restrictive in communicating with humanitarian practitioners and affected populations and in describing the complexities of the crisis. Social scientists are also typically not familiar with the way humanitarian programmes and the system works, impacting the relevance of the knowledge they produce and its applicability. Differences between different humanitarian programming levels and location (e.g., Global North versus South) also need to be taken into account. Besides translating, a shared space found through for example multidisciplinary or 'blended' teams where different areas of expertise come together can provide a platform for common language or understanding.

Ambiguity about the social sciences and what they can contribute to community engagement

From participants' experiences, it is often unclear what the social sciences can concretely contribute to community engagement in humanitarian action and how. It is also unclear what *different* social science disciplines can contribute to an interdisciplinary approach. Humanitarian practitioners might already use social science principles and tools, although they would not always refer to them as such or do not specifically ground them in social science theories and methodologies.

Temporality – (not) slow social science in emergency response

Community engagement relies on understanding the context, building trust and sustainable (working) relationships in and with communities. Understanding such context as part of social science research can take years. It can be extremely helpful to build on existing knowledge in the community and to have a network in a particular setting that one can connect to, to 'hit the ground running'. While action during a crisis needs to be rapid, dedication to the crisis throughout its cycle (including recovery and preparing for possible future emergencies), including funding, needs to be longitudinal. To social scientists, rapid information and data collection, and reporting may jeopardize the robustness of their data; they fear to leave things out or not get it exactly right. However, some social scientists also have used rapid data collection and analysis methods in humanitarian settings with valuable outcomes. These are further described in the detailed report and mentioned in the recommendations.

The standardization challenge

Academia-based social scientists tend to speak out against standardization, as standardization efforts may utilize the social sciences to provide a sense of legitimacy to imposing a fixed framework on individual contexts. Instead, they argue that social sciences should be helping to provide context-sensitive interpretations that refine, adapt or challenge standardized approaches offered by global or international agencies and donors. Humanitarian practitioners, on the other hand, see standardization as a means to warrant the quality and efficacy of humanitarian programming, and see in it an opportunity for the systematic integration of social science approaches in SOPs or protocols, budgeting and project planning. They emphasize that it is important for social scientists to know how such SOPs as well as other humanitarian protocols (such as the Humanitarian Program Cycle) and standards operate, to know when and how social science methods and insights can inform these and

steer steps in these protocols that can facilitate effective and inclusive community engagement. Accordingly a compromise towards the 'standardization for contextualization', recognizes the significance and need for community engagement to be systematically applied to identify nuances that expand the likelihood that communities lead on issues that affect them, especially during humanitarian action.

Localization, decolonization and the participation of communities

While community engagement is well implemented from an instrumental perspective, it is not recognized by respondents as a transformative activity leading to localization and democratization. Two thirds of survey respondents working in disease outbreaks indicated to have worked for a locally-led or funded project, but only half of respondents who worked in conflict settings and only one third working in hazard settings had worked for locally-led or funded projects. Community inclusion in social science research occurs in data collection and analysis, but still needs to improve in research design and dissemination. Communities are often not included in grant proposal writing, even if donors ask for community actors to be included. In addition, community leaders may be partisan, not representing all community members. For the sustained engagement of local actors, the support of international organizations in terms of resources (i.e., funding) and capacity-strengthening was highlighted as essential to 'institutionalize localization'. Local actors often lack training in project management.

Efforts are dispersed, not in dialogue with one another and not sustained

There are multiplied and/or parallel efforts in training and data collection. At the same time, there is lack of oversight and participants worried that each independent effort to collect social science information only provides a partial picture depending on areas of expertise, organizational mandates and thematic clusters.

The effectiveness of CE interventions is not measured, for lack of tools, time and/or intention, especially in the case of interventions with a project-focused, time-based character as is the case during most crisis. The lack of follow up also exists when it comes to the use of capacity development tools. With trainings, efforts are often not sustained, and mechanisms to reflect on what trainees have learned and assessments on how they apply the knowledge and skills from training are lacking.

Top-down decision making and resourcing, including hiring practices

There is a paucity of resources and efforts directed to CE in the evaluation and preparedness phases, which appears related to issues of power. Donor understanding and perspectives prescriptions of humanitarian action, research needs, and design, timeline and outcomes affect funding, prioritized interventions and programming and ultimately set the agenda. Decisions made at the top not only have great effects on the life cycle of projects, but also on human resource decisions. Hiring practices guide the composition of teams and have a great effect on the expertise existing in organizations, the dialogue taking place and the approaches that leads to. For example, women seem to have received fewer opportunities for social science work in community engagement. While multidisciplinary teams illustrate the value of social sciences for CE in HA across, additional shifts 'at the top' are needed to shift some control to communities or local actors and to allow more time and funding for activities that might not always render an immediate, measurable result. To stimulate donors and management, as well as hiring managers, towards more inclusive and multidisciplinary practices, it is vital they understand the contributions SS4CE and participatory community-led practices generally can bring. Donors and management don't fully understand SS or CE needs or their value. An SS4CE advocacy culture, in which contributions of the SS and CE in HA are made explicit and their wider inclusion or mainstreaming can help decision-makers, particularly donors and organizational leadership, understand what is needed.

SS4CE to support power shifts in humanitarianism and development

There is a general critique on the role of humanitarianism and the tasks it might maintain that local actors could take up instead. In addition, in many crisis contexts, there has been an encroachment of humanitarian agencies in the sphere of long-term or ongoing engagement, forming a structural presence. Yet humanitarian organizations do not collaborate on structural local efforts as they are guided by core humanitarian principles such as neutrality and impartiality, while development actors are considered partners with longer term engagements with national governments and other local actors.

There is little investment in how CE can boost preparedness. One of the most important things that needs to happen for inclusive, localized SS4CE, is a shift in power and responsibility

to local actors responding to, and planning for, humanitarian crises. A shift in thinking is needed towards sustainable, resilient and locally based systems in which international (humanitarian) organizations would play a supporting role to the existing systems: "humanitarian organizations need to phase themselves out."

Conclusions

The findings from the capacity mapping and needs assessment show how social science approaches can help unlock community perspectives, needs and capacities, and what institutional structures and mechanisms facilitate community engagement. Social science methods and knowledge can generate operational knowledge and inform the redesign of methods and objectives of humanitarian interventions by providing an understanding of context and of community dynamics and beliefs. They offer rich insights and a special attentiveness to context, but the social science perspective needs to be translated for humanitarian operational relevance, for example through faster data collection, analysis and reporting, but also by shorter reporting in clear, unambiguous language. Shared language and understanding between the social sciences and humanitarian practitioners will benefit SS4CE in HA. Social scientists can benefit from training in the mechanisms of the humanitarian program cycle, while humanitarians can benefit from methods and skills for data collection and analysis, as well as a different outlook – a social science lens – that can help make visible community experiences and resources needed for solutions mobilizing community knowledge and networks, they can encourage institutional actors to center these in programming.

Multidisciplinary approaches are key, as are collaborative efforts between different actors to improve coordination and knowledge exchange. Hiring staff from different disciplines for teams is helpful. On a management level, a cultural shift to valuing social science contributions across different stakeholder systems or institutions, with less short-term, project-bound investments and more support for local and structural efforts is key to stimulate sustainable community-centered efforts. To achieve sustainable change in crisis governance, effectively proven methodological approaches, such as those from the social sciences, as well as community knowledge and capacity, need to be systematically integrated into all phases and levels of humanitarian crisis governance.

Summary of institutional, structural and operational challenges to SS4CE integration identified in the project

Challenges to SS4CE integration

Knowledge transfer and the application of the social sciences in community engagement

- Different understandings, perspectives and language of social scientists and humanitarian practitioners
- Limited understanding of the value of social sciences and what they can contribute in community engagement in HA
- Timing, speed of data collection and reporting
- Making social science insights applicable for CE in HA
- Standardization and context-sensitive approaches

Institutional organization, structure and power

- Underutilization and exploitation of local actors, especially local community structures
- Fragmentation of efforts between humanitarian agencies
- Reluctance to fund CE and structural investments outside of projects
- Top-down decision making and resourcing, including human resource decisions and hiring practices
- Gender issues
- Humanitarian agencies in sphere of long-term or ongoing engagement otherwise taken up by local or development actors

Recommendations

Based on the identified needs and gaps for the integration of social sciences in community engagement in humanitarian action described above, the *SS4CE in HA Capacity Development* report provides seven major recommendations and best practices to inform and strengthen the integration of social sciences for community engagement in humanitarian action and programming in the fields of conflicts and hazards.

The implementation of these recommendations will support a sustainable way forward in humanitarian crisis governance based on inclusive, equitable representation and participation, in which lived experiences and knowledge of communities are systematically included. In operationalizing and facilitating the uptake of these recommendations it is further recommended that existing platforms and partnerships with capacity development mandates are leveraged rather than establishing or developing new initiatives.

A challenge is the disconnect between needs and decisions of frontline workers and teams in the field and the higher levels. This is not to be solved within the scope of this project, but it is a key issue that emerges in both the technical and operational recommendations as well as the capacity development recommendations. Needs and objectives in the field or technical and senior levels are not the same, and as reinforced through the multiple approaches for data collection in this project it was clear that often the funds do not trickle down to the agendas they were intended for. In terms of capacity development that might indirectly affect structural changes that benefit operational SS4CE capacities, some trainings now are more addressed to senior levels, as well as more technical ones for people who design and implement. But it is also key to pay attention to the way accountability structures and connection between the organizational and technical levels can get senior leadership and decision-making levels as well as influencing donors on board.

The seven recommendations and components within the recommendations are listed below. A detailed discussion of the recommendations is included in the report.

Strengthen technical and operational SS4CE capacities	Capacity Development for SS4CE
<p>1. Create a shared space with common language where understanding, language and approaches are exchanged</p>	<p>2. Develop field-based training infrastructure on SS4CE in disasters and conflicts</p>
<p>A. Create a glossary of standardized concepts and terms</p> <p>B. Co-create a toolbox focusing on commonly understood tools to translate the social sciences to humanitarian practice</p> <p>C. Foster multidisciplinary and interagency collaboration in a shared platform. Develop shared understanding of core competencies across agencies</p> <p>D. Motivate the creation of shared products and reporting mechanisms</p> <p>E. Communicate research findings in clear, operational language</p> <p>F. Develop different capacity development focal points tailored to varying information needs and skills, depending on the audience</p> <p>G. Consider roles and responsibilities for different profiles of humanitarian practitioners and social scientists</p>	<p>A. Develop a shared, cross institutional training infrastructure</p> <p>B. Facilitate field-based, direct training experiences where social scientists and practitioners collaborate in mentoring roles</p> <p>C. Follow up on implementation and assessment of trainings to measure continuous impact</p>
<p>3. Develop a better understanding of specific contributions of the social sciences to CE in HA</p>	
<p>A. Examine disciplinary strengths, relative to needs in the field</p> <p>B. Concise case studies, defining outcomes and impacts from SS for CE</p>	
<p>4. Effective and timely use of SS4CE within often time-sensitive emergency context of HA</p>	<p>7. Advocate for sustained, coordinated and collaborative SS4CE efforts, and define clear accountabilities of different stakeholders</p>
<p>A. Continue development, evaluation and capacity building of rapid data collection and analysis methods</p> <p>B. Use pre-existing networks and knowledge structures for rapid social science engagement.</p> <p>C. Develop strategies to include SS4CE outputs routinely and systematically for decision making by stakeholders at different levels</p>	<p>A. Address the patchwork of SS4CE efforts by stimulating a partnership based interagency collaborative framework</p>
<p>5. Develop context-sensitive principles – leave room for adaptation</p>	<p>B. Build an advocacy culture for SS4CE in HA</p>
<p>A. Need for principles that leave room for adaptation</p> <p>B. Attention to differences between and within different communities</p> <p>C. Examine gender issues</p>	<p>C. Include communities in all stages of the HPC and research cycle</p>
<p>6. Continue to build a more holistic, multidisciplinary framework</p>	
<p>A. Provide guidance for how multidisciplinary teams can be recruited, coordinated and employed</p> <p>B. Examine the specific disciplinary social science contributions to multidisciplinary teamwork (the right 'social science cocktail')</p> <p>C. Develop a multidisciplinary framework</p> <p>D. Continued support for ongoing collaboration, for example in multidisciplinary teams</p>	<p>D. Promote decolonial and localized perspectives from communities, social scientists and humanitarian practitioners in/from the Global South</p>



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