July 2011

TECHNICAL NOTE
Survey of Surveys

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1. Problem statement

There is currently no established set of standards, format, or methodology for monitoring and documenting assessment activities (the activity commonly known as the 'Survey of Surveys', hereafter referred as SoS) across the UNOCHA System / country offices.

An initial review of various UNOCHA country web sites shows that while most offices are collecting this type of information, there are numerous approaches being used with varying degrees of success and consistency. There are online Survey of Survey data collection forms, simple excel spreadsheets, static maps, and relatively sophisticated databases, but nowhere is this crucial assessment information being used to its potential.

The current approach to gathering and presenting SoS information remains ad hoc. In addition, an uneven update cycle and scope across the various humanitarian actors who conduct assessments mean that the SoS rarely tells the whole story for a given country, and as a result, may earn the reputation of being unreliable. This document is an initial attempt to lay the groundwork for a more structured approach to SoS data collection and a path to generating more meaningful SoS information products.

2. Survey of Surveys – Definition and Goals

The Survey of Surveys is defined as*…a country-specific repository of information on assessments which provides a comprehensive picture of those both undertaken and planned*[1].

The aim of an SoS is to provide a comprehensive picture of assessments in a given country affected by a humanitarian crisis as well as to share information widely and store for future reference. The SoS is used to help ensure geographic and temporal synchronization of assessments and may be used as a foundation for both assessment planning and shared analysis of those assessments which have been harmonized.

The goals of the SoS are to:

- Promote a shared understanding of the situation regarding assessment data collection in the field.
- Promote the temporal, geographic, and methodological harmonisation of assessment field activities.
- Reduce assessment fatigue, duplication of effort and donor fatigue by identifying complementary assessment plans and organizations for the purpose of collaboration.
- Highlight geographic and sectoral areas of overlap and gaps in assessment information and locations.
- Facilitate access to assessment reports, and the aggregation of the results where possible.
- Assist in prioritising the allocation of support to organisations conducting assessments to ensure that the data collected results in useful and shareable information.
- Create a database of what assessments have been done as a guide for planning future field assessments and for assessments to be used as secondary data sources of information.
- Contain assessment information in a standard way that can be used to create more value-added information products such as maps, charts, and reports with the minimum resource requirements.

[1] NATF Glossary

3. Challenges related to SoS

I. SoS often not presented in readily readable/intuitive format

- Where available, the SoS is often presented in a table format containing numerous assessments with no user friendly organisation or presentation.
- Patterns in coverage and themes are not readily apparent. Where mapping of assessment activities have taken place (West Africa for example), the results are 'one off', labour intensive, and offer little in terms of assessment comparison/ correlation.

II. SoS often out of date

- Maintenance of the SoS is often neglected or on an update cycle that is too long.
- As a consequence of staff turnover, the responsibility to update the SoS often remains unassigned or is unclear.
- There is no strong incentive for assessment actors to participate (no clear ROI), or it is not possible to update themselves.

III. SoS not always easy to find

- The frequent use of different names than "Survey of Surveys" can make it difficult to clearly identify the documents in different websites.
- The SoS is often buried too deep within UNOCHA or Oneresponse Web Sites, or the information is *siloed* in a proprietary Information system or database.

IV. Weak incentive to utilize the SoS Results

- In the majority of cases in the review, the SoS remains simply as data in a matrix; not a true or visual information product such as a map or the assessment *key findings*.
- They do not communicate well enough the patterns of assessment activity over time (assessment timeline), by theme (sector), or geography (administrative unit covered).
- SoS information is rarely exploited to its potential.

4. General recommendations

I. Summary

The management of the SoS should be formally incorporated into UNOCHA's Information Management (IM) practices at the early stage of a crisis.

The platform used for compiling and processing the SoS should also be standardised, using a low-cost, sustainable, scalable, and open source architecture that is web and GIS-enabled. The proposed example given here uses Google Documents as its basis.

The SoS procedures should be standardised and placed into four modules:
a) Data Entry
b) Data Consolidation
c) Mapping
d) Reporting.

This summary is expanded in the following three sections.

II. Formalize the SoS Procedures in UNOCHA IM Practices

The custodianship of the SoS should be integrated in the practices of either the UNOCHA Assessment coordinator (if present), or a member of the Information Management working Group at the country level.

Ideally the individual assessment actors should be enabled to enter the information, but the Assessment Coordinator / IMU should ensure that this is done. This task and responsibility should be included in their Job Description as well as in the Cluster Leads' Terms of Reference.

Creating an efficient and easy to use (and access) method of data entry should minimise the effort required to keep the SoS up-to-date. A more in depth *how-to-do SoS* should also be discussed within the Needs Assessment Task Force, in conjunction with the Information Management Task Force, and incorporated into the Operational Guidance package.

III. Standardize the SoS platform

The platform for the SoS should be online, open source, scalable, and easily customised. The platform should also be easily replicated for individual UNOCHA country or regional web sites.

Some key technical requirements for the platform include that it:
a) Supports multiple languages
b) Supports the use of forms
c) Supports the use of picklists (for data entry validation)
d) Can be hosted off-site
e) Can be GIS/Map enabled
f) Can export data in common formats (.xls, .csv. .doc, .pdf, etc)

IV. Standardize the SoS Modules

a) Data Entry and Consolidation:

Providing a simple online form to enter SoS information (as seen in UNOCHA's Libya SoS) reduces the effort required for both assessment actors to submit their information and information managers to compile and process it. The use of an online SoS data entry form such as this should be the standard practice for the data entry module of the SoS.

In addition, the data entry form should be linked to the SoS table or database, and submission of the form's contents should automatically populate it.

The compiled results should also be viewable online as an intermediate information product.

b) SoS Variables:

Below is a suggested list of variables distilled from the 20 SoS documents reviewed for this report. These should be viewed as the minimum; additional fields can be added, but none should be removed.

Name	Remarks
Cluster / Subcluster	Selected from picklist of cluster and subcluster names
Lead Agency	
Partners	
Title	Official name of the assessment
Objectives? Type?	Specify the type of survey – damage assessment, needs assessment, market study, etc.
Complete, planned or on-going?	Selected from 'picklist' of three options
Unit of Survey	Selected from picklist of possible options (i.e. focus group, community, household, key informant, other)
Data Collection/ sampling Method	Selected from picklist of possible methods (i.e. random, purposive, convenience, cluster, snowball, etc.) (multiple choice)
Sample size	Number of respondents
Province (Admin1)	Selected from 'picklist' of place names from Common Operational Data, text delimited for multiple entries
District (Admin 2)	Selected from 'picklist' of place names from Common Operational Data, text delimited for multiple entries
Sub district (Admin 3)	Selected from 'picklist' of place names from Common Operational Data, text delimited for multiple entries
Start date	Date format enforced (i.e. yyyy/mm/dd)
End date	Date format enforced (i.e. yyy/mm/dd)
Available documentation/data	
Contact name	
Contact email	
Contact phone	
Remarks	Additional information not listed
Unique ID	Generated automatically for each recorded Assessment, for relation to follow-on, more detailed SoS tables, databases, or GIS data. The Unique ID can also serve as the "Primary Key" if or when the SoS is implemented in a true Relational Database System (RDBMS)

c) Mapping: The SoS must be linked to Common Operational Data and GIS Enabled

Inconsistent place names in SoS forms is a major obstacle to the mapping of Assessment activities. If the SoS is not easily linked to GIS data (P-codes for instance), the effort required to rectify the problems mean that mapping is less likely to be performed.

All SoS forms should integrate the use of the country's Common Operational Dataset; specifically the entry of place names should be validated via the SoS data entry form to ensure consistent naming of geographic locations, to at least the second level administrative unit.

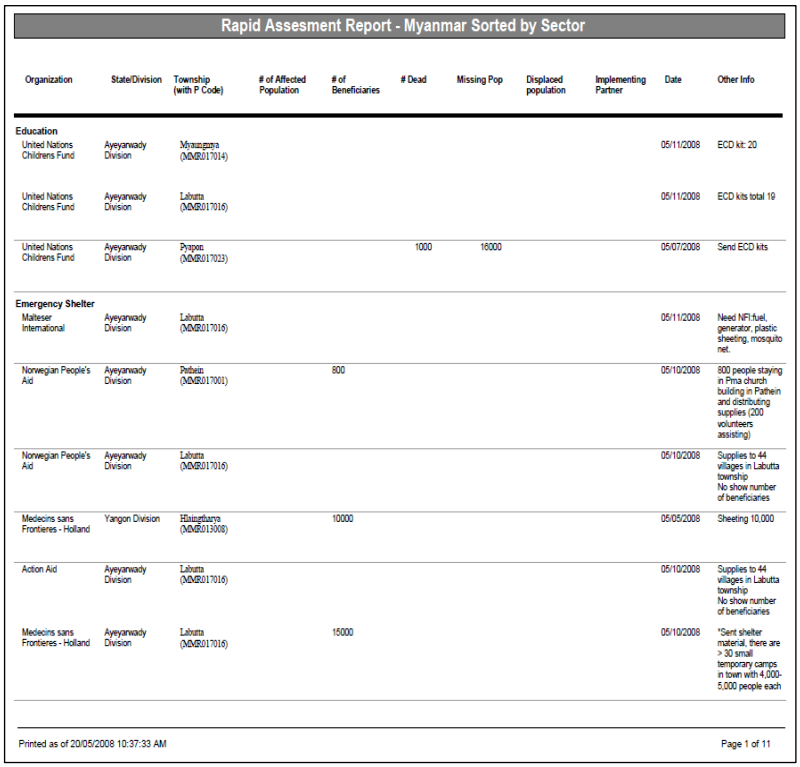
d) Reporting

Three different information products have been identified during the review:

The SoS table or database: The SoS end product is limited to the production of a database through which users can access last updated information about past, ongoing or planned assessments.

Mapping: In some cases (Myanmar, Sri Lanka), maps of past or ongoing assessment are produced, generally available per sector. This product has been proven useful for assessment coordination as assessment coverage and gaps are visually displayed per geographical areas.

Assessment key findings summary: In Haiti (earthquake 2010, annex 2), Myanmar (example in table, 2008) and Pakistan (Floods 2010, annex 3), some assessment summary reports were produced and updated, detailing the key findings of different assessments undertaken by NGOs or UN Agencies. These products have been proven useful as an example of harmonized assessment, although some challenges related to the transparency around the methodology used were reported by final users. The content of the summary is also limited by the good will of partners to share their assessment report and findings.



Rapid Assesment Report - Myanmar Sorted by Sector

Organization	State/Division	Township (with P Code)	# of Affected Population	# of Beneficiaries	# Dead	Missing Pop	Displaced population	Implementing Partner	Date	Other Info
Education										
United Nations Childrens Fund	Ayeyarwady Division	Myaungmya (MMR017014)							05/11/2008	ECD kit: 20
United Nations Childrens Fund	Ayeyarwady Division	Labutta (MMR017016)							05/11/2008	ECD kits total 19
United Nations Childrens Fund	Ayeyarwady Division	Pyapon (MMR017023)			1000	16000			05/07/2008	Send ECD kits
Emergency Shelter										
Malteser International	Ayeyarwady Division	Labutta (MMR017016)							05/11/2008	Need NFI:fuel, generator, plastic sheeting, mosquito net.
Norwegian People's Aid	Ayeyarwady Division	Pathein (MMR017001)		800					05/10/2008	800 people staying in Pma church building in Pathein and distributing supplies (200 volunteers assisting)
Norwegian People's Aid	Ayeyarwady Division	Labutta (MMR017016)							05/10/2008	Supplies to 44 villages in Labutta township No show number of beneficiaries
Medecins sans Frontieres - Holland	Yangon Division	Hlaingtharya (MMR013008)		10000					05/05/2008	Sheeting 10,000
Action Aid	Ayeyarwady Division	Labutta (MMR017016)							05/10/2008	Supplies to 44 villages in Labutta township No show number of beneficiaries
Medecins sans Frontieres - Holland	Ayeyarwady Division	Labutta (MMR017016)		15000					05/10/2008	*Sent shelter material, there are > 30 small temporary camps in town with 4,000-5,000 people each

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The main conclusion of the review regarding the reporting is that the SoS database is of little use if it is not complemented (at least) with map products. Databases are not easily readable nor inclined to be read by decision makers and do not reflect the full potential of the SoS when the visual display is limited to this stage. As a consequence, the absence of user friendly products discourage partners to report on their assessment activities as they don't clearly see a clear added value of such an effort. In that sense, improvement and investments realized around the 3W product may be of interest and applicable for reviving the SoS relevance and added value.

Some basic recommendations regarding the reporting are as follow:

a) SoS database should be linked to more user friendly product such as maps or assessment key findings.

b) If the end product complexity (report, maps, updates, summary) needs to be adapted to the in country IMU capacity, it is also crucial to understand that the information contained in survey of surveys are of greater interest at the early stages of a disaster (while first responders are consumers of situation analyses and needs related information) compared to later phases (when the situation becomes more stable and the SoS is used more as a repository of information).

c) Ideally and as soon as possible, one would be able to access regularly updated mapping of assessment activities per sector. With more time, it may also be possible to click on an interactive map (like the examples in the Figure 1 and 2) and have a pop-up appear with key information and findings of the related assessment. Reports can be generated and then linked to the SoS via the unique ID or Assessment name and can easily be invoked via interaction with the SoS map (pop-up, call-out, etc).

If it has been proven impossible to have such an interactive platform in place at the early stage of a disaster, some technical solutions proposed in the following pages of this report may be considered for future improvement of the SoS service and product and better preparedness.

5. Technical recommendations

IM and Assessment Coordination capacity are not universally high among the affected country and regional offices and the proposed solutions must reflect this. The key to implementing the SoS modules as described hereafter is simplicity.

To this end it is recommended that Google Documents suite of products and services (http://www.google.com/google-d-s/tour1.html) be utilised[2].

The existing working relationship between UNOCHA and Google (http://www.google.org/) and the humanitarian community also make this selection a logical fit, as does the potential to draw upon the rapidly growing Volunteer Technical Community (VTC) that employs open source technologies like Google Docs.

I. SoS Data Entry and Consolidation

Data entry can be relatively easily implemented online via Google Forms (more details here). This platform can also be integrated with an existing site using the Google Docs Application Programming Interface (API), described here .

II. SoS Mapping

The Google Docs suite can be leveraged into a simple web-based GIS using Fusion Tables, another Google web service. Data is stored in multiple tables that Internet users can view and download as charts, timelines, as well as interactive maps. Again, with some relatively simple customising, SoS data could be visualised very effectively and served online. At its very simplest, the Fusion Table approach could be used to present the basic SoS data cartographically, as seen in the figure below:

[2] *Google Docs is a free web service that provides word processing, spreadsheet, presentation, form, and data storage services, allowing users to create and edit documents online while collaborating in real-time with other users.*

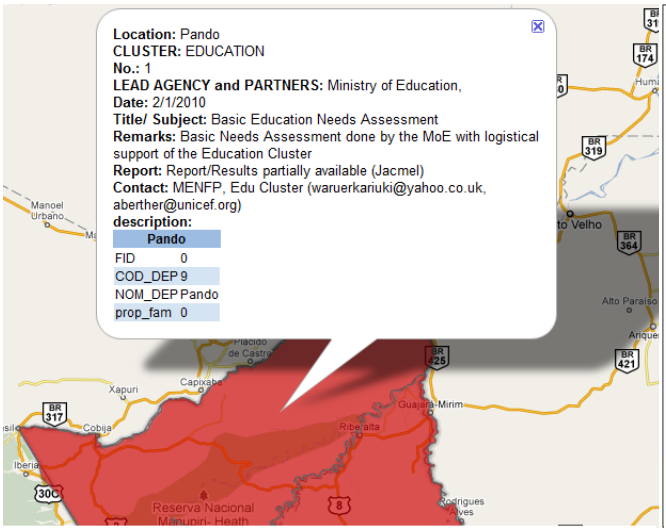

Figure 2: Example of a Google Documents' Fusion table used to create an interactive map: table data (SoS information) normalized and fused with a District map; clicking on a district displays additional information.

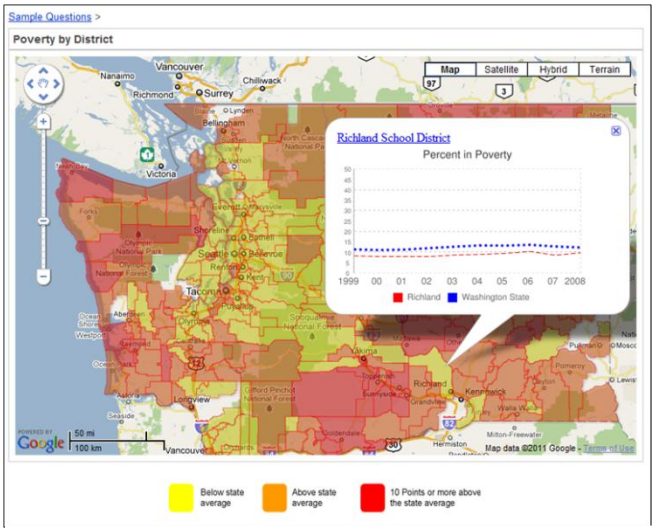

Figure 1 : A more sophisticated (but still relatively straightforward to implement) example of mapping using Google Maps and Fusion Tables

With additional customisation, there are opportunities to communicate SoS patterns and information much further, and allow for multivariate analysis, such as in the example in Figure 2.

One technical recommendation is to design a project sheet with the system specifications and requirement and to draw on the VTC to come up with some prototypes for those more advanced mapping activities using the Google API's.

6. Next steps

- Share the technical note with UNOCHA IM Section in Geneva for feedback and comments.
- Agree on the most adequate technical solution and further development required.
- Design a project sheet with system requirements and specifications.
- Identify and contact technical entities able to design the system and to run some simulation (crisis commons, Crisis mappers, Google, etc.).
- Follow up the technical development of the chosen platform(s).
- Design a technical brief on SoS, a step by step approach and best practices.
- Design a practical template for capturing key findings of available and public needs assessment and define triggers for potential updates.
- Decide on the need for a lighter and manual version (Google doc type), immediately usable during the first days of a disaster (e.g. UNDAC mission) which can later be integrated into a more refined SoS system.
- Develop and provide an improved definition of SoS.

ANNEX I – UNOCHA SoS products reviewed

Format	Country / Region	Title	Date	Author
Table	Ethiopia	Survey of Surveys as of May 2006	May 2006	UNOCHA
Table	Haiti	Survey of Survey	Feb 2010	UNOCHA
Table	Haiti	SURVEY OF SURVEYS HAITI 2010 Updated 4 June 2010 Updated 4 June 2010	June 2010	UNOCHA
Table	Haiti	SURVEY OF SURVEYS: HAITI 2010 (Updated 10 March 2010)	March 2010	UNOCHA
Table	Haiti	USAR Haiti Survey of Surveys	Jan 2010	UNDAC
Table	Indonesia	Survey of Surveys - Country : Indonesia	Feb 2010	UNOCHA
Table	Kenya	Kenya Survey of Surveys: Jan 2008	Jan 2008	UNOCHA
Table	Kyrgyzstan	Kyrgyzstan: Civil unrest Survey of Survey	April 2011	UNOCHA
table/form	Kyrgyzstan	Humanitarian Assessments and Monitoring - Assessment/Monitoring Database: Data collection sheet	June 2010	UNOCHA
Table/Form	Libya	Libya: Civil unrest - April-29-11 - Humanitarian Assessments and Monitoring - Assessment/Monitoring Database: Data collection sheet	March 2011	UNOCHA
Table/Report	Myanmar	Rapid Assessment Report - Myanmar Sorted by Sector	May 2008	UNOCHA
Map	Nepal	Who is Assessing / Monitoring What, Where? (Feb '06 – Oct '06)Far-Western Development Region	Oct. 2006	UNOCHA
Table	Nepal	Humanitarian Assessments and Monitoring	Feb 2009	UNOCHA
Table	Pakistan	Survey of Surveys Template	Sept 2010	UNOCHA
Table	ROLAC	Information Product by Agencies during Emergencies - dd/mm/yyyy	May 2008	UNOCHA
Database	Sri Lanka	Assessment Information Application		UNOCHA / Sri Lanka HIC
Table	Sri Lanka	No Title	March 2005	UNOCHA / Sri Lanka HIC
Map	West Africa	West Africa 30-April 2009 Who is Assessing What Where Food Security Nutrition Agriculture 2008/09	Apr. 2009	UNOCHA
Document / form	West Sumatra	Survey of Surveys		UNOCHA (Padang)