

CERTI

Crisis and Transition Tool Kit

RAPID ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES (RAP): Addressing the Perceived Needs of Refugees & Internally Displaced Persons through Participatory Learning and Action

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Background

Johns Hopkins University was tasked by CERTI to improve the capacity of NGOs to serve transitional populations. From previous experience providing technical support to NGOs, JHU faculty felt that most major NGOs had a good appreciation, knowledge and level of skill as regards quantitative assessment techniques. However, the level of awareness and knowledge regarding the need for qualitative techniques was low. JHU faculty felt from their own past experience (as well as reports in both the grey and published literature) that there was a huge need to combine both sets of techniques if NGOs were to conduct accurate assessments and evaluations across cultures.

Although there are rapid qualitative assessment tools available (such as the excellent tools produced by WHO), most of these are disease or problem specific, require pre-existing knowledge and experience with qualitative methods, and do not emphasize collaborative problem solving with the population. Under a previous CERTI contract we addressed the problem of lack of knowledge and experience by developing and testing a set of training materials for qualitative methods particularly suited to NGO local field staff. This testing included actual qualitative assessments done in cooperation with NGOs among the populations they were serving, to answer programmatically important questions. Under the most recent CERTI contract we used this experience and outside expertise to develop a set of Rapid Assessment Procedures (RAP) which included procedures for collaboration with the population. This 'RAP' is specifically designed for use by NGOs; to assess the needs of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

Original Project Objectives

1. To create an easy-to-use and rapid methodology for the qualitative assessment of the problems, needs and the general situation of refugees and IDPs.
 2. To create an easy-to-use and rapid methodology for facilitating local collaboration in identifying program priorities and planning interventions.
 3. To conduct at least one expert review of these procedures and one field test, to refine the methodologies and demonstrate their usefulness and usability for NGOs.

Field Applications for NGOs

The major application of these methods will be in the collaborative planning and execution of interventions which address locally perceived needs in ways which are understandable to those served and commensurate with local resources. We expect that with this approach NGOs will be able to achieve realize this type of program regardless of the ethnic group and situation in which they are working. In this way it is hoped that NGOs will produce interventions which more acceptable to local people, that directly address their needs, are more efficient and effective, and more sustainable than hitherto.

To this end the RAP was designed to help NGOs address 4 fundamental programmatic issues:

- What does the population perceive as their major problems/needs?
- Based on these priorities and available resources, which of these problems should the NGO attempt to address?
- Who (organizations and individuals, both within and outside the population) should be involved in addressing these issues?
- To provide NGOs with a process for participatory problem solving, planning and action with the population to address these issues.

Summary of the RAP Approach

The RAP is designed for use by NGO staff with some training and experience in qualitative methods (such as the training we developed) or under the direction of a person with such training. It includes procedures for qualitative sampling and data analysis, as well as a variety of data gathering methods. Multiple methods are used to provide diverse data sources which can be compared, to not only increase the amount of data but to assess data validity.

Data gathering methods used:

- Timeline
- Community mapping
- Walkabout
- Free Listing
- Pile Sorting
- Venn Diagrams
- Pairwise ranking.

Special methods are also used in the collaborative approach to problem solving and planning with the community. These include:

- Problem tree
- Objectives analysis tree
- Solutions Matrix
- Action Plan

These methods are used in turn to provide an ordered and comprehensive approach to deciding what issues to address, what aspects of the issues to focus on, and what the intervention will be.

Results of technical review of methodology

The critical review of the methodology was held in May of this year by six expert reviewers. Four were from NGOs involved in relief and development work, and two from academic institutions. All reviewers were pleased by the approach used in the RAP, and

with the RAP in general. The major changes suggested were:

- Emphasizing more participation by the local population
- Streamlining the RAP to focus on problem-solving
- Increased focus on including those marginalized in the population.

Lessons learned from the field trial

The field trial demonstrated the feasibility of this approach, given NGO resources. The major problem in implementation came in the training: It was apparent that some of the concepts used in the RAP materials were expressed in too complex terms and need simplification.

The population in the camp studied responded well to most of the data gathering methods, with the exception of pile sorting in some cases. It was apparent that some women were unused to expressing their opinions and found it difficult to think in the terms required by this method. The information gathered was very context-rich. Although the focus was on identifying and prioritizing problems, much information was gathered that would be useful in program implementation, particularly an understanding of available resources.

The procedures used to collaboratively prioritize problems, and to identify and plan solutions appeared to work well. However, more time is needed to see whether this approach is ultimately productive.