



1st Call for H.F.R.I. Research Projects for the Support of Faculty Members and Researchers and the Procurement of high-cost Research Equipment

PROJECT TITLE

**CREATIVE MULTILINGUALISM: FROM PRACTICE
TO RESEARCH TO EDUCATION (MEinART)**

PROJECT NUMBER

HFRI-FM17-710

HOST INSTITUTION

UNIVERSITY OF THESSALY

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

GEORGE ANDROULAKIS

DELIVERABLE 11

**REPORT ON NEEDS ANALYSIS
TOOLS AND RESULTS**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Chapters</i>	<i>Pages</i>
1. Definition, Purpose and Aspects of Needs Assessments	3
2. Principles in Conducting Needs Assessments	5
3. Rights-Based Approach	7
4. Participatory Approach, Community Engagement, and Accountability	8
5. Protection-centred Approach	9
6. Profiling	10
7. The Needs Assessment Process and Key Steps	11
8. Challenges for Needs Analysis with displaced people in urban settings	15
9. Needs analysis: the applied linguistics point of view	17

1. Definition, Purpose and Aspects of Needs Assessments

As stated in the UNHCR Needs Assessment Handbook, needs assessments involve systematically gathering and analysing information relating to the needs, conditions, and capacities of persons of concern – diverse women, men, girls, and boys of all ages, including those with specific needs – in order to determine gaps between a current situation and agreed standards. It must be conducted with the active involvement of persons of concern.

A needs assessment is defined as a data collection exercise usually conducted at a single point in time to gain an understanding of the protection issues, availability of resources, sources of problems and their impact on the affected population.

A needs assessment is triggered by a need to better understand a particular situation and the conditions faced by populations of concern, whether in the context of a response to a sudden crisis or an ongoing planning effort during a protracted crisis.

A needs assessment seeks to do some or all of the following:

- Identify the different protection needs and risks of diverse women, men, girls, and boys of concern, and establish priorities.
- Estimate the severity of conditions faced by diverse women, men, girls, and boys of concern, and establish priorities.
- Create a common understanding of differences in needs and reflect the diversity of conditions faced by relevant groups of persons of concern, including older women and men; persons with disabilities; persons belonging to minority groups; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons (LGBTI); and others.
- Identify existing capacities and resources of persons of concern, including positive and negative coping mechanisms, as well as partners and governments.
- Inform emergency or longer-term/multi-year programme responses to close gaps between an affected population's current status and the desired state.
- Support operational and strategic decision-making, including targeting.
- Avoid causing harm with humanitarian interventions.
- Inform the design of further assessments based in identified information gaps.

A well planned and executed needs assessment provides stakeholders (UN agencies, governments, partners, persons of concern, etc.) with a common understanding of the situation, humanitarian needs, and capacities. It assists in designing appropriate and proportionate programmes and activities by enabling evidence-based and transparent decision-making. Needs assessments can help provide the information required to make difficult prioritization decisions in light of constraints in resource allocation. An inability to prioritize humanitarian assistance and protection can lead to unnecessary suffering and even loss of life.

The centrality of protection should be considered throughout the assessment and be participatory, aiming to include the full spectrum of age, gender, and diversity of persons of concern. The level of participation will vary with the accessibility of the groups of persons of concern, size of the assessment, type of crisis, sectors to be assessed, and objectives.

Needs assessments are critical to *ensure core humanitarian principles* are upheld, including the following:

- Assistance and protection is both rights-based and needs-based: Persons of concern should be involved in the identification of their priority needs, and receive assistance and protection relevant to and appropriate for their needs and in full respect of their rights.
- Assistance and protection promotes and does not undermine safe local coping mechanisms and capacities: Affected populations are resilient and on their own will develop ways to cope with risks in order to fulfil their needs.
- The respective needs of different population groups are identified and understood: Not all affected groups will have the same needs. Not only will humanitarian needs differ for people of different sexes, ages, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, sexual orientation, and disabilities but also based on factors that might increase the risk of protection incidents, on socio-economic factors, and on other issues.
- Decisions regarding humanitarian assistance and protection are based on verifiable information: In order to explain the provision of assistance and ensure protection to populations – for instance, type of intervention, amount of assistance and protection, or the populations targeted – the humanitarian community needs verifiable information that provides both transparency and evidence for the decision-making process.

Decisions that need to be taken when conducting a needs assessment include the following:

- What information is needed to provide the necessary evidence base?
- Will the assessment serve multiple sectors or thematic areas?
- Will the assessment be a joint or harmonized assessment?
- Which geographic areas and populations will the assessment cover?
- What type of assessment is needed given the situation: initial, rapid, or in-depth?
- What is the host state's capacity to lead and coordinate the needs assessment, and how can UNHCR and other partners support this leadership of the process?

Different ***types of needs assessments*** are commonly used, and we can mainly distinguish between:

- Initial assessment
- Rapid assessment
- In-depth assessment.

Each is designed for responding to specific information needs and often corresponds to a particular point in the course of an emergency or programme cycle. Needs assessment types vary in depth, research method, time frame, and cost.

2. Principles in Conducting Needs Assessments

In order to ensure that appropriate attention is given to the diverse needs of persons of concern, UNHCR promotes key principles for needs assessments as well as participatory approaches and a protection-centred, rights-based approach.

All needs assessment activities are expected to adhere to key principles:

- **Do no harm:** Information sources should be protected by complying with best practices regarding privacy and confidentiality, and seeking informed consent.

Always keep in mind the safety of those who ask for and provide information, and note that any recorded information will need to be safeguarded against illicit use and sharing. The assessment process should not have a negative impact on societal tensions or exploit any segment of the population visited or interviewed. All needs assessments should result in a cleaned data set, eliminating all household identifiers.

- **Relevance:** Always keep in mind the purpose of the assessment, and collect and analyse only the data that is required for the specified decision-making task. Existing information needs to be compiled and reviewed before any decision is made to collect new data.
- **Adequacy:** The scope of the assessment should reflect the extent and nature of the crisis. The costs of collecting data should not outweigh the benefits of having it.
- **Timeliness:** The need for accuracy, comprehensiveness, and detail should be weighed against the speed with which critical decisions need to be made. Findings and related analysis should be disseminated in time to support decision-making.
- **Validity:** Standardized and rigorous procedures for the collection and analysis of data should be used to ensure credible results and minimize bias. Evidence should be provided to support findings and conclusions.
- **Transparency:** Methodologies and approaches used during an assessment should be made available. This includes any assumptions made during the analysis or any potential limitations on either the accuracy of the data or the sources used.
- **Impartiality:** A predefined analysis plan will ensure a predictive and objective process, and will minimize bias.
- **Disaggregation:** Ensure that the data is always disaggregated by sex, age, and other relevant factors including geographic area and sector, and that adequate analysis is conducted so that the assessment accurately captures the needs, conditions, priorities, and capacities.
- **Coordination:** Ensure that all stakeholders know when and where assessments are carried out. Involving a broad set of actors will strengthen the quality and usability of findings and their impact on the humanitarian response.
- **Sharing:** Share findings with other actors, national authorities, and the affected population while adhering to data-sharing principles and agreed data-sharing protocols or agreements, as relevant.

- Preparedness: Assessments are best undertaken when preparedness measures have been implemented and agreed in advance among stakeholders. Modalities for assessments should be part of contingency planning.
- Secondary data: Maximum use should be made of available secondary data. Primary data collection should focus on determining what has changed, validating data, and filling gaps in validated available secondary information.
- Continuity: No assessment is a one-off event. Rather, it is a process that should continue throughout a situation, adding to information on gaps and needs, and meeting any requirements for more detailed information to support operational decision-making. Always take steps in the design and implementation of each assessment to ensure comparability between data collected at different points in order to monitor trends.
- Age, Gender, and Diversity: Humanitarian assistance must be needs-based and consider that different groups within an affected population will have both common and unique needs, in line with the AGD approach. Persons of concern do not experience emergencies or their aftermath in the same way. Protection risks, needs, priorities, capacities, resilience, and coping mechanisms are varied, depending not only on age, gender, social roles, and other forms of diversity but also on the extent to which groups are able to participate in finding durable solutions to their situations.

3. Rights-Based Approach

A rights-based approach is a conceptual framework that integrates the norms, standards, and principles of the international human rights system into the policies, programmes, and processes of development and humanitarian actors. It therefore focuses on both procedures and outcomes.

A rights-based approach is founded on the principles of participation and empowering individuals and communities to promote change and enable them to exercise their rights and comply with their duties. It identifies rights holders (women, girls, boys, and men of concern) and duty bearers (principally the State and its agents), and seeks to strengthen the capacities of rights holders to make their claims and of duty bearers to satisfy those claims.

This requires an attitudinal shift in how humanitarian actors work with and for persons of concern. They are no longer viewed as beneficiaries of aid but as rights holders with legal entitlements. This shift requires that our policies, programmes, and activities be based on international legal standards, and that

members and leaders of the community consider their roles as both rights holders and duty bearers.

With all actors, it is important to analyse the obstacles to exercising these responsibilities and ways to overcome them. For example, States have a duty to provide education for children, while parents have a responsibility to encourage their children to attend school, providing that they have access to schools and the means to support their attendance. If necessary, UNHCR and partners may have to advocate for change so that such legislation conforms to human rights instruments.

4. Participatory Approach, Community Engagement, and Accountability

Needs assessments must adhere to the principles and practices of participatory and community-based approaches. While the scope and activities of participation may depend on the specific context of each situation, participatory and community-based approaches should be standard practices.

Although needs assessment activities are characterized as an exercise conducted at a single point in time to understand the various needs of a population, in practice different assessment approaches and tools can be used. These include highly qualitative approaches such as the UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessments, as well as more-quantitative assessment approaches such as IDP Profiling.

Regardless of the tool or approach chosen, participatory and community-based approaches must apply and guide all relevant aspects of assessment activities. It is good practice to establish a comprehensive assessment strategy that employs various assessment approaches to meet the needs of each sector, based on the level and types of operational data required to achieve the identified purpose.

Ensuring that persons of concern can exercise their right to participate in decision-making regarding their own lives, their family, and their communities requires meaningfully involving them in the full programme cycle, including all the needs assessment steps. Although it is crucial to use participatory assessment methods when data is collated and collected, diverse women, men, girls, and boys of concern should be involved in the other needs assessment steps as well. That includes understanding the context, defining the information needs, conducting the analysis, and sharing information – for instance, through refugee outreach volunteers. Specific initiatives may be needed to ensure the full

involvement of all persons of concern, including older women and men, youth, persons with disabilities, and LGBTI persons.

Accountability can be ensured by continuously consulting persons of concern and strengthening their participation in decisions that impact their lives.

To conduct a needs assessment in a participatory manner means to listen to diverse women, men, girls, and boys of concern speak about their own needs, priorities, and capacities so that they can take part and influence decisions instead of being passively subjected to them. A participatory assessment supports response design that leverages community capacities to increase equitable access to protection, services, and assistance. It will ensure:

- A more accurate and comprehensive understanding of a situation, including underlying causes;
- Minimized risks of exclusion of the needs, priorities, and capacities of marginalized groups by ensuring a balanced representation of all AGD groups;
- Identification of existing capacities and coping mechanisms in order to draw upon them in the response;
- Recognition and understanding of power relations among groups; and
- Contribution to improved relations between persons of concern and UNHCR and its partners.

5. Protection-centred Approach

There are a number of protection practices that need to be respected when collecting and handling information at any stage of a needs assessment. By incorporating these principles at the initial stages of a needs assessment, UNHCR can ensure that its activities target the most vulnerable, enhance safety and dignity, and protect and promote the human rights of beneficiaries.

- **Confidentiality:** The safety of those who either ask for or provide information is critical. Be mindful of which individuals are used as information sources, ensuring the confidentiality of participants in a needs assessment, being sensitive to who might overhear interviews, and/or not visiting particularly insecure areas.
- **Sensitivity:** When interviewing survivors and witnesses, assessment teams should be mindful of any suffering experienced by the affected population. Sensitivity is particularly important regarding the potential for re-traumatization

and vicarious victimization. The assessment team should have referral information available for when immediate mitigation and remedial actions are needed.

- **Integrity:** Assessment teams must treat all informants, interviewees, and co-workers with decency and respect at all times, and carry out their assigned tasks with integrity. Data collection teams should introduce themselves clearly and respectfully to assessment participants, and explain the goals and limitations of the assessment process, how the information will be used, and with whom it will be shared.
- **Informed consent:** Assessment teams must specifically ask respondents for their consent to use any information they provide. When interviewing children, parental consent must be sought as well as the child's assent. A respondent can always decline to answer a specific question. Personal information can never be disclosed or transferred for purposes other than those for which it was originally collected and for which consent was explicitly given.
- **Safeguard recorded information:** All data and information management activities must adhere to international standards of data protection.²⁶ Ensure the permanent confidentiality of recorded information, including the identity of respondents. Be mindful never to collect more information on individuals than is needed for analytical purposes. Consider using coded language and passwords, as well as keeping personally identifiable information separate from other information provided by respondents.
- **Participation and inclusion:** Action must be taken to ensure that participation in a needs assessment by diverse women, men, girls, and boys – including persons with disabilities, older persons, youth, and LGBTI persons – is adequately captured.

6. Profiling

Profiling displacement situations is the collaborative process of identifying internally displaced groups or individuals through data collection. It is intended to build a comprehensive picture of a displacement situation including demographics, needs, strengths, and vulnerabilities, often in comparison with host populations. Profiling is used to provide an evidence base for governments as well as humanitarian and development actors to advocate and fundraise for an improved response; to inform joint programming, policy development, and long-term solutions for the displaced; or to address other problems identified during the profiling exercise. Like joint needs assessments, profiling is

collaborative in nature, ensuring coordination between governments, humanitarian, and development actors in order to produce agreed upon results and inform joint action. Profiling makes use of multiple quantitative and qualitative methodologies for data collection and analysis, often involving household surveys with representative sampling. The core goal is to provide reliable estimates of the number of persons of concern, their characteristics (age, sex, location, diversity), and often their needs, capacities, coping mechanisms, and intentions.

A profiling exercise may:

- Provide population-profiling elements and characteristics;
- Contain a needs assessment component that can be considered in needs analysis; and
- Provide a solid basis by which to identify the need for specific sector assessments. In contrast to profiling, a needs assessment typically will use population data from external sources or rapid population estimation.

While needs assessments may be conducted during all phases of a humanitarian response, profiling is usually preferable in the later phases of a crisis. By that point, up-to-date and agreed disaggregated population figures are often lacking, or a comprehensive picture of opportunities and obstacles for achieving durable solutions is needed to inform policy development. Profiling and needs assessments can be seen as complementary in many cases. They can be conducted simultaneously or in tandem to optimize resources or when access to the affected population is likely to be difficult or expensive.

7. The Needs Assessment Process and Key Steps

Needs assessments are informed by key principles and implemented following a systematic process with key steps. Their complexity and scope will vary depending on the scale and context of emergencies.

Step 1: Understand Context

An initial desk review of available information to understand the context is conducted prior to any planning or data collection activity. This involves analysing existing pre-crisis data and information collected by other actors (e.g.

humanitarian organizations, national or local governments, civil society organizations) on the current situation. The aim is to build an initial understanding of the context and the crisis drivers in order to define further information needs, determine whether a needs assessment is needed, and identify which type of assessment will best address the information needs given available time and resources. Results of the review are summarized into a **situation analysis**, which seeks to:

- Define the scope, scale, and context of the current situation;
- Identify the initial needs and roles of affected women, men, girls, and boys of concern, including any sub-groups that have particular needs such as persons with disabilities, older persons, youth, or LGBTI persons;
- Understand the socio-political context and relevant legal/policy frameworks; and
- Identify protection risks and likely evolution, including projections based on data from previous similar emergencies that have happened with this population or in this context.

Step 2: Plan the Needs Assessment

Based on the results of the context review, the assessment project outline can be developed. Minimum requirements include:

- Clear and precise objectives and focus for the needs assessment, keeping in mind the purpose of the needs assessment, guiding principles for safe and ethical protection-related information management, the needs assessment coverage (populations, sectors, and geographic areas), the types of decisions that need to be informed, and the time frame by which they need to be made.
- An assessment project outline, including data collection and analysis methodologies, data collection tools, analysis plans, training and pilot plans, budget, human resources requirements, work plan, terms of reference, etc.
- Coordination modalities and arrangements if multiple actors are involved, including a plan on how to engage affected populations in the needs assessment process.
- Detailed information needs, organized into an analytical framework that shows the linkages between information categories and how they intersect analytically. An example of an analytical framework is proposed in Figure 8 and described in the text box that follows.

- An analysis plan that operationalizes the **analytical framework** and details indicators and sources for each information element sought, as well as how the information will be analysed.

The analytical framework:

- Supports and guides the collection and analysis of secondary and primary data by identifying key analytical questions;
- Provides a way to organize what data to collect and how to analyse it, and as well as how to describe the relationships and interactions between the elements that are to be measured;
- Supports a common analysis of where humanitarian needs and protection risks are most severe and which population groups are most in need; and
- Serves as a communication tool between stakeholders and should be considered as a reference throughout the needs assessment process.

Step 3: Collate and Collect Data

Needs assessments rely on both secondary and primary data and should always start with a desk review of available information, based on the analysis plan and in support of the analytical framework. For the purpose of this Handbook, primary data is defined as data that has been collected within the scope of a current needs assessment exercise, while secondary data has been collected outside that scope and for other purposes.

The **secondary data review** can be undertaken to understand the situation through consolidation of data that has been collected outside the scope of the current assessment exercise. There are several potential sources including previous assessments, situation reports, operations plans, and registration systems.

An important step in the secondary data review is to identify information gaps by comparing what information needs have been identified with the available data that has been consolidated. **Primary data collection** can then be considered in order to help validate information already collected and/or fill identified gaps in existing information. Different methods can be used to fill these gaps, including direct observations, focus group discussions, and interviews with persons of concern. These methods must be designed to ensure that women, men, girls, and boys (including older people, persons with disabilities, youth, LGBTI persons, those with specific needs, minorities, and

indigenous peoples) are given the opportunity to express their needs, priorities, and capacities.

An assessment registry should keep track of conducted and planned assessments, while a data repository should store assessment reports and data from a secondary data review. Data from primary data collection in the field is generally compiled into databases.

Step 4: Draw Conclusions: Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is a process that aims to make sense of information and to draw conclusions about the severity of conditions and humanitarian needs priorities. There are four different phases of analysis, including:

- **Description:** Grouping, summarizing, and comparing data based on the analysis plan in order to identify trends, patterns, outliers, and anomalies.
- **Explanation:** Determining why certain patterns and trends are present or emerging, and the underlying factors and processes that led to their existence.
- **Interpretation:** Drawing conclusions on severity and priorities. Interpretation also involves judging the amount of evidence that supports those conclusions and estimating the extent to which the findings can apply to others settings.
- **Anticipation:** Predicting or forecasting a situation's likely evolution(s) based on past and present data. This step provides information about potential future events and their expected consequences for the affected population, and helps to identify new and emerging risks.

Generally, the interpretation and anticipation phases of analysis are conducted jointly among the assessment stakeholders, i.e. in a workshop setting. Findings from the analysis are compiled into a final report, and all processing and analytical decisions are documented. The report and the assessment findings are the basis for a subsequent response analysis that draws strategic, programmatic, or operational conclusions based on current and forecasted severity and priorities.

Step 5: Share Information

The findings from the analysis step should be transposed into clear and persuasive information products and shared with relevant stakeholders. The most common output from such a process is the needs assessment report, including a concise summary of key findings and recommendations to assist

decision-making. Assessment results can be disseminated through many other information products in condensed formats, including verbal presentations and briefings. Dashboards, maps, and infographics can be used to visually illustrate the main findings and messages of the assessment.

Data, methods, and findings are shared as widely as possible with other agencies and actors in the humanitarian response. This includes the affected populations and assessed communities, who also should be given explanations about how the information will be used and what decisions it will impact. Protocols or agreements for the sharing of data should regulate the sharing of findings and raw data. It is important to share both internally and externally – including with persons of concern – but only after protection risks for all the actors who were or will be involved (i.e. data collectors, subjects, managers, disseminators, etc.) have been identified and mitigation strategies been agreed.

8. Challenges for Needs Analysis with displaced people in urban settings

As Mohiddin & Smith (2016) point out, the development of tools for needs assessment, response analysis and targeting relevant in urban and post-conflict contexts evidently still necessitates investment. The following overarching conclusions and recommendations can be drawn:

Urban programming is taking place but tools and guidelines are lagging behind. Many multisector displaced population needs can be met through markets. This has implications for urban response programming, with growing interest in multi-sector approaches, the provision of multi-purpose cash grants to meet all manner of needs, and targeting based on ‘multi-sectoral’ economic vulnerability. However, development of tools or guidelines to support this is lagging behind. For example, frameworks tend to be sector and/or thematic specific, making it hard to identify priorities between sectors, whilst targeting approaches that have been invested in the MENA region have not been translated into detailed guidance for the sector.

With this in mind, urban developed tools and approaches should take into consideration the opinions and needs of key stakeholders (such as governing bodies, employers and service providers) as well as hosting, non-displaced populations. As displaced population urban programmes increasingly support non-displaced populations and local government structures and service providers that facilitate access to basic needs, the inclusion of these actors in assessments, response analysis and targeting processes is required.

There is a need to move forward with developing and standardising urban tools on the basis of tried and tested approaches, creating templates for tools that can be tailored per context. In the food security sector, a follow-up of a desk review of urban tools concluded that deliberative tool development, field testing and standardisation (especially harnessing the skills and approaches of various agencies) was still lacking, compared to the undertaking of desk reviews and cataloguing (Nyemah 2015). It is important to take stock of what exists but there is a need to go beyond this, to take action to fill the gaps identified.

Urban needs and response analysis tools and approaches developed have to be coherent due to their interdependency in as much that most of the information required for good response analysis and targeting can be collected in needs assessment data and operational contextual analysis, especially that related to the political economy and power dynamics. Ensuring that these approaches and tools relate to one another could result in a more cost-efficient approach. For example, as stated by FAO 'Improved Response Analysis and Planning is itself limited by the quality of situational analyses and needs assessments' (FAO 2011a: 12), and it can be supposed that targeting methods are also limited in this regard.

Investment in assessments, response analysis and targeting must strike a balance between accuracy, timeliness and cost. Although this is not an urban-specific recommendation, it is particularly valid in urban humanitarian contexts since the dynamism of urban contexts and highly mobile urban populations (such as refugees) demands the use of tools that enable quick decisions. Ensuring that there is availability of sufficient, updated, good enough information regarding the needs, gaps and priorities and immediate future trends following any shock can be a challenge. ACAPS reviews of four recent disasters (Nepal, Syria, Nigeria and Ebola-affected countries) indicate varieties of information gaps (Benini et al. 2016). However, compilation of data on needs is a time consuming and costly process that can prevent a rapid response. Similarly in the case of targeting in urban areas, good approaches take time, resources and good preparedness (MacAusland and Farhat 2013). Efforts to develop approaches based on the extensive household surveys or proxy means tests can improve objectivity and perhaps also accuracy but is very costly and time consuming, which must be taken into consideration when deciding approaches. In their report Benini et al. propose that such compromise may be the best approach: 'if an assessment covers the areas affected (and the affected social groups living there), speaks to key concerns of preserving life and dignity, enables comparisons by areas, social groups or sectors, and is available within useful time, then its information is sufficient' (Benini et al. 2016: p.13).

Monitoring and evaluation processes must capture evidence of effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of new urban tools and approaches to improve the

uptake of response analysis and of new targeting approaches in urban contexts. The contribution of these tools and processes must be measured in terms of the extent to which they improve the overall effectiveness of responses. Humanitarian evaluations should include a reflection of decisions relating to programmes implemented, response analysis processes undertaken and targeting approaches (timeliness, cost and inclusion and exclusion errors) to enable this valuable advocacy and awareness raising.

Specialist organisational leadership in coordinating need assessments, response analysis and targeting approaches in complex, protracted post-conflict urban contexts is required. This not only ensures that specialist resources from organisations are utilised, but also to ensure that what is 'good enough' is applied. This is already happening in an ad hoc manner with UNHCR taking a lead in the development of targeting approaches based on economic vulnerability and in coordination with WFP to align this with targeting approaches for food assistance. In urban displacement contexts they are therefore a natural stakeholder to take the lead in such coordination.

Community awareness of urban tools and approach development could be improved to harness cross-fertilisation, piloting and application of new approaches. Despite warm and timely responses from the IASC and gFSC in undertaking this desk review, a challenge was faced in accessing sufficient information related to ongoing and/ or planned work in urban post-conflict contexts. The authors are in favour and see the benefit of specialist groups undertaking specific pieces of research and development, but would encourage greater transparency via discussion groups and learning portals, such as ALNAP's urban portal.

9. Needs analysis: the applied linguistics point of view

Needs analysis (NA) is nowadays recognised, in applied linguistics literature, as playing a crucial part in the process of language teaching and learning. In fact, individual and social NA is considered as providing validity and relevance to all course design and implementation actions. In a pioneer book in 1978, Munby introduced his strongly criticized but influential model which consists of two stages: (a) the "Communication Needs Processor" (CNP), set out under eight variables that affect communication needs and have dynamic relationships with each other, and (b) the interpretation of the profile of needs derived from the CNP in terms of micro-skills and micro-functions. Several other models followed, with their focus on the learner's situation (target situation analysis), on the learner's needs in combination with the teaching context (pedagogic needs

analysis) or on the specific language and communication goals pursued (register, discourse or genre analysis to needs assessment). The distinction underlying most of these models is the one between “objective” and “subjective” needs, established by Nunan. Thus, “objective” needs take into account biographical data, such as age, nationality, social profile, first language, literacy in other languages, etc., whereas “subjective” needs are based on information reflecting the perceptions, attitudes, expectations and priorities of the learner and may include information on the reasons why a learner undertakes to learn a second language, or on the classroom tasks the learner prefers.

NA is indisputably a complex process. In their early but significant works, Richterich and Chancerel point out that in general the learner is little aware of his/her needs and, in particular, he/she is unable to express them except in very vague terms. Porcher stresses that “speaking of a need is not the same as speaking in general of what is lacking. A need does not exist prior to a project: it is always constructed.” Furthermore, we are increasingly aware today that NA should not just be considered as a first stage for the design of language courses, but rather as an “on-going process”.

In an attempt to summarize the components of a NA for designing a language learning programme, and extending the still useful list that Dudley-Evans and St. John proposed, we may include the following:

- Context situation, in which the course will be run
- Personal information about learners
- Language information about learners
- Professional, cultural and social information about learners
- Learner’s deficiencies and strengths
- Language learning needs formulated by the learners
- Language learning needs formulated by the second language community
- Learner’s needs from the course
- Language and communication patterns used in the target situation
- Content analysis of documents used in the target situation.

In any case, a strategy about the NA in a given community and situation has to tackle some fundamental questions:

- Who will conduct the study?

- What kind of information is to be collected?
- How will the information be collected?
- How will the findings be interpreted?

Techniques and tools used in NA may vary considerably, from consultation with persons in key positions and in situ discussions to tests, scales and statistical analyses, from direct observation to records and report studies, from review of relevant literature and of case studies to questionnaires, interviews or focus groups. After all, most researches on language NA were not systematic and multifactorial, global and interdisciplinary, and thus it seems that mere intuition is still central in taking decisions about language course design. According to Long: "There is an urgent need for a serious research program (as distinct from one-off studies) focused on methodological options in NA itself."