

Keeping the Light On in a Time of Crisis

Why evidence still matters in humanitarian response

June 2025

A quiet crisis is unfolding at the heart of humanitarian response.

As funding models shift and global attention fragments, the data systems that power principled and impactful aid are starting to falter. Visibility is slipping. Disinformation is rising. There is now a risk that hard-won progress in evidence-based action could be lost.

This isn't just a resource gap — it's a turning point. Without urgent action, we risk losing the ability to see, analyse, and respond to needs at the speed and scale crises demand.

Principled and impactful aid depends on a strong evidence chain — but in 2025, three critical links are under pressure: availability, analysis and usage.

1 EVIDENCE MUST BE AVAILABLE — Or the Lights Go Out

Without data collected with and from affected populations, we can't see who needs assistance — or whether aid is working. And in 2025, the system is at real risk of going blind.

Across crises contexts key data systems, such as SMART surveys, DTM mobility tracking and Multi Sector Needs Assessments (MSNA) are under significant strain and in many cases, have been fully suspended. At IMPACT, we are witnessing serious disruptions to some of our core services:

- **MSNAs:** In 2025, only 5 full-scale and 9 partial MSNAs are planned. While this limited data coverage may offer some support to the HNO and HRP processes this year, it raises serious concerns for 2026—when over \$10 billion in humanitarian funding could be allocated without a robust and reliable evidence base.

- **Rapid Assessments:** 10 of 15 IMPACT priority emergencies have limited and patchy capacity for rapid assessments. These are essential for detecting shocks like conflict displacement, disease outbreaks, or sudden flooding — where delays cost lives.
- **Market Monitoring:** 7 of 16 Joint Market Monitoring Initiatives are likely to close, undermining the ability of humanitarian actors to assess whether local markets can support cash-based responses, or whether in-kind delivery is more appropriate.

Each of these data collection systems supports core decisions about who to help, how, and where. Shutting them down means losing visibility in the very crises where people are most vulnerable.

Maintaining these primary data pipelines is not a luxury — it's a necessity.

Created in 2010, IMPACT Initiatives is a Geneva-based NGO and the largest independent data provider in contexts of crisis. Through the REACH initiative in particular, we aim to support a range of stakeholders in making better, more informed decisions in humanitarian, stabilisation, and development settings. We believe that a key pathway to better planning and decision-making is direct engagement with local communities and their leaders. Through our team of assessment, data, geospatial, and thematic specialists, we deliver high quality research, based on people-centred approaches, and rigorous standards for collecting and analysing data in complex environments. IMPACT also aims to foster partnerships and build capacities with key stakeholders.

2 EVIDENCE MUST BE ANALYSED – Or Needs Will Be Missed

Data alone doesn't drive decisions. It must be analysed — and translated into clear, usable insight.

The humanitarian community is increasingly dependent on core analysis systems such as the JIAF and the IPC. These analysis systems are under strain and should continue to be supported.

At the same time, critical gaps in our understanding remain:

- **Who is most urgently in life saving need of assistance?** (Across all areas affected by a crises)

- **What types of assistance do communities say they need?**

- **What forms of assistance actually work?**

To fill these gaps, IMPACT is launching a new workstream, that is structured, timely, and decision-focused. It enables cross and within crisis-level prioritisation even when traditional data sources are missing, patchy or delayed. And it equips coordination actors, donors, and responders with the insight needed to plan and act more effectively.

3 EVIDENCE MUST BE USED – Or We Plan Badly

Collective humanitarian planning processes, such as the HPC, remain the cornerstone of prioritization decisions. The core elements required for credible, principled and impactful planning are now under pressure.

To strengthen these processes, we need a model that:

- Ensures the delivery and uptake of **credible, representative data**
- Supports **fairer resource allocation** through transparent needs estimation
- Prioritizes **taking decisions on community-expressed needs**, not just supply-side considerations, such as agency mandates.

IMPACT, through its REACH initiative, is committed to supporting this shift. Our data collection systems and analysis products are designed to plug into Humanitarian Needs Overviews, inter-agency coordination mechanisms, and agency [inclusive of donors] planning processes — helping improve the speed, focus, and credibility of collective response.

At the same time, we recognise the humanitarian coordination architecture is in flux. With structural reform underway — including the UN80 initiative and wider humanitarian “reset” discussions — our model must remain flexible and independent where needed.

We are prepared to act with the humanitarian coordination architecture when it works — and to act outside of it, when it falters — ensuring critical insights remain available regardless of institutional uncertainty.

2025 is a critical year. Funding is tight. Needs are growing. Resources are constrained. Tough prioritization choices must happen. Systems are being tested.

Through its REACH initiative, IMPACT's response is clear:

- Keep core data pipelines alive
- Analyse evidence to highlight urgent needs
- Support better collective decisions — and act independently when required

Because principled and impactful humanitarian action depends on having the right evidence and analysis — even more when the system is under strain.