

Accountability to Affected Populations

Nigeria, March 2020

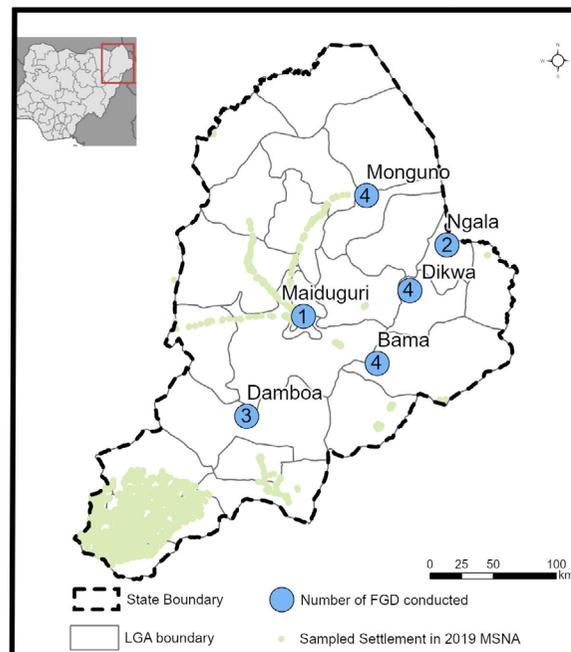
INTRODUCTION

As the protracted crisis in North-East Nigeria progressed in its eleventh year in 2020, humanitarian needs in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY) States remain dire and multifaceted. The conflict has resulted in 7.1 million individuals in need of humanitarian assistance¹. Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) principles are highlighted as key objectives in the 2019-2022 Humanitarian Response Plan for Nigeria under the wider bracket of protection. Objectives included “ensure accountability to affected populations by establishing feedback mechanisms through which they can measure the adequacy of interventions and address any concerns and complaints”². Therefore, REACH conducted an AAP assessment in Borno state, with the objective of strengthening the evidence base around affected populations’ perceptions of humanitarian assistance and feedback mechanisms, and inform human-centered approaches to humanitarian programming. This assessment combines the findings of the 2019 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) with qualitative data from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

METHODOLOGY

During 2019, REACH conducted an MSNA³ across all three BAY states. In Borno state, data collection took place between 17th June and 30th July 2019. After data cleaning, 3,160 household surveys were analysed from Borno, covering Internally Displaced People (IDPs), returnee and non-displaced population groups. This assessment used a two-stage cluster sampling designed to collect data with a confidence level of 90% and a margin of error of 10% for all accessible areas within a Local Government Area (LGA), and for each population group at the state level.

Map 1: Borno MSNA and FGD sampling



To further explore the AAP findings from the MSNA, REACH undertook a qualitative study comprised of FGDs and a panel discussion.

In total, 17 FGDs were conducted across 5 LGA capitals in Borno and one panel discussion in Maiduguri. FGD Data collection took place between March 4th and March 23rd 2020. The panel discussion took place in October 2019, following MSNA data collection and analysis.

The FGDs were stratified into three groups; beneficiaries, national non-governmental organisation (NNGO) staff and community leaders, and international non-governmental organisation (INGO) staff. This allowed information from multiple perspectives to be collected. For this study, beneficiaries were defined as IDPs, either living in camps or host communities, who have received humanitarian assistance in the 6 months before data collection. These beneficiaries were identified by IDP community leaders within camps and host communities. These beneficiary groups were separated by gender, with two separate FGDs being undertaken in each LGA capital.

Data was collected by REACH field officers, using a semi-structured interview guide developed from the findings of the 2019 MSNA. One field officer acted as the FGD facilitator whilst the other took notes on the answers responses from participants. These notes were then digitalised and analysed for key themes.

REACH conducted 10 beneficiary FGDs, 4 NNGO and Community leader FGDs and 3 INGO FGDs. The location of these FGDs are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Location and Type of FGDs

LGA	INGO FGD	NNGO and Community Leaders FGD	Female Beneficiary FGD	Male Beneficiary FGD
Bama	X	X	X	X
Damboa		X	X	X
Dikwa	X	X	X	X
Monguno	X	X	X	X
Ngala			X	X



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LIMITATIONS

- MSNA enumerator teams only interviewed heads of households, which may skew some responses. These head of households were more likely to be men, meaning the AAP findings of the MSNA may not take into account the perceptions of women and girls.
- Due to limited accessibility in North Borno, data collection was predominantly carried out in the urban LGA capitals, potentially skewing responses away from rural households in these areas.
- REACH used community and camp leaders to select the beneficiary IDPs during the FGDs, potentially leading to a selection bias.
- Findings from the FGDs and panel discussions are indicative only and are not generalizable for the LGA or the state.

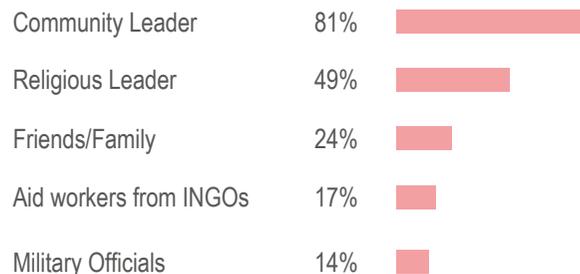
KEY FINDINGS

The key findings section will present the quantitative findings of the AAP section of the 2019 MSNA and the findings of the qualitative assessment, both conducted by REACH. The qualitative findings of the FGDs and panel discussions are used to provide context, nuance and explanation to the findings of the MSNA, creating a deeper understanding of AAP mechanisms within Borno State.

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

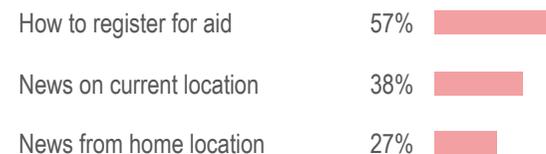
During the 2019 MSNA, a large majority of households selected community leaders and religious leaders as their most trusted sources of information (refer to Figure 1). This finding was consistent across all population groups at the state level.

Figure 1: Top 5 Most Commonly Reported Trusted Information Source ⁴



In INGO and NNGO FGDs, community leaders were identified by INGO staff as a “trusted link” to the community. As an INGO participant explained, spreading information through community leaders also helps to “build acceptance” for the information, as these individuals are well known to the community and better understand them. An NNGO participant added that these people were “trusted” by their communities.

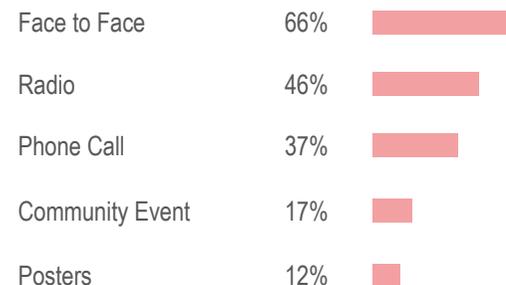
Figure 2: Top 3 Reported Preferred Type of Information⁵



When asked in the MSNA “What type of information would you like to receive from Aid Providers?”, 57% of households selected how to register for aid, as shown in Figure 2. This was the most popular choice across all three population groups, followed by news on current location (38%) and news on home location (27%). Participants in all beneficiary FGDs reported that they specifically wanted to be kept up to date on distributions of food and non-food items.

In the MSNA, 42% of IDP Households in Borno indicated that they wanted to hear news from their home location. Participants in 8 out of 10 of the beneficiary FGDs, sampled from IDP populations, reported that they would like to hear whether their home area is safe for them to return and whether those still in the area are currently safe.

Figure 3: Top 5 Reported Preferred Means of Communication ⁶



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When asked “What means of receiving information do you trust the most?”, 66% of households in the MSNA selected face to face, the most popular choice across all three population groups (refer to Figure 3). Face to face interactions includes interactions with aid workers, community leaders or other stakeholders. Some participants in beneficiary FGDs reported receiving information verbally, whilst both INGO staff and NNGO staff in the FGDs reported that they currently use a mix of face to face communication and community leaders to disseminate information. INGO participants in the panel discussion also indicated they used volunteers to disseminate information.

INGO and NNGO staff also reported using posters, banners and other forms of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials to disseminate information. Participants in eight out of ten beneficiary FGDs identified that IEC materials were being used in their community. Whilst participants in the beneficiary FGDs reported materials were often translated into languages specific for each LGA, including Hausa, Kanuri and Margi, NNGO and community leaders identified that there are low levels of literacy amongst the target population, particularly amongst the most vulnerable members of the community. Participants in the Dikwa Beneficiary FGDs and participants in two of the three NNGO and community leader FGDs highlighted the use of community leaders to translate the IEC materials. This is another example of community leaders playing a role in the dissemination of information.

Whilst the community leaders play an important role in disseminating and create legitimacy for information, the REACH field teams observed that an over-reliance upon them creates the risk of community leaders acting as gatekeepers to information, preventing information from reaching the most vulnerable in the communities. A focus on well-designed pictorial messaging may reduce this risk, allowing direct access to information for the whole community.

Radio was reported as the second most preferred means of communication in the MSNA, with 46% of households in Borno reporting it as a preferred means of communication. This is despite only 40% of households reporting they owned a radio. When explored further, beneficiaries in some of the FGDs reported that they often used phones to listen to the radio. INGOs and NNGOs staff also reported during FGDS that they use loudspeakers to play jingles in the settlements to spread information.

CONSULTATION

During the MSNA, there was a low level of awareness reported by households on whether consultations on aid had taken place in their community. At the state level, 78% of households reported that neither they, nor the leaders in their community, had been consulted on the assistance they received or would like to receive. This compares to only 16% who reported that they or their community leaders had been consulted. Knowledge of consultations was slightly higher within IDP and returnee households, (both 23% compared to 10% of non-displaced households). These households were more likely to report receiving assistance in the last six months, with 46% of IDP households and 44% of returnee households, as compared to 12% of non-displaced households.

In all beneficiary FGDs, some participants reported either being consulted directly or being aware that their leaders had been consulted. Female beneficiaries identified that they were more likely to be consulted directly by NGOs if the issues were gender specific or relating to protection programmes, rather than NGOs undertaking consultations with the predominantly male community leaders. The sampling of the FGDs, specifically IDPs who had received assistance in the last six months selected by community leaders, perhaps explains the higher level of awareness of consultations than in the MSNA.

Within the INGO FGDs, there were differing responses on whether they ran assessments, dependent on the types of projects being implemented. Some of the INGOs within each of the FGDs claimed to undertake a combination of FGDs or Household Surveys as part of needs assessments within the community. Other INGOs and some NNGOs indicated they used sector data before consulting with community leaders to ensure the information was up to date and the assistance was appropriate.



30% of households that received assistance reported that the assistance received was inappropriate to the needs of the community.⁷

Within INGO FGDs, staff operating in food security reported that they did not undertake regular food security needs assessments. Instead, one staff member reported that they “give beneficiaries what they receive from the donors”, rather than undertaking regular assessments and modifying the programme to reflect the results. This sentiment was agreed by other staff working on food security interventions within the FGD.



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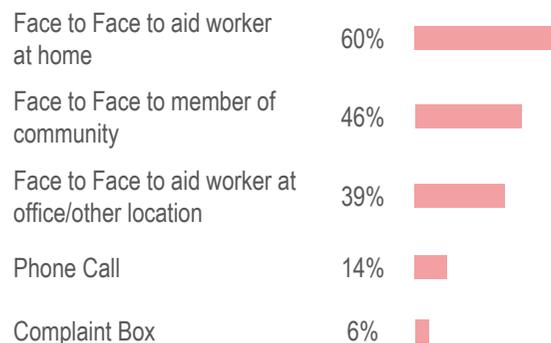
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Some participants in the community leaders and NNGOs FGDs reported that the delay between the initial consultation and assessment phase to the implementation phase meant needs changed and elements of the assistance had become inappropriate. This was particularly relevant for seasonal assistance, such as providing seedlings for planting or mosquito nets. Other beneficiary FGDs and NNGO and community leader FGDs commented upon the quality of the food. Participants in three FGDs indicated that the size of portions, taste and type of food was inappropriate for their needs.

FEEDBACK SYSTEMS

Households in the MSNA selected a range of face to face methods as their preferred means for giving feedback regarding aid, with face to face with aid worker at home being the most picked (60%), followed by face to face with member of community (46%) and then face to face with aid worker in other location (39%) (refer to Figure 4).

Figure 4: Top 5 reported preferred mechanism for providing feedback⁸



There were disagreements between the beneficiaries within the FGDs regarding whether it was better to provide feedback to community leaders or NGO staff directly. In some FGDs, beneficiaries reported the community leaders offered understanding and provided their complaint with more weight, increasing the likelihood that they would receive feedback from the NGO. Some female beneficiaries reported that they had developed relationships directly with NGO workers that allowed them to report incidents of sensitive and gendered issues. The key theme throughout was the ability for beneficiaries to receive feedback on their complaints. Face to face methods, either with community leaders or with aid workers, allowed for quicker feedback, increasing the feeling within the beneficiaries that their complaint was being heard.

Participants in most beneficiary FGDs and community leaders agreed that there were long delays between making a complaint and receiving feedback. Beneficiaries in FGDs in each of the LGAs complained of waiting long periods of time without hearing from the NGOs regarding whether the feedback was being acted on.

During the MSNA data collection in June and July, phone calls were chosen by 14% of households, despite the lines being free and operated widely across Borno. The REACH field officers indicated that during MSNA data collection, there were network issues across the garrison towns in North Borno. Since the MSNA data collection, mobile networks have increased their coverage across the state, which may lead to an increase in popularity. Community leaders and NNGO staff in the FGDs conducted in Dikwa agreed that they had since been given access to mobile networks by providers, so beneficiaries would be more inclined to use the hotlines set up by NGOs. Whilst certain hotlines run by INGOs had their operational issues, it was identified by some INGOs, NNGOs and community leaders that a phone line allowed complainants to express their complaint without reliance upon writing skills.

Staff members from every INGO that took part in the FGDs reported operating complaints boxes. Despite widespread availability, they were only reported as a preferred method of feedback by 6% of households in the MSNA. Participants from all three types of FGD revealed that a multitude of issues stopped the complaints boxes becoming widely adopted across the LGAs. Participants in one beneficiary group, the INGO panel discussion and 4 NNGO and community leader FGDs identified that literacy was a key obstacle to beneficiaries using complaints boxes. Among some participants within the beneficiary FGDs, there was a perceived lack of feedback once the complaint has been made using the complaints box. Some participants in beneficiary FGDs claimed the boxes were rarely emptied and, when they were, feedback from these complaints would take months to arrive, if at all. Some community leaders in one FGD reported that they believed many of the complaints boxes lacked locks. This perception may reduce trust in the modality even further, with these participants concerned sensitive issues within the complaint would no longer be confidential.

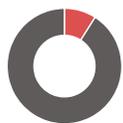
The lack of feedback, or long delay before receiving feedback, along with a lack of locks, even lead NNGO and community leaders in one FGDs and beneficiaries in another FGD to claim that the complaints may be being destroyed. If a perception like this were to spread, it is likely to cause mistrust, inhibiting other AAP feedback systems and lines of communications.



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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AID WORKERS AND BENEFICIARIES



9% of households that received assistance reported they did not feel respected by aid workers.⁹

The high levels of respect and feeling of safety reported by households that had received assistance were broadly confirmed by the FGDs. However, localised issues were raised. Beneficiaries in a FGD in Bama discussed the high tensions between beneficiary IDPs within the camps and the Host Communities volunteering to deliver food distributions.

In the panel discussion in Maiduguri as well as one FGD, some INGO staff members reported that armed forces and Civilian Joint Task Force had previously provided security for food distributions. The INGO staff explained that these groups have previously been accused of mistreating beneficiaries, leading to some beneficiaries at some of these food distributions to not feel safe or respected. These localised issues were associated with NGO activities, which may have a knock on effect for trust in NGOs and AAP mechanisms.



4% of households that received assistance reported they did not feel safe whilst receiving this assistance while 96% reported that they felt safe whilst receiving assistance.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

Observing AAP principles is vital for ensuring that assistance being provided by humanitarian actors remains relevant and effective.

This assessment found that information dissemination requires understanding the information needs of the target population and ensuring that the information is understood by the target population. Currently, humanitarian actors use community leaders to disseminate this information, legitimising the information through trusted messengers and providing beneficiaries with a means to seek clarification.

There was limited awareness of consultations by NGOs within the 2019 MSNA findings. Whilst NGOs did report they conducted FGDs and needs assessments, few households within the MSNA were aware of these consultations. Participants within the beneficiary FGDs reported knowledge of community leaders being consulted on projects. In the forum provided by the FGDs, beneficiaries raised concerns about the assistance they received, particularly seasonality and the items supplied during food distributions.

There was a perception amongst both community leaders and beneficiaries that feedback mechanisms were slow to respond to complaints, particularly complaints boxes. Ensuring the smooth running of these feedback mechanisms allows humanitarian actors to be responsive to the needs of the communities they work within. Therefore, improvement in this area is vital for ensuring that aid delivered is suited to beneficiaries' needs.

Whilst the majority of beneficiary respondents in the FGDs and households within the MSNA reported that they felt safe whilst receiving assistance, the humanitarian principle of "Do No Harm" means NGOs must be aware of when they may be placing beneficiaries at risk. This risk may come from tensions with other population groups or armed actors providing security.

To conclude, frequent consultations, appropriate feedback mechanisms and appropriate information dissemination mechanisms is needed for humanitarian actors to be responsive to the needs of beneficiaries. Since the global outbreak of COVID-19, AAP principles have only increased in importance. Further research is needed to develop the themes in this assessment, such as whether beneficiaries prefer face to face consultations in the context of a contagious disease.

ENDNOTES

1 OCHA, [Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019 Nigeria](#)

2 OCHA, [Humanitarian Response Strategy Summary 2019-2022 Nigeria](#)

3 REACH [Multi-Sector Needs Assessment 2019 Full Report](#)

4 Multiple answers could be selected in MSNA Household interviews

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7 Findings relating to subsets of a population and therefore have a lower confidence level and a wider margin of error

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