OBJECTIVE 4
Strengthen Humanitarian Operations and Coordination

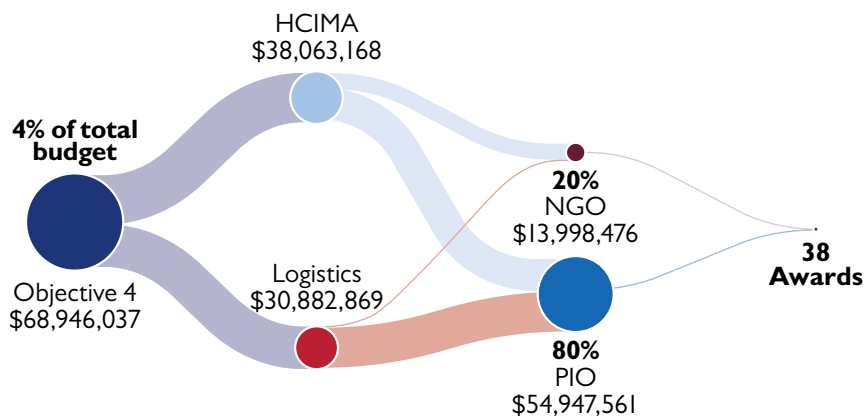**Sub-Objective 4.1:** Enhance logistics platforms and common services

Sub-Objective 4.2: Improve humanitarian information management and coordination services

Sectors: Logistics, Humanitarian Coordination, Information Management, and Assessments (HCIMA)

OVERVIEW OF AWARDS

HCIMA
$38,063,168

4% of total budget

Objective 4
$68,946,037

Logistics
$30,882,869

20%
NGO
$13,998,476

38 Awards

80%
PIO
$54,947,561

Note: Excludes two multisectoral HCIMA global awards reported in Obj 5 funding.

KEY FINDINGS

- The Cluster system was strengthened in supported countries, with mixed results at sub-national levels

- The awards supported improvements and innovations in IMA

- Limited Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) capacity hindered coherence of the pandemic response

- HCIMA funds were generally used in line with BHA's objectives, yet, could have been more effectively distributed and used

KEY RESULTS

72 percent of awards supported Clusters and coordination platforms

7,707 organizations used IM services of NGO HCIMA awards

9 awards: primarily to support United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) transport services centered in Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Nigeria

212,762 UNHAS passengers with 92 percent average satisfaction; 950 organizations served

30,855 Metric Tons of cargo shipped through Logistics Cluster

PROMISING PRACTICES (HCIMA)

Innovations to better utilize secondary data (e.g., local media and social media) and adapting remote data collection methods

Increasing joint and multi-sectoral assessments: 78 percent of the HCIMA awardees led, participated, or supported assessments

Supporting Clusters with technical and cross-sectoral expertise

Consolidating a shared evidence-base for advocacy such as around vaccines for vulnerable populations

Expanding some coordination staffing and leadership at sub-national levels

PROGRAMMING CONSIDERATIONS

1. BHA's support for greater coherence within the humanitarian system such as funding joint assessments, sharing data, and muti-sectoral planning should be continued and strategically and transparently expanded. This includes donor support to strengthen OCHA's role in these components.

2. Continued donor support to the Cluster system is important but should be based on assessment of system and country-level gaps. Ongoing investments are needed to promote participation by local organizations and to strengthen sub-national mechanisms.

3. BHA should also increase funding to technical innovations of NGOs whose focus is data and information management.

Background

Effective humanitarian coordination and shared services are critical to ensure humanitarian actors work together efficiently to meet the needs of those impacted by crises. Humanitarian work requires real-time data and robust analysis to understand the needs of populations and prioritize assistance. To this end, BHA allocated about four percent of the Supplemental to Objective 4: HCIMA/Logistics. This included multi-level plans to enhance logistics platforms and common services for the continuity of operations and improve humanitarian action with information management and coordination mechanisms.

HCIMA funding was distributed across 35 awards in 16 countries plus five global awards.[1] Over half (52%) went to awards in Africa. South Sudan received the most funding, followed by Syria. PIOs received more HCIMA awards (64%) than NGOs. Eight awards were stand-alone HCIMA; otherwise, HCIMA funds as a percentage of the multi-sectoral BHA awards ranged from less than one percent to 68 percent (average 17%). Further results on Logistics investments from the Supplemental are discussed in the Thematic 1 study. Objective 4 findings were developed by triangulating information from review of all available award reports, external grey literature, interviews with nine IPs (26% of HCIMA awards) and three BHA representatives.

Results: Including Key Drivers and Challenges

Note: Limited indicator results are reported for this sector. Table 1 in Annex E.4 provides the HCIMA indicator results for NGO awards. For PIOs, this funding was often added to other funding streams and with limited reporting on the sector, and there are no common indicators to aggregate.

Key Finding: The Cluster system was strengthened with country-level assistance but with mixed results at sub-national coordination levels. HCIMA funds went directly to support Clusters in 13 of 16 countries based on award reporting. More than 72 percent of awardees specifically reported support to Clusters' coordination, working groups, and other coordination platforms. BHA funded the HCIMA sector and clusters because data, digital technology, and humanitarian coordination can save lives. The evaluation finds the following key areas of support to coordination systems, through:

- Availability of improved data, information, and assessments
- Provision of technical assistance and expertise
- Consolidated evidence-base for advocacy
- Support to expand some coordination at sub-national levels

"The partners were out there, collecting data. [HCIMA] funds allowed us to get to places where partners were, re-establishing some of the rigor, ensuring standards, providing support, and making sure authorities were engaged." IP KII OA

Clusters are heavily dependent on humanitarian actors to provide data and information, and despite many challenges and gaps, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Clusters played an important role in coordination at the global and country office levels during the pandemic (IAHE, 2022). This was critical due to movement and other restrictions, combined with the fragmented governance structures in some humanitarian contexts (IAHE, 2022; WHO, 2023). While Clusters bring their own technical expertise, they also rely heavily on the expertise of humanitarian actors in-country, which was particularly crucial for sector

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[1] The OCHA award included five countries. Two multisectoral global awards were reviewed under Objective 5. It should be noted seven other HCIMA awards were masked by BHA, limiting in-depth review and interviews with these IPs.

responses to a novel disease, according to KIIs with IPs and BHA. HCIMA awards supported actors with strong technical expertise to support these platforms. In Niger, an IP worked with ten coordination bodies, including Clusters, on the agreed scope and indicators of a 2022 Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment. The supported Clusters also coordinated or participated in a variety of multi-sectoral and joint assessments according to KIIs and reports. Joint assessments with a strong methodology and transparent implementation are a way to reduce duplication, create a common understanding of needs, and build trust with crisis-affected communities.

Coordination platforms were also used to consolidate data and information to create a timely and reliable evidence-base critical for advocacy for vaccines and other issues. Award reports described how one coordination body in Syria used their joint information to advocate with authorities on issues ranging from border crossing closures to health facility support, and response to new conflict-driven displacement.

There is some evidence that the awards supported the expansion of coordination at sub-national levels, though with some mixed results around durability. Coordination systems at the national level are often removed from the specific coordination needs at sub-national levels, particularly in large responses, a challenge well documented; but the shift to virtual coordination during the pandemic allowed for wider participation (HygieneHub, 2023; IAHE, 2022). Humanitarian coordination is also heavily reliant on staff availability and not conducted in/nor translated to local languages, and thus, more difficult for meaningful participation by smaller or local NGOs (USAID READY, 2023; IAHE, 2022; WHO, 2023). According to IP interviews and reports, HCIMA funds were often used to support coordination platforms at the sub-national level. This allowed for coordination to be closer to the relevant populations, allowed for more decentralized decision-making, and created space for the participation of a wider range of local actors. For example, in South Sudan, IPs were supported to provide sub-cluster leadership and sub-national coordinator staffing support across various sectors. The Supplemental funded key humanitarian reporting that shows these sub-national structures supported during COVID-19 were often inadequate and with weak links established with the national mechanisms (WHO, 2023). More discussion of system-wide challenges affecting these results are provided in Annex E.4.

Key Finding: The awards supported improvements and innovations in IMA. Yet, gaps in OCHA's capacity to support effective coordination and planning during a global emergency, including data sharing mechanisms, limited the coherence of the pandemic response. Not only was data collection an issue in the first two years of the pandemic, but how data were shared, protected, and used became a central challenge within the HCIMA space (IAHE, 2022). In addition, inter-agency competition for funding exacerbates the tendency not to share data. The lack of a coherent "humanitarian data ecosystem" (Berens, J. et al, 2017) including minimum standards for data protection and ethical use, came into stark focus during this response (Bump, J. et al, 2021). Thus, the evaluation finds that any move in the direction of jointly gathering and sharing data should be considered one small step towards greater coherence. Humanitarian actors generally responded to the dearth of data in two ways depending on the country context: First, they relied more heavily on secondary data. Second, they found innovative ways to collect primary data.

The evaluation finds HCIMA supported better use of secondary and local data sources. One IP, whose primary mandate includes mining, analyzing, packaging, and disseminating existing sources of secondary data, said that the stakeholders receiving their information "often had no other sources of information than what we were providing." Another IP said they went back to their existing dataset and found untapped data that was used to develop their information products. Still another IP used BHA funds to create regional teams, comprised of staff from that region, to expand their ability to access secondary data and information in local languages. In addition, they broadened their data and information sources to include local media and social media. There were, however, concerns about secondary data usage. Data were rapidly expiring as knowledge of COVID-19 and its primary and secondary impacts evolved. IPs expressed concern that outdated secondary data were being used to project the likely impacts on affected populations, with very little new data coming in to inform the current situation.

The evaluation finds HCIMA also supported IPs to collect critical primary data despite challenges. As noted above, HCIMA funds encouraged joint assessments and multi-sectoral assessments, which reduced duplication. An estimated 78 percent of the HCIMA awardees led, participated in, or supported assessments, according to award reports. This was corroborated by more than half of awardees interviewed specifically discussing their roles in such assessments and the benefits in-country. These are notable as a contribution to the commitments of the Grand Bargain.[2] IPs often integrated new tools for remote data collection and monitoring such as through phones and other mapping techniques. IPs and BHA moved toward a "good enough" approach to use available or readily accessible data to make the best decisions at that time, approaches that are now more systematic and robust as a result of the pandemic; recognizing the limitations of excluding vulnerable groups (OCHA, 2021; IAHE, 2022).

"[HCIMA awardee] data feeds into our security analyses ahead of field missions. Sometimes, these security analyses can lead to a mission being cancelled or the itinerary being changed for security reasons." ~IP KII MENAE

KIIs agreed that the Clusters did not adequately prioritize information management, data and analytics staff, tools, and deliverables to support the influx in information being processed. Given the multi-sectoral nature of the responses, another need that emerged was for IM staff that worked across clusters. KIIs noted a positive shift in recognizing the importance of IM overall for humanitarian response. Based on evidence and external literature, the evaluation finds it is unclear if existing IM gaps in staffing come from a lack of funding or a lack of will to prioritize these roles in the Cluster system (IASC, 2019; IAHE, 2022; WHO, 2023); nonetheless, the need is evident.

These challenges around collecting and sharing humanitarian information and data during the pandemic and prioritizing IMA have exposed weaknesses in the humanitarian coordination system and in OCHA's role. OCHA played a crucial role in coordinating the COVID-19 humanitarian response according to KIIs. It facilitated key meetings with Humanitarian Country Teams and Inter-Cluster groups, providing vital political negotiation where necessary, and it provided a platform for data consolidation (if data were available). Though evaluation evidence shows OCHA struggled to fulfill its mandate and was overwhelmed by the global emergency caused by the pandemic and its secondary effects. OCHA struggled due to inadequate resources for IM and technical roles, wide variation in country leadership capacities, and challenges in holding more powerful actors accountable to data sharing and coordination systems.

Key Finding: HCIMA funds were generally used in line with BHA's objectives, yet, could have been more effectively distributed and used. Overall, awardees used HCIMA funds in a way that met BHA's funding objective. These new ways of working have given humanitarian actors something to build on for future pandemics. The HCIMA global NGO awards were key to BHA's objective to improve humanitarian action through better data, timely needs analysis, information management services, and capacity building (ICVA, 2021). The evaluation finds that more NGOs with a clear IM mandate could have benefited from a larger share of the funds, particularly at country level. Funds directed to PIOs often supplemented existing programming or were used to top-up other sector funding, making it challenging for them to account for specific expenditure. Conversely, smaller actors as well as global NGOs particularly focused on data analysis and aiding humanitarian efforts and heavily relied on HCIMA funds. KIIs acknowledged the shortcomings of the current humanitarian coordination system and showed willingness and agility for new

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2   Grand Bargain calls for needs assessments that are impartial, unbiased, comprehensive, context-sensitive, timely and up to date. The process must be coordinated, impartial, collaborative and fully transparent with a clear distinction between the analysis of data and the subsequent prioritization and decision-making. Independent reviews and evaluations can contribute to learning and improvement of practice. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/improve-joint-and-impartial-needs-assessments

approaches. In addition, despite HCIMA forming a core objective of the funding, it is unclear how funding allocation decisions were made. Neither BHA COVID-19 emergency guidance nor internal funding criteria address HCIMA sector priorities. KIIs reveal that HCIMA allocation was based on ad hoc requests rather than assessment of optimal and strategic global usage. The evaluation finds that enhanced transparency combined with stronger sector indicators and reporting[3] could have diversified access to HCIMA across actors, fostering more innovative proposals and maximizing funding impact.

Programming Considerations

1. BHA's work towards greater coherence within the humanitarian system through funding joint assessments and muti-sectoral planning, data and information sharing, and harmonizing activities should be continued and strategically expanded. This includes increased transparency in HCIMA sector allocation decisions. Donor support is needed to strengthen OCHA's role in ensuring appropriate data protections and inter-agency data sharing mechanisms are in place before the next global emergency.

2. A strengthened Cluster system will help the push towards coherence, and continued donor support is important but should be based on assessment of system gaps for strategic allocation of country-level funding. In addition, BHA can further USAID's localization agenda (USAID, 2023) by earmarking funds for addressing issues that prevent local organizations from actively participating in the Cluster system and strengthening sub-national mechanisms.

3. For innovation, analysis, and cost-effective HCIMA results, BHA should increase funding to the nimble and creative technical NGOs whose focus is data and information management.

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3 This is discussed in the BHA FY 2020 COVID-19 Supplemental Evaluation including a corresponding recommendation. This evaluation continues to agree with the previous findings around strengthening HCIMA reporting.