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ASSESSING THE DG ECHO INDEX FOR HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS AND CONTEXTUALISATION OF IT IN THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS: THE IMPACT OF RUSSIA'S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE (COMMENCED IN 2022)

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Abstract. *The devastating war in Ukraine has created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, demanding a multifaceted response from humanitarian organizations. The DG ECHO Index, a widely used tool for assessing the effectiveness of humanitarian operations, has faced scrutiny for its applicability in complex crises like this. This chapter focuses on the efficacy of the DG ECHO Index in the Ukrainian context, exploring its strengths, limitations, and potential for improvement.*

Through a mixed-methods approach, this chapter delves into the lived experiences of humanitarian practitioners, analyzing qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. Additionally, it examines quantitative data on humanitarian operations in Ukraine, aiming to assess the index's effectiveness in capturing the nuances of complex crises.

The chapter opens with a comprehensive overview of the DG ECHO Index, discussing its strengths and limitations. It then delves into the specific challenges posed by the Ukrainian crisis, highlighting the index's applicability in a multi-actor environment with numerous humanitarian programs operating simultaneously.

The chapter further analyzes the 2023 adaptation of the DG ECHO Index by the Bureau Of Population, Refugees, & Migration, exploring its potential to address the identified limitations. By examining the impact of this adaptation, the chapter ultimately aims to provide valuable insights and recommendations for improving humanitarian evaluation tools and enhancing their effectiveness in complex crisis contexts.

This chapter contributes to the ongoing dialogue on the efficacy of the DG ECHO Index and the development of more effective tools for assessing humanitarian operations. By providing evidence-based recommendations and practical insights, this chapter seeks to empower humanitarian organizations operating in Ukraine to refine their response and address the unique challenges presented by the crisis.

The Chapter's findings will be of interest to researchers, policymakers, humanitarian practitioners, and anyone concerned with improving the effectiveness of humanitarian response in complex crises like the war in Ukraine.

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Summary of Findings and Generalizations

1. SDH 1: Safety During Assistance Process
 - Issue: Ambiguity in activities covered and not specific to different types of assistance (e.g., bank transfer vs. physical distribution).
 - Clarification: Specify the different stages of assistance (registration, bank visits, using funds electronically) and tailor it to the mode of assistance.
2. SDH 2: Respect from Implementing Partner Staff
 - Issue: Unclear which implementing partner (local NGO vs. INGO) the feedback pertains to in programs with multiple partners.
 - Clarification: Ask separately about treatment from local NGO staff and INGO staff. Include context-specific prefaces to guide respondents.
3. MEA 1: Satisfaction with Assistance/Service
 - Issue: (Newly identified) General satisfaction question without specified organization or service type.
 - Clarification: Specify the organization or the specific type of assistance for more targeted feedback.
4. MEA 2: Awareness of Excluded Individuals
 - Issue: Unclear which organization's exclusions are being assessed; lack of clarity on eligibility criteria.
 - Clarification: Specify the organization and the type of assistance/service. Include context about eligibility criteria.
5. ACC 1: Channeling Suggestions or Complaints
 - Issue: Ambiguity around which organization's feedback mechanism is being referred to; potential confusion in multi-actor environments.
 - Clarification: Specify the organization and provide examples of channels (e.g., feedback boxes, hotlines) used by this organization to make it clear.
6. ACC 2: Responsiveness to Suggestions or Complaints
 - Issue: Unclear which organization's follow-up actions are being assessed.
 - Clarification: Specify the organization and ask explicitly about their specific feedback mechanisms. Include follow-up questions for detailed responses.
7. PEM 1: Views Taken into Account
 - Issue: Unclear which organization or program considers the views; general approach not tailored to specific accountability actions.
 - Clarification: Specify the organization and provide examples of how feedback is collected (e.g., surveys, community meetings). Include follow-up questions for further clarification.
8. PEM 2: Information about Assistance/Service
 - Issue: General question not specific to information dissemination actions by different organizations.

○ Clarification: Specify the organization or program and provide examples of communication methods (e.g., leaflets, SMS). Include follow-up questions for detailed feedback.

Generalization for the Block

● Ambiguity in Multi-Actor Environments: Many questions are unclear when multiple humanitarian organizations are operating in the same area. This leads to confusion and mixed responses from beneficiaries.

● Specification Needed: Questions should be tailored to specify which organization, type of assistance, or specific accountability actions are being referred to.

● Detailed Feedback Collection: Including follow-up questions and examples of specific actions can help clarify and obtain more precise responses.

● Disaggregation for Analysis: Data should be disaggregated by organization and type of assistance to provide clear, actionable insights. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of beneficiary experiences and the effectiveness of different humanitarian actors' interventions.

Implementing these clarifications and adjustments will make the feedback from beneficiaries more accurate and actionable, leading to better-informed decisions and improvements in humanitarian assistance programs.

Conclusions

The DG ECHO Index stands as a formidable tool for assessing the performance of humanitarian operations, offering a comprehensive framework that captures crucial dimensions of humanitarian assistance, including relevance, coherence, effectiveness, and impact. However, its application in complex crisis environments, such as the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, underscores the need for adaptation and contextualization to ensure its maximum utility and accuracy.

Indicator as a Process Measure

From the research, it is evident that the DG ECHO Index is particularly effective when used as a process measure rather than merely a result level metric. This approach aligns better with real-time field conditions and adaptive management strategies, allowing for continuous improvements and adjustments in response to dynamic and often unpredictable humanitarian environments. Tracking the indicator as a process measure facilitates timely interventions, supports more nuanced analysis, and enhances the overall humanitarian response.

Need for Clarification and Contextualization

1. Clarification of Indicators:

○ The wording of the questions used in the DG ECHO Index needs to be precise and context-sensitive to avoid ambiguities and ensure accurate data



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collection. This includes specifying different forms of assistance (e.g., cash transfers, physical goods distribution) and distinct stages of aid provision (e.g., registration, delivery, usage).

2. Contextualization for Specific Crises:

○ Given the complexities of the Ukrainian crisis, where numerous humanitarian actors operate and various types of assistance coexist, it is crucial to adapt the DG ECHO Index to reflect these unique conditions. Disaggregating data by local NGOs, registration points, geographical locations, and types of assistance can provide deeper insights and more targeted recommendations.

Specific Findings and Recommendations

1. Comprehensive and Objective:

○ The DG ECHO Index remains valuable for offering a balanced assessment by incorporating both quantitative and qualitative indicators. However, ensuring that these indicators are well-defined and contextually relevant will enhance their effectiveness.

2. Enhancing Data Collection and Analysis:

○ Utilizing disaggregated data allows for a more granular analysis. By breaking down data by local NGO performance, registration points, geographical locations, and assistance types, humanitarian organizations can identify specific areas for improvement and best practices.

○ Example disaggregations include:

■ By Local NGOs: Assessing performance variations among different implementing partners.

■ By Registration Points: Identifying logistical or security issues specific to certain points.

■ By Locations: Understanding regional differences in service delivery effectiveness.

■ By Types of Assistance: Tailoring strategies based on the unique challenges and benefits of various forms of aid.

3. Addressing Subjectivity and Bias:

○ The reliance on beneficiaries' subjective perceptions can lead to biases. Mitigating this involves integrating qualitative assessments and beneficiary feedback with traditional data collection methods, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of humanitarian operations' effectiveness.

4. Continuous Improvement and Feedback Loops:

○ Establishing regular feedback loops and real-time data collection mechanisms ensures that humanitarian organizations can respond promptly to emerging issues and changing needs. This dynamic approach supports ongoing improvements and alignment with beneficiaries' needs.

Recommendations for Humanitarian Organizations

1. Customization:
 - Adapt the DG ECHO Index to address specific regional challenges and donor requirements, ensuring the indicators used are relevant and actionable.
2. Training:
 - Provide extensive training to field staff on data collection and analysis, ensuring consistency and accuracy.
3. Robust Feedback Mechanisms:
 - Establish mechanisms for incorporating continuous beneficiary feedback, enhancing the relevance and responsiveness of humanitarian interventions.
4. Utilization as a Continuous Improvement Tool:
 - Emphasize the use of the DG ECHO Index within a continuous improvement framework rather than as a static evaluative tool. Regular updates and refinements based on field experiences and new insights will ensure its sustained relevance and utility.

In conclusion, the DG ECHO Index is an effective tool for assessing the performance of humanitarian operations, but its utility is maximized when used as a process measure. Adapting and clarifying the index for specific crisis contexts, such as the complex and multifaceted situation in Ukraine, is essential. By incorporating detailed disaggregations and ongoing feedback mechanisms, humanitarian organizations can ensure more precise, actionable insights that drive continuous improvement in their interventions. This approach aligns with the overarching goal of enhancing the effectiveness and impact of humanitarian aid in serving affected populations. Through these adaptations and ongoing refinements, the DG ECHO Index can continue to play a pivotal role in advancing the quality and accountability of humanitarian responses worldwide.

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