

Overview of key assessment tools

Introduction

The relevance, quality, reach and sustainability of National Society services can be maintained by periodic assessment exercises. Broadly speaking, assessments exercises analyses criteria such as capacity, performance, quality, and identify weaknesses or obstacles. This brief overview of key assessment tools is intended to provide basic information on their use in a nutshell.

Before the assessment

Before deciding to launch into an assessment process, consider the following:

Define what it is the NS wants to achieve in setting off on this path. Consider carefully which process or methodology will help you achieve your goals or objectives. This should inform which, if any, assessment tool will support that development process.

In selecting the process or methodology, ensure that you fully understand what it entails to reach the goals you have set. Bear in mind that assessments are the start of a journey and not the destination. If no plan exists to follow-up on any actionable points, there is little reason to carry out an assessment.

If the set goals are to be reached, a strong commitment or buy-in to the change/development process is needed on the part of the NS leadership. The outcome of the assessment has to be acted upon to reach set goals. One critical element to bear in mind is the need to allocate sufficient resources, for example human and material resources, before setting off on the assessment process. If a previous assessment has been undertaken, be sure to use as much of the lessons learned and information you gathered in that exercise in the assessment process/methodology you have chosen.

After the assessment

The assessment is only the first step of the development. For tangible changes to occur, a National Society will need to define how it will share the findings more broadly within the NS (discussion at the Governing Board, sharing with branches, etc.) and externally (partners, etc.), how action will be planned for (process for prioritization, translation into concrete measures, etc.) if need be, and what resources (focal point, funds, etc.) will be made available.

To ensure buy-in and ownership at all levels of the NS, disseminate the outcomes of the assessment and clearly explain why this change/development process is being undertaken, and what is at stake for everybody (governance, senior management, staff and volunteers, branches, etc.). Engage your partners to support the development/change plan. This can be achieved by sharing the assessment results or the related plan with partners.

Choosing the right assessment tool

Defining what you wish to achieve is perhaps the single most important decision you will make. The tools presented below will guide you which is the right assessment process for your needs.

- The Organizational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC) is a broad/comprehensive assessment process. It assesses both the performance and capacity of an NS.
- The Branch Organizational Capacity Assessment (BOCA) is for a general check-up of a branch or branches.
- The Preparedness for Effective Response Capacity Assessment (Well Prepared National Society (WPNS) and Disaster Response Capacity Evaluation (DRCE)) tools are the preferred option when an assessment of a NS disaster management capacities is needed.
- The Safer Access Framework (SAF) Assessment and Planning is aimed at increasing and maintaining NS acceptance, security and access to people and communities in need. While applicable to all situations, it becomes more relevant when a NS is operating in sensitive and insecure contexts such as armed conflict, internal disturbances or tensions.
- The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) seeks to evaluate whether the humanitarian work and accountability standards of an NS is aligned with the best in class.

	OCAC	BOCA	Preparedness for Effective Response (WPNS/DRCE)	SAF	CHS
What are the aims of this process / assessment?	The objectives of OCAC are twofold: the first objective is to provide NS with a diagnostic tool that will help them assess their overall strengths and weaknesses, and inform, prioritize and strengthen their development efforts. OCAC includes minimum standards for all NS decided by the IFRC Governing Board. As part of the process, NS are informed of the role and responsibilities of a modern organization is expected to fulfill, as well as expectations/standards for organizations working in our sector.	BOCA is a self-assessment tool developed for NS branches to identify and assess their strengths, limitations and challenges in relation to a wide range of organizational capacities. It can be used as the first step in a branch development process.	The Preparedness for Effective response: self-assessment (WPNS), simulation, operational, and post-operation (DRCE) assessment methods enable NS to measure, analyze and plan their preparedness for response capacity. These tools help NS to better identify areas for improvement, and to champion efforts to enhance their disaster management and preparedness work.	SAF allows NS to further their understanding of what it takes to increase and or maintain their acceptance, security and access to communities and people in need by understanding their operational context, taking stock of the lessons the NS learned and assessing their strengths and challenges in relation to the application of the SAF elements and the Fundamental Principles.	CHS is a set of quality and accountability standards against which humanitarian organizations can assess themselves. This process is meant for the whole humanitarian sector, and is not tailored specifically for the RC/RC Movement.
What does it assess?	OCAC has two assessment phases: the first phase focuses on NS capacities, e.g. its structure, systems, procedures, and the resources it needs to function in an effective manner. The second phase examines the impact the NS has in the country; this covers criteria such as the relevance, quality and scale of programmatic activity, and helps to determine whether internal cohesion exists between the NS and Headquarters, as well as with branches.	BOCA is a comprehensive assessment tool that provides an in-depth view of a branch's strengths and weaknesses, and allows them to assess their current capacity to deliver services to initiate or strengthen their overall development.	The Preparedness for Effective Response, self-assessment (WPNS), simulation, operational, and post-operation exercises (DRCE) assesses the capacity of a NS to deliver services in a crisis/emergency. The self-assessment method aims to reflect the existing disaster preparedness capacities, and identify areas that require attention. The simulation, operational, and post-operation assessment methods test and provide external evidence-based information on a NS disaster response system, process and practice.	SAF assesses the underpinning principles of safer access (access, perception, acceptance and security) by taking stock of lessons learned and examining detailed attributes related to the eight elements of Safer Access.	CHS allows organizations involved in humanitarian response to improve the quality and effectiveness of the assistance they provide, and to ensure greater accountability to communities and people affected by crisis. While the CHS assessment is currently intended to be used by humanitarian actors, the CHS Alliance is also planning to develop guidance for organizations involved in development work.
When should it be carried out?	As a comprehensive diagnostic tool, OCAC is best used to look into key areas, such as NS capacity and impact, and can generally be compared to a general health check. OCAC is therefore best used when a NS would like to have a general overview of its strengths and weaknesses. Unless the NS has defined specific areas of development, OCAC should be the preferred option. OCAC has two phases: the first phase will determine whether an NS has the capacity to make an impact (i.e. how prepared are you?); the second is to establish whether an impact has been made (i.e. how effective are you?), and by means of which strengths/resources.	BOCA can be compared to a general health check and should be used whenever a NS wishes to develop or strengthen the capacity of its branches. It is strongly recommended that branch assessments are conducted in all of the NS branches, rather than in just one or a few of them.	The self-assessment process should, ideally, be undertaken on a regular basis within the framework of the planning, M&E process to establish how well prepared an NS may be. Goals, objectives and results of the self-assessment process should be revisited and updated every two years, or after an emergency operation to incorporate learning. The simulation, operational, and post-operation assessment methods should be planned in the context of the NS planning process and/or in relation to ongoing operations.	A SAF assessment is the preferred option if a NS has concerns on access, acceptance and security, or when a country is experiencing sensitive and insecure contexts including armed conflict, internal disturbances and tensions which will likely require humanitarian activities to be carried out by the NS. It should ideally form part of NS emergency preparedness measures, and be undertaken before any sensitive and insecure contexts arise. However, it is worth bearing in mind that putting in place systems and procedures to strengthen acceptance, security and access may require more than a year.	CHS should be conducted when a NS would like to assess and improve the quality and effectiveness of the assistance they provide and ensure greater accountability to communities and people affected by crisis, using a process developed for all humanitarian organizations.

	OCAC	BOCA	Preparedness for Effective Response (WPNS/DRCE)	SAF	CHS
How will it support or strengthen service delivery	OCAC allows NS to have a clearer picture of any weaknesses that may exist. It also enables NS to take concrete steps to strengthen their capacities to ensure that the services they provide are addressing the needs of the most vulnerable in their country in the most effective manner possible. The process includes components to promote exchanges among participating NS.	Branches are the service arms of the organization in the community, responding directly to the needs of the most vulnerable. BOCA supports branches by identifying and addressing its key weaknesses to strengthen and sustain its service delivery capacity. BOCA also allows HQ to provide support in cases where recurring weaknesses in branches are identified.	Responding to humanitarian challenges, e.g. a disaster and/or crisis, is one of the core services that NS provide to vulnerable communities. The Preparedness for Effective Response assessment methods help NS to identify gaps and strengths in their preparedness to respond during an emergency, as well as establish systems and procedures for this response. The action plan generated after the assessment process improves NS capacity to respond to disaster and crisis, in an effective and timely manner.	National Societies have a mandate to respond to humanitarian needs in sensitive and insecure contexts. SAF provides concrete and direct support to a NS to operate safely and gain better access to peoples and communities in need, as it focuses on positioning the NS to all stakeholders and actors of influence towards their acceptance, security and access.	A CHS assessment helps organizations identify weaknesses in its humanitarian response, and supports efforts to promote quality and accountability to communities.
How does it work?	Phase I starts with a 3-day capacity self-assessment workshop with a group of about 15 people (representatives of the NS as a whole), and supported by two external facilitators. Phase II focuses on the impact the NS may have in its sphere of operations. This is evaluated through a peer NS review conducted by 4 representatives from 2 different NS. The aim of the peer review is to assess the relevance, quality and scale of NS programmes and services. NS that meet all the benchmarks are proposed for an IFRC Governing Board certification valid for a period of 5 years. Costs related to these assessments are covered by the IFRC. All outcomes are confidential and are not shared with anyone outside the NS.	The process starts with adapting the tools to the local context, and with a training of BOCA facilitators. Those facilitators are staff from the NS, and will support branches to conduct their BOCA assessments. Each of the NS branch will then undergo a 2 days' workshop with selected volunteers (and staff) to assess itself and develop a branch plan of action.	The Preparedness for Effective Response approach is a 4-step process consisting of: (a) an orientation session; (b) an assessment exercise (self-assessment (WPNS), simulation, during operation, and/or post-operation (DRCE)); (c) an analysis workshop, and planning during which the NS not only reviews symptoms, but addresses the root causes of any weaknesses; and (d) outcomes from the analysis are translated into a work plan for enhancing national preparedness for effective response. Depending on the selected method, specific methodologies have been developed to accompany the NS. From few days of working sessions for the self-assessment to a simulated/operational/post-operation exercise externally facilitated.	The process begins with a 3-day workshop that brings together 15-20 representatives from all layers of a NS. The workshop employs 3 distinct methodologies (context analysis, lessons learned and benchmark exercises). The outcome of these 3 exercises leads to the development of a plan of action that a NS will work on within the next 2 years. Assessment-related costs are covered by ICRC Delegations, and a report is shared with a NS and the Delegation so that they can discuss it as part of the joint planning. The NS is likewise encouraged to share the report with other Movement partners.	An organization willing to undergo a CHS assessment can choose from a set of different methodologies, e.g. self-assessment, peer review and independent verification. The independent verification is undertaken by a dedicated organization, Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (HQAI). The assessment is carried out against a set of indicators, and can include document reviews, interviews with key staff, partners and communities and people affected by crisis, other stakeholders and direct observation at selected project sites. Certification is also available, but first require that organizations undergo an audit through HQAI to verify whether the organization meets minimum CHS requirements.

MORE INFO

OCAC – You can find key documents on [Fednet](#) or contact Roger Fischli (roger.fischli@ifrc.org/+41 22 730 44 83).

BOCA – You can contact Roger Fischli (roger.fischli@ifrc.org/+41 22 730 44 83)

SAF – You can find key documents on [saferaccess.icrc.org](#). Some tools related to specific elements that were developed by NS can be found in Fednet under NSKD. You may also contact Catherine Martin (camartin@icrc.org/+41 22 730 2919)

Preparedness for Response – Capacity Assessment (WPNS/DRCE) – You can find more information on [Fednet](#) or contact Marjorie Soto Franco (Marjorie.sotofranco@ifrc.org) /+41 (0)22 730 4280 and Carla Taylor carla.taylor@redcross.ca/+1 613 220 4805

CHS – key information about the process, the methodologies and the indicators can be found on <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/> and <http://www.chsalliance.org/what-we-do/chs>