MYANMAR
Analysis ecosystem

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OVERVIEW

The humanitarian situation in Myanmar has been deteriorating since the military coup in February 2021 that overthrew the Government led by the National League for Democracy. The takeover of the military junta has intensified violence and conflict across the country and limited people's freedom. The operating environment has also shrunk for humanitarian and development organisations. To design programmes, including life-saving interventions, and anticipate potential risks, humanitarian decision makers and responders need comprehensive, quality information and analyses to understand the evolving context and needs of affected communities. The generation of, access to, and sharing of data and information on the situation in Myanmar have significantly decreased since the coup. A limited amount of publicly available data and information products and scattered information characterise the Myanmar humanitarian analysis ecosystem for the humanitarian response. There are a few public repositories available, but they are not comprehensive with a potential risk of duplication in analysis and data collection efforts. This poses challenges to designing and planning a targeted and effective response.

About this report

This report analyses the current analysis ecosystem in the humanitarian context of Myanmar. It highlights the humanitarian sector's analysis needs and gaps resulting from the reduced operational space and consequent constraints on data collection and data and information sharing. It also outlines a few opportunities to strengthen the ecosystem based on ACAPS' expertise in humanitarian analysis. Understanding the information and analysis ecosystem in Myanmar, specifically regarding humanitarian needs, provides decision makers with an overview of what information already exists, what the information gaps are, and how some can be addressed.

Methodology

ACAPS went through the following steps to develop this report.

- We conducted a secondary data review of publicly available documents to collect information on the analysis landscape and existing access constraints in Myanmar.

- We also conducted a secondary data review of the main publicly available data and information products on Myanmar published between February 2021 and December 2022. ACAPS considered publicly available products related to the humanitarian context gathered on ReliefWeb and various organisations' websites. From these, we developed a metadatabase using 610 unique products as a sample. Products published in a series (either at regular or irregular intervals) were considered unique regardless of the number of times they were published in the given time frame. The metadatabase was also built as a time-bound snapshot of publicly available data and information on Myanmar to use as a sample for the analysis.

- We interviewed 18 key informants, including information management (IM) representatives, research institutions, and individuals working on face-to-face and remote data collection and analysis in Myanmar.

- We analysed the above through the lens of an ideal analysis ecosystem.
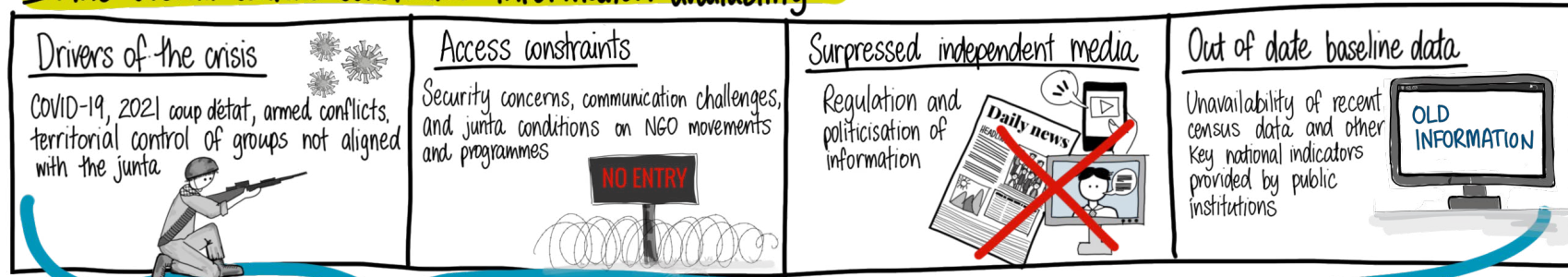
Limitations

ACAPS developed the metadatabase that supported our study on the Myanmar humanitarian analysis ecosystem based on a selection of publicly available data and information products published between February 2021 and December 2022. Many reports in Myanmar are not publicly available because of context sensitivities. The scarcity of information and data collection restrictions in the country also make it difficult to understand the information and analysis landscape. ACAPS consulted different organisations and experts to complement the findings extracted from the metadatabase. For more details,

Myanmar analysis ecosystem
Insufficient data and information to support evidence-based analysis and decision-making

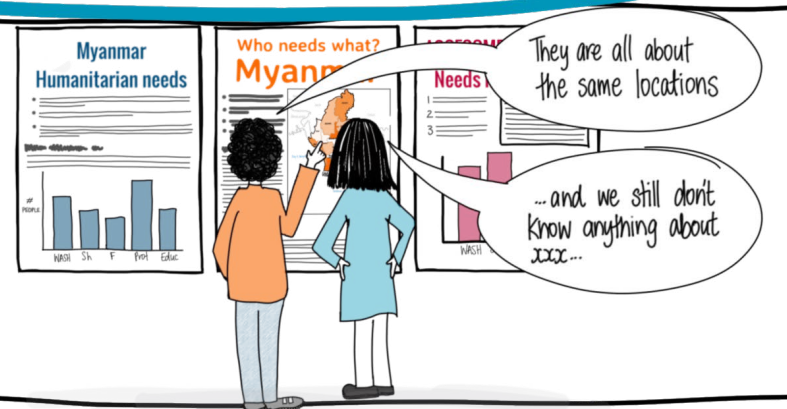**1. The overall context constrains information availability**

Drivers of the crisis

COVID-19, 2021 coup détat, armed conflicts, territorial control of groups not aligned with the junta

Access constraints

Security concerns, communication challenges, and junta conditions on NGO movements and programmes

NO ENTRY

Surpressed independent media

Regulation and politicisation of information

Daily news

Out of date baseline data

Unavailability of recent census data and other key national indicators provided by public institutions

OLD INFORMATION

2. This limits data collection, analysis, and sharing

Few in-person data collection exercises

Hello, ...ask some questions... about needs and the situation there?

Sorry, I cannot hear you well. Please can you call another time?

Limitations of remote data collection

Security challenges and administrative constraints limit joint data collection and analysis efforts

Risks preventing the public sharing of findings

Another high-quality assessment report

CONFIDENTIAL

CAUTION
CONTAINS SENSITIVE DATA

INTERNAL USE ONLY

3. Resulting in an incomplete and disconnected information landscape

➡ Inability to conduct analysis by location and over time

➡ Low data quality limits analysis

➡ Current data and analysis provide only a fragile basis for evidence-based decision-making

Myanmar Humanitarian needs

Who needs what? Myanmar

Needs

They are all about the same locations

...and we still don't know anything about xxx...

Source: ACAPS

KEY FINDINGS

Humanitarian access constraints

Access constraints in Myanmar are among the highest across humanitarian crises worldwide. Violence, insecurity, and bureaucratic and logistical constraints hamper or limit not only humanitarians' ability to assist people in need but also their capacity to conduct needs assessments and surveys or gather useful information to programme an effective response.

Collecting data to assess the severity of the crisis or monitor recent developments in areas affected by armed conflict or natural hazards is extremely challenging because of insecurity and humanitarian access impediments.

Lack of publicly available data and information

There is an overall lack of publicly available or easily accessible data and information on the Myanmar humanitarian crisis. Baseline data, including population figures, is outdated. Population data by specific group (such as IDPs in informal settlements and stateless Rohingya people), demographic characteristics (e.g. age, sex, and disability), or administrative level below states and regions (e.g. townships and villages) are almost non-existent or inaccurate. This data is normally key to understanding the number of people in need of assistance and the specific needs across population groups. It is also challenging to triangulate secondary data, especially given the limited number of sources reporting on the same issue.

Limited space for collaboration and information sharing

A number of actors use and/or produce data and information on Myanmar. These include humanitarian organisations, humanitarian clusters and working groups or fora, developmental organisations, advocacy responders, research institutes and think tanks, consultancy firms, intergovernmental organisations, and media outlets. These entities often work in silos because of the overall insecure environment in Myanmar characterised by violence and very limited freedom.

Within the humanitarian sector, many data and information products, including products with significant analytical content, are not made publicly available in Myanmar because of the risks they could generate for operations or staff. The military junta tries to control the flow of information and the delivery of goods and services, including humanitarian aid, to align them with their strategic interests (The Diplomat 22/02/2021; IMS 12/2022; Access Now 28/02/2023; OHCHR 07/06/2022 and 06/07/2023; The New Humanitarian 28/06/2023; OCHA 01/10/2022, 08/09/2023,

and 02/10/2023). Information on conflict-affected areas and IDPs is particularly sensitive. The risk of detention and arrest for humanitarians, of the interruption or cessation of their operations, and of harm to aid recipients increases if information regarding humanitarian activities and people in need reaches the military junta.

After the coup, security concerns significantly decreased the willingness of national and international organisations to share data, with some only sharing reports relating to certain topics or themes and with specific partner organisations. The introduction of data and information protection policies among some organisations helped improve sharing practices. Many local civil society organisations (CSOs) and NGOs focusing on specific localities or communities conduct low-profile operations outside the purview of the military junta, as they work in areas outside its control.

Lack of a comprehensive database of data and information products

There is no accessible database with a comprehensive overview of all the publicly available data and information products on the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, such as surveys of surveys or assessment registries, which exist for other humanitarian responses. These would be key to informing the response and new data collection efforts and reducing the duplication of efforts.

Limited number of comprehensive multisectoral analyses

Information products by UN agencies and clusters on Myanmar mostly consist of short brief providing humanitarian updates. Only a small share of products consists of in-depth humanitarian analyses.

Some organisations, depending on their mandates, focus on different themes/groups, such as food and nutrition, forcibly displaced communities, refugees, or children. The number of comprehensive and multisectoral analyses is low compared with sectoral information or analysis products. This is also because access constraints hinder conducting multisectoral needs assessments and analyses.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and coup on data quality

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and the military coup of February 2021 have been constraining access for in-person data collection. Organisations have had to make a significant shift towards remote data collection, particularly phone interviews, which has affected data quality. Low data quality has also been attributed to the lack of experience of local organisations in collecting data in newly conflict-affected areas. Quality is expected to improve as these organisations get more experience in data collection.

Data comparability and the duplication of efforts

The data collected by different organisations is often incomparable because of differences in the methodologies, statistical indicators, or time frames used in assessments and surveys. Different organisations have different objectives (or mandates) and standards when collecting data, sometimes even when working with the same indicators. This often leads to the duplication of data collection efforts. The lack of a comprehensive database of data and information products also contributes to the duplication of efforts.

OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN THE HUMANITARIAN ANALYSIS ECOSYSTEM

After studying the Myanmar humanitarian analysis ecosystem, ACAPS has identified opportunities to strengthen it and support an effective response in a few main areas:

- data and information sharing through collaboration
- the use of local knowledge for ground truthing
- the harmonisation of data collection processes and methodologies
- the development of a comprehensive database.

ACAPS identified these opportunities while taking into consideration the extreme constraints that humanitarian responders, data collectors and information producers, and affected populations face in accessing information.

Enhancing data and information sharing through stakeholder collaboration

Deepened collaboration in the sharing of data, information, and analyses will enhance the quantity and quality of analyses and address more issues. One way to achieve this is through the introduction of robust data and information protection policies or protocols.

Substantial data and information have been produced to better understand the Myanmar context and humanitarian crisis, but much has not been shared publicly. Often, information producers in Myanmar work in silos because of the insecure environment. That said, despite insufficient data and information to conduct analyses on Myanmar, information producers in the ecosystem seem to have made good use of what is available.

Given the security situation in Myanmar, sensitive information might have to remain internal. Building robust data protection protocols and more collaboration and exchanges among trusted contacts would increase the amount of data and information available, filling in some information gaps. Further extending information-sharing networks beyond the humanitarian sector to development organisations, peace-building and human rights organisations, independent media outlets, and research institutes and think tanks, and bolstering existing ones could make this possible. Collaborating with technology firms could also help develop innovations to fill in data and information gaps.

Ground truthing information using local knowledge

Local analytical capacities are currently not being used adequately. Given the scarcity or ambiguity of available information, connecting with organisations and people at the local level is essential to understanding the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar and triangulating information.

Local CSOs and NGOs, especially in newly conflict-affected areas, lack data collection experience, and there is significant room for improvement. Their knowledge of the context is essential to understanding context evolution, responder dynamics, and key humanitarian concerns. Whenever the security situation allows, as long as the principle of 'do no harm' is applied, including local analysts' perspectives can enrich analysis and provide a nuanced understanding of the context.

Harmonising data collection standards

Whenever any type of data collection effort is possible, harmonising methodologies, quantitative indicators, and time frames for data collection will enhance the comparability and interoperability of data across organisations. This will also make data sharing easier.

Developing a comprehensive database of data and information products

Data and information products could be compiled in a user-friendly repository for sharing. Considering the dynamic nature of the context, the repository would need to be regularly updated and maintained.

CONTEXT OVERVIEW

Longstanding localised conflicts between Myanmar's armed forces (the Tatmadaw) and various armed groups, including militias and ethnic armed organisations (EAOs), and the conflict that began with the coup in February 2021 characterise the humanitarian situation in Myanmar. The country records high levels of human rights violations (OHCHR 29/08/2018 and 03/03/2023 a). These include the military crackdown on Rohingya Muslims from 2016–2017, resulting in a refugee outflow of around 800,000 into Bangladesh (OHCHR 21/06/2023; HRW accessed 08/04/2023). Myanmar ranked 13th among the countries with the worst human rights and rule of law records in the 2023 Fragile States Index and was among the 16 countries with the worst scores for political rights and civil liberties in 2022 according to Freedom House (FSI 2023; Freedom House 02/2022).

The conflict reached new heights after the military coup d'état. On 1 February 2021, the Tatmadaw staged a military coup, declaring fraud in the November 2020 multiparty general elections that the National League for Democracy won (OHCHR 28/02/2023; CFR accessed 25/01/2023). The coup resulted in intense conflict between the Tatmadaw and anti-coup armed resistance groups, with support from several EAOs (ACAPS 04/05/2023). The humanitarian community estimates that around 18 million people out of a population of around 56 million will need humanitarian assistance in 2023. As at 2 October 2023, the total number of IDPs was nearly 2 million, and at least 1.2 million were displaced to Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand (UN 17/08/2023; UNHCR 02/10/2023, 04/10/2023, and 17/01/2023; OCHA 15/01/2023; UNHCR accessed 08/10/2023 a; UNHCR accessed 08/10/2023 b; TBC 31/07/2023).

Humanitarian access constraints in Myanmar

Violence and fighting continue to affect humanitarian access across the country. Security measures imposed by both the military junta and anti-military groups include checkpoints, roadblocks, and curfews. These measures continue to constrain the movement of people, goods, and aid. The military junta also restricts the passage of humanitarian items, including food and medicine, to conflict-affected areas because it claims that these items could be distributed to anti-coup groups and EAOs. The martial law imposed by the military junta in many townships across the country has severely suppressed civic space. Visa delays, banking restrictions, and problems with tax exemption certificates and customs clearances for imported goods also affect the humanitarian response (OCHA 19/04/2022, 30/12/2022, 15/01/2023, 02/02/2023, and 06/04/2023; UNHCR 16/09/2022 and 15/03/2023; OHCHR 03/03/2023 b; RFA 31/07/2023). Access restrictions also impeded assessment and aid efforts in areas affected by Cyclone Mocha, which made landfall in Rakhine state on 14 May 2023 (OHCHR 30/06/2023; CNN 14/05/2023).

People living in areas not under the military junta control usually have less access to aid and assistance, as the junta generally restricts authorisation for humanitarian response in such areas. Many other IDPs reside in remote areas, such as jungles and forests, to escape conflict between the military and armed resistance groups and lack access to basic services and assistance (OCHA 19/04/2022, 30/12/2022, 15/01/2023, 02/02/2023, and 06/04/2023; UNHCR 16/09/2022 and 15/03/2023). Around 600,000 Rohingya people in Rakhine state continue to be denied citizenship and face movement restrictions and a lack of access to services and aid (OCHA 15/01/2023; HRW 08/10/2020).

In 2022, the junta suspended all registration and renewal processes for CSOs and NGOs until the new registration law, the Organisation Registration Law, was enacted in late October 2022 (The Global NPO Coalition on FATF 10/2022; Allen & Gledhill 07/12/2022). The law heightened restrictions on all organisations. These restrictions include prohibiting any organisation from operating without a registration certificate or working with unregistered affiliates. The law also imposes penalties for organisations not adhering to the law (Devex 15/02/2023; Allen & Gledhill 07/12/2022). It stipulates that no organisation with a registration certificate should directly or indirectly contact or support organisations or individuals blacklisted by the military junta, who, in many cases, are the gatekeepers of areas with people in need (Allen & Gledhill 07/12/2022; The Guardian 03/11/2022). Many of the country's local CSOs and NGOs, which often focus on specific localities and communities, conduct low-profile and informal operations outside the purview of the military junta because they work in areas outside its control and/or do not consider the military junta as the legitimate authority (The Guardian 03/11/2022; KII 04/08/2022).

The information and analysis landscape in Myanmar

The generation of, access to, and sharing of data and information have decreased significantly after the coup. The military's crackdown on independent media has made it challenging for people to access independent news and information (IMS 12/2022; The Diplomat 22/02/2021). Understanding the overall information landscape in Myanmar is essential to better understanding the humanitarian analysis ecosystem in the country, in particular the drivers behind many of the gaps and limitations that ACAPS identified in this study.

Some mainstream media outlets, especially those based abroad, are considered reliable, but they are unable to provide information at a local level. As a supplement, there are local and online community media outlets and sources of information, such as Facebook groups, for specific local areas (IMS 12/2022; KII 12/10/2022).

The military junta's initiatives and policies have reduced reporting by independent media. Many outlets have had to move underground or abroad, mainly to Bangladesh, India, or Thailand. The media crackdown since the coup has included the arrest of at least 175 journalists, with dozens still detained (IFJ 08/05/2023). Myanmar's press freedom ranking plunged from 140 in 2021 to 176 in 2022 in the World Press Freedom Index (RSF accessed 18/04/2023).

After the coup, media, especially those under the control of the military junta, became considered unreliable for promoting disinformation and being inaccurate or misleading, including through the publication of false news (IMS 12/2022). Following the coup d'état, information on the running of the country, public services, budgets, and policies has become even more inaccessible, including information on education, health, agriculture, justice, economy, and other sectors. Statistical data is also unavailable, and what is present is considered unreliable or outdated (FEM 28/09/2022).

Telecommunications have become a prime target following the February 2021 coup. All the country's 330 townships were subjected to internet shutdowns at least once in 2022, and nearly 50 townships have experienced telecommunications shutdowns more than once per year. The junta has been implementing telecommunications shutdowns mostly in Chin state and Magway and Sagaing regions, strongholds of anti-coup resistance groups (Access Now 28/02/2023; FEM 28/09/2022). The junta has also taken control of all telecommunications providers and enhanced its surveillance infrastructure. This has made it difficult to verify the duration and frequency of shutdowns; the number, frequency, and duration of telecommunications shutdowns are likely higher than reported (Access Now 28/02/2023). Expansions in surveillance through telecommunications include controlling people's phone data, expanding the use of surveillance tools, and setting up checkpoints for random phone checks (Access Now 28/02/2023; FEM 28/09/2022).

DEEP DIVE INTO THE ANALYSIS ECOSYSTEM IN MYANMAR (2021–2022)

Actors in the humanitarian analysis landscape

Both international and national humanitarian stakeholders contribute to the information and analysis ecosystem in Myanmar, with some national stakeholders working in/on specific geographic areas. As at 31 August 2023, according to the Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU) 5W report, around 210 organisations were conducting humanitarian, development, and peace-related activities across Myanmar (MIMU accessed 08/10/2023). Some of these were involved in at least some stage of the data and information collection and analysis processes.

There are seven clusters and several working groups in Myanmar involved in different levels of data and information collection and analysis to inform the humanitarian response (OCHA 15/01/2023). Organisations based outside the country generally outsource their primary data collection to the local organisations they partner with or the survey companies they contract (KII 28/06/2022; KII 12/10/2022 a; KII 13/10/2022; KII 18/10/2022).

A number of organisations working on Myanmar have IM units. The services these units provide include compiling information on assessments, surveys, reports, and publications on Myanmar; compiling data such as socioeconomic, administrative, and geospatial data; developing various dashboards using compiled data; developing geospatial tools for analysis; providing technical assistance and capacity-building; and networking and liaising. That said, a lot of these services and products are based on outdated data and information.

Some public repositories providing a collection of data and information products on the Myanmar humanitarian context are mentioned below.

- The MIMU Assessment Tracking tool is a database that tracks information products, such as assessments, surveys, reports, and other publications, on Myanmar to better facilitate information-gathering initiatives and the sharing of plans, results, methodologies, data, and expertise (MIMU accessed 12/04/2023). As at May 2023, the tracker had collected over 210 publicly available products published between February 2021 and May 2023. Some non-public products are also listed in the database. The dataset captures the details (name, sector, implementation status, and completion date) of assessments conducted by humanitarian, development, and peace-building organisations and the geographic areas they cover. A quick review revealed that some of the information products available on ReliefWeb were not present in this tracker. A likely limiting factor of this tracker is the lack of participation of reporting organisations.

- OCHA's Humanitarian Data Exchange is an open platform for sharing data across crises and organisations (OCHA accessed 12/04/2023). It comprises 188 datasets on Myanmar (47 additional datasets, mainly developed for specific past events such as floods, have been archived). More than 50% of the datasets comprise geodata on administrative divisions, geographical features, and essential infrastructure, mainly healthcare and transportation. Around 13% of the datasets are subsets of World Bank data on specific socioeconomic indicators and data. A lot of these datasets in the platform, although useful, are either outdated or are projections based on old data, primarily because of the challenges in conducting new surveys in the country.

- There are also other sources that, to some extent, act as repositories. One example is the Euro-Burma Office, the operations centre of Associates to Develop Democratic Burma, Inc. It provides a collection of news media articles daily.

The study did not find any comprehensive database of publicly available data and information products on the humanitarian crisis, such as surveys of surveys or assessment registries, which exist for other humanitarian responses. It is difficult for organisations to know what data and information already exist in the absence of such a database, increasing the risk of duplication of efforts.

Research institutes and think tanks, as well as some international organisations, play a significant role in providing information products, especially analyses, used in humanitarian programming. The issue is that they often cover a specific topic, such as agriculture, food, nutrition, livelihoods, economy, and markets. The role of academia is negligible in the humanitarian context owing to various constraints in conducting research activities in the country. Human rights and advocacy organisations usually provide updates on human rights issues.

ACAPS' 'ideal' humanitarian analysis ecosystem

In this subsection, ACAPS breaks down the essential elements of the information and analysis ecosystem in Myanmar. Over time, ACAPS has identified five key elements of an 'ideal' analysis ecosystem (involving both data collection and analysis processes). Figure 1 shows the information flow cycle in an ideal analysis ecosystem. Processes around data gathering or collection and analysis in Myanmar were reviewed based on these elements.

Figure 1. What happens in an ideal analysis ecosystem
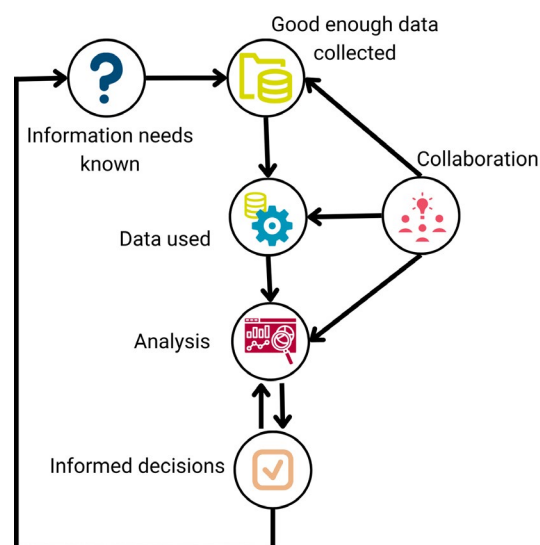
Source: ACAPS

Good enough data collected

Lack of baseline data

Many essential government datasets in Myanmar are neither made publicly available nor shared with NGOs and UN agencies. Some publicly available government datasets are considered outdated (MIMU 06/2021; KII 31/10/2022; KII 28/06/2022; KII 18/10/2022). Some baseline information at the township level has been missing since 2021, including township profiles made public by the Government prior to the coup. Data at the village level is almost non-existent (KII 22/06/2022).

Organisations face challenges in performing in-depth analyses given a lack of data and information. For example, a lack of disaggregated information hinders developing an understanding of how humanitarian crises affect different demographic groups (KII 22/06/2022). There is also a lack of comparable data or indicators for specific sectors, such as education or food security (WFP 04/05/2022; KII 04/08/2022).

Data collection environment

Interviewed stakeholders indicated a lack of a robust data collection environment in Myanmar. Before the coup, most large-scale data collection efforts were implemented in partnership with UN agencies and the Government of Myanmar. Since the coup, data collection activities have been conducted at a smaller scale. The last large-scale data collection exercise conducted in Myanmar was an intercensal survey by the Myanmar Government in 2019, with a sample size of nearly 550,000 individuals (around 132,000 households), to capture demographic changes in the country (KII 22/06/2022; KII 28/06/2022; KII 08/11/2022; DOP/UNFPA 12/2020; Merriam-Webster accessed 09/04/2023; EPA 25/01/2013). Stakeholder consultations and secondary data review revealed that surveys with a sample size of up to 50,000 (around 12,000 households) had been conducted after the coup (KII 28/06/2022; KII 12/10/2022 a; IFPRI 06/2022).

Remote data collection

The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 military coup led to the adoption of remote data collection processes at a large scale to overcome restrictions (e.g. movement restrictions resulting from COVID-19 or demands for travel authorisations by the junta) and insecurity. The main method for primary data collection for most organisations post-COVID has been telephone interviews, which also address security concerns for both the surveyed and the enumerators (KII 28/06/2022; KII 04/08/2022; KII 07/09/2022; KII 12/10/2022 a; KII 13/10/2022; KII 06/10/2022 c).

Challenges in collecting good enough data

Lack of participation and high attrition rates

Because of security concerns, most respondents are hesitant to have interviews with strangers. A possible approach to encourage participation among respondents is replacing the names of respondents and interviewers with codes (KII 13/10/2022). Focus group discussions are very challenging to conduct in Myanmar because people are reluctant to share information in a collective forum. The long duration of in-depth interviews also causes fatigue and heightens the unwillingness of respondents to participate (KII 12/10/2022 a). High attrition rates have been observed in many data collection efforts, with some participants unwilling to attend follow-up interviews (KII 28/06/2022; KII 12/10/2022 a; KII 06/10/2022 b; KII 12/10/2022 b).

Local capacity for data collection

It is only recently since the coup that there have been a lot of initiatives for data collection at the national level given the new scale of the crisis. Previously, data collection efforts were localised to areas experiencing longstanding conflicts. Local CSOs and NGOs, especially in newly conflict-affected areas, do not have extensive experience in data collection, and there is significant room for the improvement of their data collection capacity (KII 31/10/2022).

Secondary displacement

Many IDPs in Myanmar are forced to move multiple times. Most of the displaced people, especially after the coup, do not live in formal camps. This results in difficulties in tracking IDP movements and collecting information from a significant portion of IDPs (KII 20/07/2022; KII 22/06/2022; KII 12/10/2022 b).

Access constraints due to insecurity and the monsoon season

The increase in violence and insecurity since the coup has been affecting organisations' ability to collect data (ACLED 03/2022; UNICEF 31/01/2022; KII 22/06/2022). High levels of violence and insecurity constrain access to areas with active armed conflict and those not under the control of the military junta. The peak of the monsoon season (May–October) also limits access to some flood-prone areas in southeastern Myanmar (KII 22/06/2022; KII 20/07/2022; KII 12/10/2022 b; IFRC 04/2021).

Bureaucratic challenges

For humanitarian organisations, it is challenging and time-consuming to obtain approval for memoranda of understanding from respective government departments, particularly to operate or conduct assessments in areas not under the control of the military junta (KII 28/06/2022; KII 22/06/2022; Nutrition Cluster 10/2021; SIDA 03/2022; OHCHR 16/03/2022).

Obtaining the travel authorisation required to move to affected areas is also difficult and uncertain, hampering data collection for needs assessments, programme evaluations, and project implementation (KII 20/07/2022; KII 07/09/2022; OCHA 31/07/2022).

Administrations set up by EAOs and the National Unity Government (NUG), also known as the shadow government, parallel to that of the military junta are also in place throughout the country. At times, it is difficult for humanitarians to know exactly which administration is controlling an area. The lack of clarity makes it difficult to obtain the necessary permissions to plan and conduct data collection exercises (KII 04/08/2022). Before collecting data for research in some areas, organisations must obtain what is called an 'ethical approval' from both the military junta and the NUG. Both administrations have ethical review committees working parallel with each other. Research organisations face challenges in understanding which approval to obtain and implement (KII 12/10/2022 b).

Internal organisational policies

After the coup, many organisations restricted their collaborations with the military junta. Previously, organisations obtained useful data from the Government. Currently, new policies prevent organisations from requesting data from the military junta. Some organisations still use publicly available data from the former Government (for example, the Myanmar township profiles). These are usually outdated but provide useful baseline data on the demography and educational level of students in Myanmar's townships (KII 20/07/2022; KII 22/06/2022; KII 06/10/2022 a; KII 28/06/2022).

Financial and legal considerations

Respondents to surveys conducted by research institutes and think tanks often expect incentives for their participation. It is challenging for organisations to make international payments given the restrictions imposed on the financial system by the military junta, necessitating local financial structures. Local enumerators sometimes act as intermediaries between organisations and respondents to make the payments (KII 28/06/2022).

For remote data collection, some organisations provide mobile credit as an incentive for participation. Providing such incentives requires special waivers, since the Government or people associated with the Government who are subject to sanctions own the mobile operators in the country (KII 28/06/2022).

Providing incentives through third-party vendors is also challenging, because vendors refuse electronic transfers or request extra fees. Some vendors are also unwilling to provide credit to people who might be under government surveillance (KII 28/06/2022).

Internet and mobile network challenges

Connectivity disruptions, which are often reported in conflicted-affected areas, restrict data collectors' ability to collect information via telephone and hinder the use of mobile data collection applications (OHCHR 19/08/2022; KII 20/07/2022; KII 28/06/2022; KII 22/06/2022; KII 12/10/2022 a; KII 12/10/2022 b). Conducting iterative data collection is challenging, with respondents changing telephone numbers for security purposes. Some people are also reluctant to use government-associated mobile carriers (KII 28/06/2022).

Data quality

Challenges to data quality

Sampling

In Myanmar, data collection efforts are often poorly documented or incomplete, and samples are usually not representative. Because of access constraints, some organisations have opted for convenience sampling, a type of non-probability sampling where the selection of units for the sample is made from a conveniently available pool of respondents for assessments and evaluations, resulting in sampling biases that restrict the generalisability of the findings (KII 07/09/2022).

Assessment reliability

Data and assessment reliability are low, as respondents are sometimes hesitant to give truthful answers out of fear that they are under government surveillance (KII 22/06/2022; KII 28/06/2022; KII 08/11/2022).

Reliance on remote data collection

The use of telephone interviews for data collection has affected the quality of data collected. Telephone surveys are designed to be short to encourage participation but restrict the ability to ask open-ended and follow-up questions and hinder the development of contextual understanding (KII 22/06/2022; KII 28/06/2022; KII 12/10/2022 a). Telephone interviews can also be challenging when there are phone and internet data access issues, and it is difficult to know who has access to mobile devices at which time (KII 04/08/2022).

Lack of harmonisation/integration

A lack of data standardisation across different organisations renders some data incoherent. This presents challenges in data validation and triangulation. Different definitions for the same indicators also result in a duplication of efforts (KII 20/07/2022; KII 22/06/2022).

The absence of common data collection, usage, and sharing standards generates quality gaps and prevent the availability and interoperability of datasets, restricting data utilisation (KII 12/10/2022 a; KII 28/06/2022; KII 22/06/2022; MIMU 06/2021).

A lack of harmonisation also occurs because of the differing levels of access that different organisations are entitled to (KII 04/08/2022).

Challenges in the triangulation of information

Interviewed stakeholders reported challenges in triangulating secondary data, especially given a limited number of sources reporting on the same issue (KII 06/10/2022 a; KII 04/08/2022). They use their knowledge and networks, or analysis by research institutes, to triangulate and gather information on affected communities.

Reliability or availability of non-humanitarian sources, such as the media

Humanitarian organisations also rely on media sources to monitor humanitarian developments in the country, including displacement events and the location and needs of the displaced. That said, only a few reliable media sources are reporting on Myanmar. There are concerns regarding the reliability of reporting, especially in areas under the military junta, given the regulation, control, and politicisation of information (KII 04/08/2022; UNHRC 07/06/2022; Myanmar Now 18/03/2021).

Social media, especially Facebook, are among the main secondary data sources for some of the organisations that conduct media monitoring (KII 06/10/2022 c; KII 27/10/2022; KII 12/10/2022 a). Local media outlets that publish on social media (generally Facebook) are perceived to be fairly reliable. Although most of these local media groups have ethnic roots and might have specific political opinions or affiliations, they are seen to make timely reports on any incidents, although the details they provide might show subjective leanings (KII 27/10/2022).
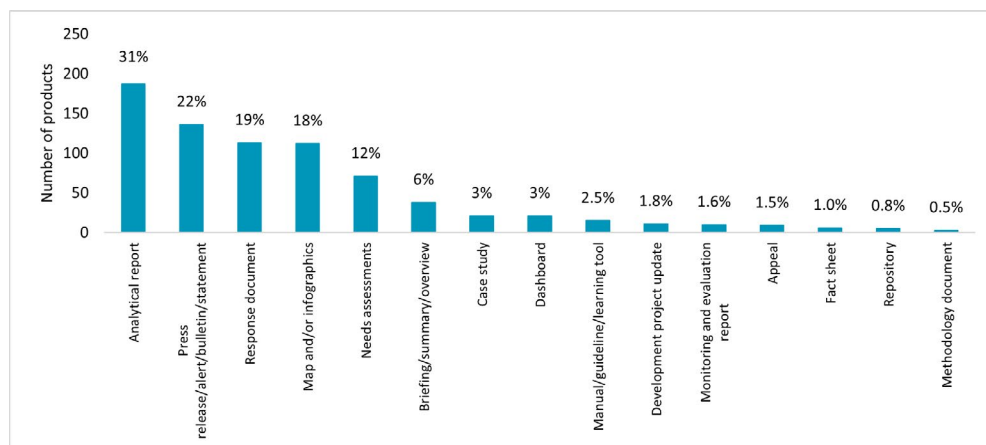
Analysis

This subsection provides a meta-analysis of the products included in the metadatabase, complemented by information collected through interviews with experts. This metadatabase comprises 187 analytical reports[1] (31%) in a total of 610 products assessed from February 2021 to December 2022.[2]

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1   In this study, we refer to analytical reports as products that have a significant analytical component and are produced by deploying research and/or data analysis methods to generate useful information. For example, a concise operational document that provides a summary to support the coordination of humanitarian response (e.g. situation reports and briefings) or maps and infographics are not considered analytical reports.

2   In this subsection, there are many cases where the sum of percentages (representing shares of individual categories) will add up to more than 100% because of overlapping categories. For example, around 60% of the analytical reports have multiple themes, meaning the sum of all the shares of individual themes in the thematic distribution of analytical reports will be greater than 100%.

Figure 2. Categories of products in the metadatabase

Source: ACAPS metadatabase

Themes tackled by the analyses

Almost a quarter of the analytical reports analysed as a sample by ACAPS covered the economy/market as the main theme/topic, followed by protection, human rights, livelihoods, agriculture, and food security. The focus of most analytical reports on topics comprising the economy/market, livelihoods, agriculture, and food security was found to largely depend on the mandate and areas of work of the information producers. Emphasis on protection and human rights analysis is to be expected given the heightened protection and human rights issues in the country (OCHA 31/12/2021 and 15/01/2023).

Only a few products collected in ACAPS' metadatabase focus on natural and climate-related hazards. Stakeholder consultations also confirmed that analyses regarding the impact of natural hazards in Myanmar, especially anticipatory analyses related to climate events, were very scarce despite being key to informing preparedness and early action (KII 11/10/2022).

Geographical coverage

Information on the areas of the country heavily affected by post-coup conflict is relatively scarce (KII 12/10/2022 b; KII 31/10/2022). Because of the conflict, Sagaing region has the highest number of IDPs (42% of the IDPs in Myanmar as at 2 October 2023) (UNHCR 02/10/2023). At the

same time, Sagaing has significantly less information available relative to many other states. This difference has been attributed to the lower presence of responders and insecurity (KII 12/10/2022 b; KII 31/10/2022).

There are more analytical reports on states that have historically been affected by conflict resulting in humanitarian needs for the population, including Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Rakhine, and Shan (KII 27/10/2022; KII 12/10/2022 a; KII 06/10/2022 b; KII 12/10/2022 b; OCHA 31/12/2021). That said, even though many reports cover Rakhine state, there are significant information gaps about Rohingya conditions and other vulnerable communities in the state. The information gaps have widened after Cyclone Mocha hit the state.

Figure 3. Disaggregation of published analytical reports by state and region (for reports that are not country-level)
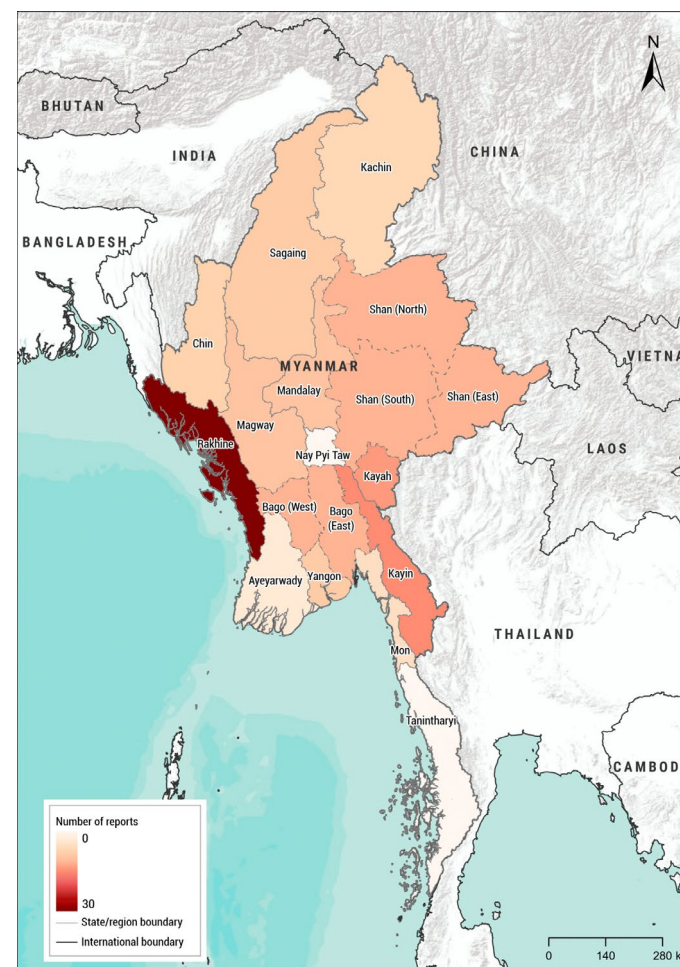
Source: ACAPS metadatabase

Groups of focus

Most of the analytical reports did not focus on any particular group within the affected population. Only a few analytical reports focused on one or more population group(s). Around 6.5% of the analytical reports collected by ACAPS focused on children, followed by IDPs/returnees and women and girls, while the rest of the groups, such as aid workers and people with disabilities, each had less than 5% coverage.

Depth of analysis

Around 87% of the analytical reports (i.e. a quarter of all the products in the metadatabase) had at least some explanatory content (i.e. explained the facts more in depth), with the rest being descriptive analyses.[3] The degree of explanation in the explanatory content varied among analytical reports. Many of the analytical reports with explanatory content also provided conclusions and interpretations. Around 42% and 5%, respectively, of all the analytical reports were prescriptive (i.e. provided some recommendations) and anticipatory. The limited availability of publicly available or shared anticipatory analyses has also been indicated in interviews with experts.

Methodology used for analysis

More than 65% of the analytical reports that only used secondary data review clearly defined their methodology. The following findings emerged among the analytical reports based on primary data (i.e. based on only primary data or both primary and secondary data).

- Most of these reports provided substantial information regarding how the data was collected, the tools used for data collection, the analysis process, and ethical considerations.
- A significant portion (around half) of the products did not explain limitations clearly.
- Generally, the primary data used by these analytical reports was not publicly available.

Academia as a source of analysis

Stakeholder consultations indicated that the academia, based outside Myanmar, has been producing robust qualitative analyses on the context, conflict, and politics in the country. This was also observed in the brief review of academic literature by ACAPS. These analyses are generally at the country or state/region level and are mostly outdated. A major portion of the literature focused on the areas historically affected by crisis, such as Kachin, Rakhine, and Shan, and on the Rohingya context.

Because of data collection constraints, only a few analyses by academia have used quantitative approaches (KII 28/06/2022; KII 27/10/2022). Financial restrictions, logistical challenges, a lack of local staff, and the need to constantly adjust and adapt to the changes in the country prevent the international academic community from working in Myanmar (KII 28/06/2022). Local academic and research institutes generally face restrictions and have not been able to conduct research in the country, especially after the coup (KII 28/06/2022; KII 27/10/2022).

Other information products

ACAPS also tracked other types of information products, besides analytical reports, that had perceived usefulness for a good understanding of the humanitarian crisis and response in Myanmar. Around 22% of the products that ACAPS captured in the metadatabase were press releases, alerts (regarding natural hazards, such as floods), bulletins, or statements. Most of these products focused on human rights, advocacy, and protection and were generally published by INGOs and UN agencies.

Around 18% of the products were maps and/or infographics. Of these, around 60% focused on humanitarian needs and/or response by organisations.

Nearly 12% of the products were categorised as needs assessments and focused on humanitarian needs. Among them, more than 75% were maps and/or infographics and were published by cluster members. More than 75% of the needs assessments focused on IDPs or returnees, most of whom lived in IDP camps in Rakhine and Kachin states. Such needs assessments were cross-sectoral. Systematic needs assessment reports focusing on informal settlements – where the majority of the post-coup IDPs resided – were not publicly available. Because of the limited amount of data available and the inability to perform in-depth needs assessments in these areas given access constraints, humanitarians can identify needs and assess levels of severity only to some extent across various sectors (KII 28/06/2022).

There are several dashboards in the metadatabase, of which around 80% were published by UN agencies or clusters. These focus on a variety of themes and sectors, such as agriculture, food security, and livelihood; WASH; coordination; contribution/financing; shelter and NFIs; and the economy/market. Some of the dashboards rely on outdated data given the unavailability of recent data.

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3   Explanatory content comprises explanatory analysis that looks for associations, correlations, and, more generally, connections between observations. It is an extension of the descriptive analytical phase and allows for the formulation of better hypotheses or theories, based on the careful investigation of relationships, underlying processes, or causal mechanisms.

Data and information sharing and collaboration

After the coup, humanitarian organisations' willingness to share information dropped significantly. Some improvement came on the back of organisations introducing information protection policies or protocols, allowing for a certain level of information sharing but not always publication. Because of political sensitivities and insecurity, information and analyses are often not made public, and only some are shared within humanitarian clusters and working groups (KII 22/06/2022).

Many local CSOs/NGOs share information on their activities/projects with a limited number of other organisations and UN agencies (KII 28/06/2022; KII 11/10/2022; KII 18/10/2022; KII 20/07/2022). Sometimes, organisations receive requests for information that they often find difficult to respond to, especially because requests are not standardised or do not follow a regular pattern (KII 20/03/2023).

Stakeholder consultations indicate that, at least among some organisations, joint analysis sessions are held frequently. That said, differences in objectives and standards in collecting data for statistical indicators sometimes hinder collaboration and often result in the duplication of efforts.

Stakeholder consultations also revealed that many international organisations who wanted to partner with local organisations in newly conflict-affected areas did not have enough information on the latter. This indicates a need to map potential local counterparts and their locations and access to population groups, which could be done by leveraging working groups and forums (KII 31/10/2022).

Informed decision-making

Humanitarian stakeholders in Myanmar generally know what information they need, but they do not know if such information already exists and where they can find it. If it exists, they are often unable to access it. Rapid changes in the operational environment, coupled with access restrictions, make it particularly challenging to produce information in a timely manner that would support decision-making and programme-planning (KII 28/06/2022; KII 04/08/2022).

As pointed out previously, the absence of baseline data for many geographical areas is also reducing organisations' ability to design evidence-based responses (OCHA 30/01/2022). Some organisations have reported that they are designing and implementing programmes based on old, incomplete, or unrepresentative data and projections (KII 22/06/2022; KII 28/06/2022; Nutrition Cluster 10/2021). There is a need for frequent countrywide needs assessments, with comparisons across states and regions, to help in prioritising programme activities (KII 31/10/2022).

LIMITATIONS

Selectivity

The study included only products published in English, affecting its comprehensiveness. ACAPS used expert judgement to assess the relevance of products in providing information on the humanitarian context in Myanmar. Relevant products were included in the metadatabase as a sample for analysis. Products not listed on ReliefWeb but publicly available on the internet were considered, but there is a likelihood that some relevant products were not included in the metadatabase.

Period of assessment

The study wanted to capture the situation of the current analysis ecosystem. The time frame for the sample of products included in the metadatabase was from February 2021 to December 2022. February 2021 was selected as the starting point as the humanitarian situation in Myanmar changed significantly after the coup. The most recent products, i.e. those published after December 2022, were not included in the metadatabase. Around 30 analytical reports were published from January–May 2023. Most of the new products published in a series in this period mainly focused on Cyclone Mocha. The review indicates that adding all the publicly available products from January–May 2023 to the metadatabase would bring no significant changes to the composition of the type of products, the depth of analysis, main themes/sectors, groups of focus, authorship, and research methods.

Public versus restricted information

The metadatabase only includes publicly available products, but findings indicate that many reports are not published in Myanmar. This was mitigated by conducting interviews with experts.

ACAPS working remotely

Currently, ACAPS does not have an institutional presence in Myanmar but has been monitoring different crises in the country under the CrisisInSight portfolio since 2016. ACAPS has been present in Cox's Bazar district in Bangladesh, covering the Rohingya situation and humanitarian response, from 2018 to December 2022.