

WHY DATA LITERACY MATTERS

There has been a rapid and significant shift in the role data plays in the humanitarian sector. Virtually every aspect of the work is shaped by data and in turn nearly all humanitarians are working with and using data in some capacity.

Nevertheless, while data use is ubiquitous, data skills are not. Data is seen primarily as the work of information managers, with many non-technical humanitarians believing that data management is a highly specialised domain, one in which they play only a tangential role. Many are not conversant in basic terminology around data and are hesitant to engage in conversations with peers, colleagues and staff around data use. To unlock the power of data, we need to become conversant and make it core to our work.

Improving the way we interact with and use data has the potential to affect every step of the data management process and ultimately the humanitarian response. Decision makers can become more clear on the questions they are attempting to answer, data collection exercises can capture more relevant and usable information, analysis can be performed with a clear understanding of the limitations of data, and visualisations can be created to answer framing questions.

WE ALL PLAY A PART

Data literacy for the Centre includes the ability to read, work with, analyze, and converse with data.¹

- **Reading** data involves approaching data with appropriate questions or clear intent in mind. It includes understanding what data is, and what aspects of the world it represents.
- **Working** with data involves creating, acquiring, cleaning and managing it.
- **Analyzing** data involves synthesizing, comparing and performing other analytic operations that may yet reveal further questions.

- **Conversing** with data involves using data to support a larger narrative intended to communicate some message to a particular audience.

Data skills look different depending on a person's role. Data literacy for a senior manager will be different than that of a data and information manager. Understanding one's role in the data management process is imperative to productively contributing to cross-functional teams and a data culture.

Data Literacy for Senior Managers: Senior managers play a strategic role throughout any data management process. While they do not require advanced computational skills, they need to understand and engage with data in order to draw conclusions, communicate insights and make decisions. For senior managers, data literacy means having an understanding of data concepts and analysis and being able to confidently drive data processes.

Data Literacy for Humanitarian Advisors: Humanitarian advisors engage with data intensively throughout the data management process. They develop and consume data products and incorporate data analysis into their work. For this group, data literacy means understanding what is in a dataset, where the data comes from and what insights can be derived from it. They need in-depth knowledge of data collection methodologies, the ability to assess the quality of data and detect data gaps. They are able to synthesise qualitative and quantitative data and advise senior managers on data caveats and insights.

Data Literacy for Data & Information Managers: Data and information managers have the most advanced technical abilities. They are able to create surveys for data collection, clean data and perform analysis and visualisation. They make data accessible, and advise colleagues and senior managers on targeted products for communicating with data.

¹ Revised from, "Designing Tools and Activities for Data Literacy Learners", Rahul Bhargava & Catherine D'Ignazio.

THE CENTRE'S DATA LITERACY SERVICES

The Centre's data literacy work is focused on increasing the capacity of humanitarians to access and use data. Our team offers services designed to build data skills and instil a data culture within teams. We are prioritizing OCHA staff in non-technical roles for our intensive training programmes but other services will be available to all OCHA staff and partners. Our goal is to:

1. Create accessible entry points, for humanitarians from different roles and backgrounds, to improve their ability to use data effectively.
2. Support the emergence of effective, cross-functional data teams.
3. Foster a healthy data culture within the humanitarian sector.

Training, Resources Development & Skill Building

- **Intensive Training Programmes:** The Centre is planning its first 'Data Literacy Foundation Programme' for OCHA staff from non-technical backgrounds starting in September 2019. The trainings will be integrated into participants' workflow, and include a mix of face-to-face, distance online training, and skill application.
- **Data Literacy Supplements & Online Resources:** The Centre is developing a set of easy-to-use resources to introduce individuals to data, the data management process and data visualisation. These resources can be used as data literacy inserts in existing training or as standalone courses delivered by experienced data users for their colleagues and partners.
- **Speaker Series on Data & Technology:** There is interest in trendy topics like predictive analytics and data security and how they can improve humanitarian action. Through a forthcoming speaker series, the Centre will help contextualise and explain how to harness these new technologies and approaches to managing data.

Data Champions, Team & Network Building

- **Train-the-Trainers:** Scaling data literacy requires that more individuals be able to support their teams in building data skills and leading data transformation processes. The

Centre will organise train-the-trainer events for existing data champions with humanitarian organisations and support them in delivering data literacy trainings to their colleagues and partners. The Centre will expand its strong partnerships with humanitarians working to build data literacy in the sector.

- **Facilitate Peer Networks:** The Centre will build peer-to-peer support into its intensive training programmes. The networks will connect people from different contexts to share how they are using data and to search for solutions for common challenges.

Training Advisory Services & Data Literacy Diagnosis

- **Advice on Data Literacy Training Programmes:** Across the sector, organisations are looking to upskill their teams. The Centre is available to provide advice and light-touch support to humanitarian organisations looking to deliver data literacy training and skill building initiatives.
- **Data Literacy Assessment:** The Centre will support OCHA offices to diagnose and understand their level of data literacy, establish clear steps they need to take to improve their data literacy and access provide advice and support to achieve their goals.

Resources

- [We Are All Data People: Insights From The Centre's Data Literacy Survey](#)
- [The Centre's Data Literacy webpage](#)

What can you do

- Get in touch with the Centre's Data Literacy Team to find out how we can help. Contact: Lisa Peterson, peterston1@un.org and Katelyn Rogers, katelyn.rogers@un.org
- Connect with the [Data Literacy Consortium](#)