

## 2 A Rapid Assessment for Markets (RAM)

The RAM is an instrument allowing humanitarian practitioners with limited market expertise and time to develop a rapid and basic understanding of key markets within the first few days after a shock.

### 2.1 What is the RAM for?

The RAM is designed to provide a quick and basic first understanding of key markets in the immediate aftermath of a shock. The RAM strengthens response analysis by providing market data, essential for informed decision-making on appropriate transfer mechanisms (i.e. in-kind or cash-based)<sup>8</sup> if relief is to be provided. The tools used in the RAM, such as market mapping tools, can also reveal possibilities for market-support interventions and identify entry points to support market recovery. Therefore, the RAM is not biased towards a specific form of response, but facilitates reflection about a wide range of response options.

It should be noted that the RAM **does not assess the need for relief**; this is the purpose of household and community needs assessments (highlighted below). Strictly speaking, the RAM can be used to analyse any commodity market – that is, it can be used for goods and services. However, the focus of attention in the immediate aftermath of a shock will typically be on goods.

### 2.2 How does the RAM work?

The RAM includes a five-step process (see fig. 1) and a series of tools to gather, analyse, interpret, summarize, and monitor market data and obtain a basic understanding of key markets.<sup>10</sup> The five steps and the materials necessary to perform them are presented in distinct chapters.

**Figure 1: The RAM process**



**In the first step**, RAM users establish an initial overview of the shock-affected area and the consequences of the shock. They collect secondary data on the affected area and information from people familiar with the context. The collected information is discussed and used to define which commodities (i.e. market systems) and marketplaces should be assessed.

<sup>8</sup> In this document, the term cash-based intervention refers to any intervention that increases purchasing power of its beneficiaries – i.e. any transfer of cash or vouchers.

<sup>9</sup> See for example ICRC (2013) for responsibilities and procedures with respect to Cash Transfer Programming.

<sup>10</sup> The RAM draws on a number of existing assessment methodologies including Oxfam GB's 48-Hour Assessment Tool, the Emergency Market Mapping and Analysis (EMMA) approach, and the Market Information and Food Insecurity Response Analysis (MIFIRA) framework.

#### **Be aware!**

The decision about the appropriate immediate relief response does not only depend on the markets' capacity to respond to cash-based interventions, but on other factors such as programme objectives, beneficiary preferences, administrative capacity, logistical constraints, efficiency, cost effectiveness, and security conditions.<sup>9</sup>

***In the second step***, RAM users visit selected marketplaces and collect information on commodities from key informants and traders. They conduct individual interviews and focus group discussions using interview forms to guide them. At the end of this data collection process, the RAM team comes together to discuss and summarize their findings using a series of questions to prompt their analysis.

***In the third step***, RAM users use a decision tree to discuss their findings for each selected marketplace and determine whether it has the capacity to respond to an increase in demand for the key commodities. The decision tree points out potential for cash-based relief and market-support interventions.

***In the fourth step***, RAM users compile their findings and conclusions in a defined reporting format for a *RAM Profile Report*. The report is intended for use in response-analysis discussions when decisions regarding appropriate interventions are made.

***In the fifth step***, RAM users are presented with a simple monitoring tool to track the evolution of the assessed markets and marketplaces. As markets often change quickly, especially after a sudden shock, the monitoring tool allows RAM users to follow developments easily and collect data that would be needed if modifications to relief interventions were required.

Additional support on the use of the five steps and associated tools is provided for RAM team leaders in the Additional Guidance chapter.

## 2.3 Who is the RAM for?

The RAM is for humanitarian aid practitioners who find themselves in the immediate aftermath of a shock and have to develop an immediate relief intervention to assist a shock-affected population. This resource has been developed specifically for staff with no or limited technical skills in market analysis and rapid-onset shocks in urban and rural contexts.

Applying the RAM requires a team leader with a basic understanding of how markets work. A greater understanding of markets and market analysis experience will increase the quality of the assessment. In addition to this, member(s) of the logistics team should be involved in the RAM, due to the relevance of their skills, knowledge and decision-making role in intervention design.

The team leader guides a group of RAM users through the process of data collection and data analysis and makes sure the respective findings are accurately summarized in a report. Although the RAM does not assume that RAM users have market expertise,<sup>11</sup> the following skills are needed:

- ➔ experience in field work and assessments;
- ➔ ability to break down and rephrase complex questions;
- ➔ ability to adapt the language to the interviewee;
- ➔ (i.e. adapting to the cultural and socio-economic background of the interviewee);
- ➔ ability to collect information using rapid and participatory rural appraisal tools;
- ➔ language skills;

<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, market knowledge is an asset that can increase the speed and quality of the assessment.

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- (i.e. local language and common language to communicate between team members);
- basic numeracy and analytical skills;
- Excel / database skills for the analysis of the price data collected during price monitoring in Step 5 is needed by at least one RAM team member.

Ideally RAM users will have good knowledge of the shock-affected area, inhabitants, key informants, relevant secondary data and markets. Such knowledge speeds up the assessment process and improves the quality of the information gathered.



Aliyaa Abdulkhaleq Huseein/CRC