

GECARR Agile Analysis that shapes Action

September 2019



GECARR
Good Enough
Context Analysis
for Rapid Response

Executive summary

A high tolerance for ambiguity is essential to conduct rapid context analysis in fragile contexts, and the Good Enough Context Analysis for Rapid Response (GECARR) tool was designed for that purpose.

It is built to equip decision-makers with a practical and locally informed snapshot analysis during times of crises, and to enable and incentivise timely, effective and safe humanitarian decision-making in difficult contexts and circumstances.

This report outlines three pillars that make GECARR a rapid context analysis of choice in volatile contexts. Firstly, it explains its action oriented and locally informed analysis when time, resources and predictability are scarce. Secondly, it explains its agility that makes it work in fragile contexts because it is underpinned by principles of timeliness, local ownership and practicality. Thirdly, it outlines its ability to turn analysis into decisions that lead to action.



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What is GECARR?

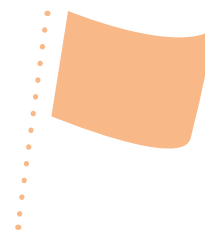
GECARR is a macro-level analysis of a country or a specific geographic context of a country. It is a tool used during, or in anticipation of, an imminent change or at the initial or urgent phase of a humanitarian response. GECARR findings can influence decisions including shaping the design of relevant response plans for improved planning, responsiveness and accountability to affected populations, and informing security management.

Over a period of 7-10 days a trained GECARR team draws together the views of a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders, including staff, local community members, and partners. This is done through

focus group discussions, key informant interviews and a half day scenario planning workshop. The purpose is to produce a snapshot of the current situation, including current context, needs, key actors, sources of cohesion and division (connectors and dividers), likely future scenarios and practical and actionable internal and external recommendations for NGOs involved in humanitarian response. These recommendations can be used immediately and are appropriate and relevant to the context. The outcome is a short document that is easily digested by busy decision-makers and practitioners.

For more information on the GECARR, click [here](#).

GECARR Milestones



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|-------------|---------------|--|
| 2014 | May | GECARR initial concept developed |
| | July | First GECARR in the Central African Republic |
| 2015 | April | First inter-agency GECARR conducted in Burundi |
| | Nov | GECARR tool is reviewed and guidelines formalised into version 2.0 |
| 2016 | | GECARR tool receives DFID funding enabling further professionalisation and the funding of two GECARRs (DRC and Mali) |
| 2018 | Autumn | First non-WV GECARR conducted in Nigeria |
| 2019 | March | GECARR tool is reviewed for version 3.0 |
| | April | GECARR documents becomes START branded |

Why was GECARR created?

In 2014, the conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR) turned an already impoverished country into a humanitarian disaster. The collapse of government, proliferation of rebel groups and rampant violence led to mass displacement, prompting a rapid increase in humanitarian need and corresponding activities to support.

In situations of great need there is an imperative for humanitarian agencies to act rapidly and effectively, which also requires actions to be safe for staff and communities. They require a good understanding of often delicate political, economic and social dynamics of the context, which are often highly volatile and unpredictable. Understanding this is essential to effectively serving communities in need, while providing adequate care for staff.

World Vision first used the GECARR in the Central African Republic context to bridge the gap between needing to take rapid humanitarian action in a fragile context, and needing comprehensive analysis that often takes more time than when an urgent crisis allows.

The Central African Republic became a test case for how GECARR could be both participatory in methodology and practical in output, bringing immediate value in a context of significant turbulence, humanitarian need and limited resources.

By focusing on a light-touch, inclusive and action-oriented approach GECARR has proven to be effective in more than 20 countries. Developed in 2014, the tool has remained relevant and effective by resisting the temptation to expand its scope, remaining simple and practical.

Aspiring to a standard of “good enough” rather than “perfection” contributes to the utility of the tool. Field teams can and do implement the tool at short notice and use the GECARR in settings where a more comprehensive approach is not always possible. GECARR is proven to work as a tool because its **analysis (section 1)** has a unique design and methodology. It demonstrates **agility (section 2)** in response to the challenge of working in fragile contexts because it prioritizes the principles of

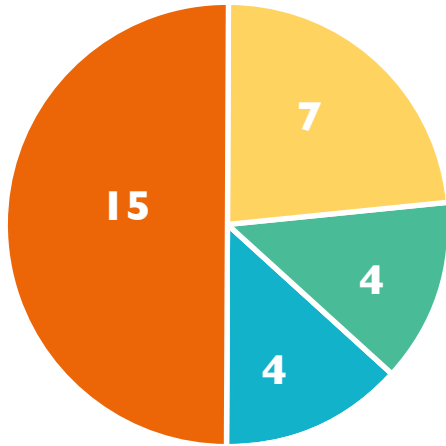
1. being timely for decision-makers,
2. creating ownership of analysis for communities, implementers and decision-makers by ensuring their buy-in, and
3. providing practical and implementable recommendations for immediate action.

These principles have been critical to the analysis being turned into **action (section 3)** for implementing agencies, which has continued since it was first used in the Central African Republic in 2014 to its 30th iteration in 2019. These three aspects (analysis, agility and translation into action) make GECARR a rapid context analysis tool of choice in volatile and fragile contexts.

Total number of GECARRs

(as of September 2019)

30



Africa

15

Latin America

7

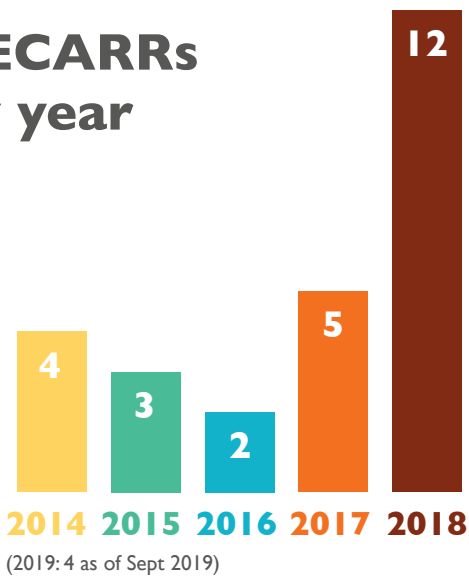
Middle East

4

Asia

4

GECARRs by year



GECARRs across the world

2014

- CAR
- Iraq
- Syria
- Jordan

2015

- Burundi
- Sierra Leone
- CAR

2016

- DRC
- Mali

2017

- Niger
- Kenya
- Uganda
- Philippines
- DRC

2018

- Bangladesh
- Lebanon
- Zimbabwe
- Colombia x 3
- Ethiopia
- Ecuador
- Brazil
- Peru
- PNG
- Nigeria

Analysis

“ Working with World Vision and START¹ on this process allowed us to use a simple and flexible tool for better context analysis and the inter-agency approach solidified working relationships with partners also committed to evidence-based programming.

- Mildred Makore, Director of Programs,
MercyCorps Zimbabwe

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GECARR process

1. Identification

A GECARR begins by appointment of a lead facilitator who then works with a country office to identify where the organisation can best benefit from this tool.



2. Planning

A point person/s in the country office is assigned to work with the lead facilitator, primarily around logistics. The facilitator will organise their team in terms of roles and responsibilities and compile secondary data (if available) about the context in question.



3. Data collection

The GECARR undertakes data collection in the country by conducting key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with a variety of internal and external stakeholders, including members of the local community and partner agencies. Data is collected around 8 questions broadly around the three areas of: What's happened? What's happening now? What may happen next?



4. Analysis

The KIIs/FGDs are followed by a short scenario-planning session leading to implications for the agency's work. The workshop is typically inter-agency in nature. After the workshop, facilitators analyse and compile data into a draft written report, together with the in-country team. This includes a list of actionable recommendations and a detailed analysis of three possible scenarios identified and discussed during the scenario-planning workshop.



5. Validation

The GECARR results are validated in a debrief meeting in-country with senior leadership. The draft report is then finalised by the GECARR lead facilitator in collaboration with the country office.



6. Implementation

Most of the recommendations are often shared and used in-country, but some are also useful for other parts of an organisation/s involved in the process, e.g. use in global advocacy, operational security, donor engagement and communications. Other agencies and partners can also use findings where appropriate. Each GECARR process has a lessons learnt exercise completed at the end, including reflecting on the challenges of being agile in unpredictable contexts.





Partners with GECARR experience

GECARR is designed to be an inter-agency tool whenever possible. Inter-agency context analysis decreases the impact of organisational blindspots and bias and contributes to humanitarian coordination and collaborative working. More comprehensive and diverse information can also often be collected when multiple organisations are involved.

- OCHA
- Caritas
- Trocaire
- Oxfam
- Action Aid
- MercyCorps
- CRS
- Plan
- Islamic Relief
- Nigeria INGO Forum

GECARR has been featured at forums and occasions including.....

- United Nations Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week (HNPW),
- The START Network,
- “From Poverty to Power”, Duncan Green blog,
- United Nations staff in New York,
- United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS),
- Department for International Development (DFID),
- Office of U.S Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA),
- Kings College London,
- International Development Select Committee (UK Parliament),
- Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP),
- Overseas Development Institute (ODI)
- Conflict Sensitivity Community Hub,
- Geneva Peace Week 2018,
- Conflict Analysis Network (CAN).

“ *GECARR sets a good standard in the humanitarian sector for rapid and practical analysis in difficult contexts that others can learn from.*

- Tom Kirk, Researcher, London School of Economics. ”

GECARR aims to reach a balance between reaching minimum standards to deliver a quality analysis and producing an analysis in a time-efficient way that’s ‘good enough’ in order to quickly inform operations and planning moving forward. It is an agile process that is guided by the principles of timeliness, practicality and local ownership, all of which are explored in the next section.

Agility

“ GECARR provides us with up to the minute context information, helping us be more agile and adaptive. It’s an essential part of our toolkit to meet the real and current needs of children and communities. The analysis it provides supports partner and donor engagement, to ensure effective and collaborative programmes.

- Anne-Marie Connor, National Director,
World Vision DRC

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GECARR was designed and developed with agility in mind, underpinned by three key principles - timeliness, ownership, and practicality. This ensures it is simple and practical enough to work in challenging contexts. The GECARR process has been reviewed and improved over the years, but the commitment to simplicity over complexity, rapid response over lengthy timeliness, and ease of use over cumbersome processes has remained.

The three guiding principles of GECARR

.... Timeliness Ownership Practicality

Timeliness

Timeliness of analysis refers to the intention of GECARR to ensure that the analysis is available to decision-makers at the time they need it. Ideally, all decisions should be reached following thorough examination of complete data. In reality, much analysis that strives to achieve this becomes so time-consuming that it is not ready to be used at all by the time decisions must be made. The GECARR process takes the timing of anticipated decisions into account as much as possible, allowing decision makers to use it to make the best decisions at the right time. The best way for analysis to have impact is for it to be available so the intended user can absorb it and process the information ahead of the decision-making process.

GECARR can be implemented rapidly. It requires a minimum of 2 weeks for preparation and approximately 2 weeks for in-country data collection after which a report can be produced in a matter of days if needed. As the process is largely built around interviews conducted by a GECARR facilitation team, rather than workshops, it does not consume the time of many of the early responders who need to remain focused on the immediate needs of the affected population.

Ownership

Ownership complements the principle of timeliness. A challenge for analysis is that often these entire processes are completed separately from those who would be using the information, due to understandable but unfortunate pressures of time and capacity. This then creates a challenge for buy-in and take up of recommendations. But alternatively, if the decision-maker can claim some level of ownership of the process and product, it is easier for them to accept, use it and to defend the conclusions and resulting actions. GECARR therefore promotes participatory analysis where decision-makers are part of the process, inputting into it in terms of design and/or content and sign off.

To create ownership it is often important to ensure that the analysts and the intended user (country office, including staff who would commission the analysis as well as others who would lead or participate in the exercise) work together from the beginning. They need to create a common understanding of the issue, the methodology and who to involve in the process and what type of output is expected at what time.

By including local communities in the process GECARR also ensures that intended or possible beneficiaries are provided a voice, creating both a local grounding in the analysis as well as building acceptance for the organisation and any resulting actions. In addition, if a GECARR is conducted inter-agency it also increases ownership of the findings across the sector for joint planning, coordination and advocacy.

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GECARR helps bring together different departments of our global organisation to work effectively to respond proactively and reactively to emergencies, guided by local understanding of the operating context.

*- Justin Byworth, Global Lead - Disaster Management,
World Vision International*

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Practicality

Practical recommendations that can be implemented immediately are the end goal of this type of analysis. Overly complex or detailed analyses can actually be counterproductive, in that the lengthy process or lengthy final product renders them impractical or inaccessible for the intended end-user, often busy decision-makers in humanitarian settings. In humanitarian settings, it is important to make sure that the macro analysis is adequately informed by the practical realities and constraints faced on a daily basis. This type of analysis, while often led by someone external to the context, needs to rely heavily upon the insights of a wide variety of local people, (as specified in the GECARR guidance), and staff for guidance as to what the key issues are and the key opportunities and challenges in the local communities. That way macro-level analysis of possible scenarios can be combined with local understanding of impact on a specific context and what the humanitarian consequences in a particular area may be.

Agility is achieved by ensuring that there is an intentional friction between practicality and perfection throughout the process. Agility is prioritised as it ensures GECARRs actually occur in the first place, as the gap GECARR seeks to fill is to work where other processes struggle to work.

The GECARR process tolerates that neither the data-gathering nor the analysis will be perfect, allowing imperfection in order to be effective within the operational constraints often present when a GECARR is needed. Rather, those aspects are intentionally held in tension with the often urgent need for a decision, and by the imperfect and often insufficient resources available during the timeframe to make it happen.

As a result of this agile analysis process, GECARRs often then translate into action and impact for most vulnerable communities. Culturally, this means encouraging an organisational willingness and humility to be comfortable with information that is less than perfect when that is required in order to be operationally relevant, timely and effective.



Action

“ GECARR enables the humanitarian agencies within our network to work together in a collaborative way. GECARR is unique in that it draws on insights from local communities and triangulates this with information from a wide-variety of other stakeholders. GECARR produces likely scenarios and actionable recommendations which allows our network to quickly act in an anticipatory way.

- Sarah Klassen, Technical Advisor,
START Network

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The agile design of GECARR is intentional so that the resulting analysis easily translates into tangible action and impact. To date, GECARRs have had a range of impact, in relation to strategy, programming, funding, building relationships and capacity, wider systems strengthening (e.g. security), communications and advocacy. This is often because the scenarios GECARRs predict are reasonably accurate and ensure that advance preparations result in impact. This next section gives examples of how analysis turns into decisions and practical action.

Strategic decisions



GECARR analysis, scenarios and recommendations frequently influence planning and response, country office and partner strategic decisions, particularly around starting new or changing existing programming, security, communications and advocacy.

Burundi

In 2015, in Burundi, the GECARR findings showed concerns from communities about INGOs remaining present during the insecurity. This prompted the design, funding and implementation of an accountability hotline project with OCHA, which aimed at enhancing communication between disaster-affected people and humanitarian actors.

Democratic Republic of Congo

The 2017 GECARR in the Kasais, DRC, helped to inform the strategic intent of the new response, giving validation of sector focus and a mixed approach of both long- and short-term interventions. It also directed project locations (a focus on one rather than two areas), a scale up of cross cutting issues such as Do No Harm, and provided a template for continuous monitoring of the contexts. The power analysis helped to determine who to engage with, e.g. local chiefs, and this was subsequently built into the organisations' way of working, resulting in a stronger footprint and programme impact earlier on. The predicted scenarios challenged pre-existing ways of working, e.g. pushing WV to reassess its method of food distribution in one instance and its targeting methods in order to avoid exacerbating tensions as much as possible.

Context monitoring



GECARRs provide impetus for ongoing context monitoring, in a format optimised for updating key decision-makers at various levels.

Democratic Republic of Congo

In the DRC, post GECARR, the WV office reported increased staff capacity to monitor and adapt to their context. These staff started more regular context monitoring meetings for programming in the East. It also helped increasingly align security monitoring with programmes monitoring.

Capacity

GECARRs enhance context awareness and context analysis/wider capacity for in-country staff and partners who participate in the process, including senior leadership teams.



Columbia

In Colombia, as WV did not have a presence on the ground where the GECARR was being conducted, the local church stepped in to support facilitation and as a result benefitted from increased capacity in arranging and conducting analysis. Pastors provided buildings for the team to work from, arranged volunteers to help with data collection and put them in touch with refugees organisations able to provide access to communities.

GECARRs have worked together with security risk assessments to help ensure that macro-level analysis through GECARRs support strategic and tactical security management to enable coherent risk management. Security staff have also taught other staff on how to conduct risk analysis.

Democratic Republic of Congo

In WV DRC, as a result of doing a first GECARR in 2016, the office gained in-country capacity which resulted in them being able to run a second in 2017, in the Kasais, without further external support. The enhanced context awareness and analysis skill set also helped staff going forward to strengthen needs, risks, analysis and capacity sections of various proposals required by the donors.

Democratic Republic of Congo

In the DRC in 2016 the GECARR findings informed advocacy messaging, which was used with existing donors, and catalysed better UN contingency planning. World Vision's reputation was built as 'an organisation that is thinking in advance'. In 2017 this continued with the Kasais GECARR, as findings informed joint INGO documents, contributing and/or reinforcing wider dialogues. As a result, several asks were successful including getting a United Nations Level 3 declaration (the most severe classification of a humanitarian crisis), increased UN flights into the Kasais, stronger security and coordination, and better access and visas. The content of the report enabled senior level WV staff to undertake more vocal advocacy at the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) level with confidence and to have increased visibility and legitimacy regarding the work in the Kasais, especially with donors.

External engagement



GECARRs have added value as input for external messaging and advocacy, with useful, succinct summaries for donor and INGO coordination meetings and clusters or networks, both in-country and at capital level, as well as for wider communications. The strengths of the GECARR tool, namely its community links, participatory nature, immediate operational relevance and flexibility, all help the credibility of the findings when doing external engagement.

Funding

GECARRs by design are able to be among the first coherent, and multi-agency assessments of a situation, and are therefore in a good place to trigger and inform funding in the early stages of a response or in anticipation of a potential one.



Burundi

In Burundi in 2015, Kenya in 2017 and Zimbabwe in 2018, each inter-agency GECARR successfully triggered funding for preparedness activities for several agencies in anticipation of potential increase in tensions. This funding often helped to fill key gaps and included activities such as food distributions, pre-positioning of supplies, dialogue meetings, contingency planning, radio work, and work with religious leaders on mediation processes.

Relationships



GECARRs build and strengthen long-term relationships. This includes:

Peer agencies:

participation in GECARRs can catalyse programme-level collaboration.

Democratic Republic of Congo

In the DRC, for WV's second GECARR in the Kasais, the local NGO partner went on to become WV's main local partner for its response.

Donors:

GECARRs can provide opportunities to connect with donors, share learning, advocate and preposition for funding.

Burundi

As a result of START Network engagement with GECARR in Burundi, the humanitarian directors of various START members felt the GECARR model was useful enough that they could consider it becoming a standard component of their preparedness work. It encouraged the creation of a new funding mechanism for inter-agency anticipatory context analysis and since then this grant, known as the START Network fund "Analysis for Action" grant, has funded two GECARRs.

Democratic Republic of Congo

In the DRC, the GECARR report in 2017 for the Kasais was internally used or drawn from as one of several products for mobilisation of funding and raising awareness of the situation, combating what seemed to be apparent fatigue with the country. As a result, the crisis was elevated to from a national to a global response for the WV partnership², which resulted in additional capacity and support.

Internally:

GECARRs can strengthen internal linkages between departments at all levels: national, regional and global. They result in better internal awareness, improved whole-of-office approaches, regional coordination and planning, better induction of new staff and visitors, and advocacy for increased awareness/investment

Democratic Republic of Congo

In the DRC in the first month following the GECARR, the report findings were used as an entry point with new donors and their newly-arrived staff to gain meetings and pre-position the organisation.

Communities:

New and/or stronger relationships with communities through GECARRs brings solidarity and hope.

Columbia

In Colombia, it was reported that since the GECARR, local community organisations have helped WV to implement programmes responding to the crisis. They were encouraged by the attention the assessment gave to their situation.



GECARR enlarged the panorama of the local context of El Talento neighborhood (where migrants are settling) for us, allowing us to understand its inhabitants a little more and to design work programs according to the analysis carried out.

- Pastor John Peña, Church leader, Colombia



Looking forward

In the spring of 2019, a meeting of the GECARR steering group and partners reaffirmed the following as the intended way forward for GECARR

- Preserving the foundational principles of timeliness, ownership and practicality, while avoiding the temptation to make GECARR increasingly complicated,
- Promoting inter-agency use and use by other agencies,
- Intentionally building the capacity of lead facilitators across multiple agencies, through training and mentorship of individuals in key strategic positions. This also includes maintaining strategic relationships between lead facilitators and organisations to promote collaboration and learning.

“ GECARR was designed to incentivise good decision-making with a good enough rapid understanding of often volatile situations in the increasingly fragile contexts of humanitarian response.

- Johan Eldebo, Regional Security Director and co-creator of GECARR

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For more information about GECARR please email rapidcontextanalysis@wvi.org

Authors:

Johan Eldebo and Sarah Pickwick

Design:

Amy Reinecke

With thanks to:

Sarah Klassen, Joanna Garbalinska, Nicola Hannigan, Maya Assaf-Horstmeier, Alanna Mascoll, Rebecca Isaak and Nadine Hernandez

Endnotes

1. <https://startnetwork.org/>
2. World Vision categorises emergencies into Category I, II and III depending on the percentage of the population affected. Category III (highest level) is either a National Office led response or a Global responses depending on National Office capacity.

