

## 2025 Humanitarian Networks & Partnerships Week - Geneva


# Striking the Right Balance Rapid vs. Detailed Damage Assessments


## Session Report

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### 1. Event Summary

**Session Title: Striking the right balance: Rapid vs. Detailed Damage Assessments for Effective Shelter Programming**

 **Date:** 25 March 2025

 **Time:** 11:00–12:30 UTC+1

 **Recording, powerpoint, report:** [watch the session and documents.](#)

 [watch the session on Youtube](#)

Organizer: Global Shelter Cluster

Moderators: Pascal Panosetti & Caroline Dewaste, Global Shelter Cluster

Location: CICG Room 16 & Online

### Participants

The session brought together over 120 participants from humanitarian agencies, academia, and independent professionals across global regions.

### 2. Introduction

Damage assessment is a critical step in shaping shelter interventions post-disaster or conflict. The challenge lies in balancing speed (rapid assessments) and accuracy (detailed assessments). This session brought together experts to explore methodologies, innovations, and field experiences that help optimize the use of damage assessments in shelter programming.

### 3. Objectives of the Session

- Evaluate the trade-offs between rapid and detailed assessments.
- Discuss how assessment data informs shelter decision-making.
- Share methodologies, tools, and coordination best practices.

- Emphasize collaboration between humanitarian actors, local authorities, and communities.

## 4. Panel Presentations & Key Insights

### 4.1 Ukraine Case Study – Streamlining house assessments and repairs in multi-stakeholder settings - Konstantin Midrenko, Shelter Cluster Ukraine

- Scale of Damage: \$57 billion in housing damages; over 2.5 million households affected.
- Challenge: Satellite imagery lacked address-level detail; hard to connect affected owners with aid providers.
- Solution: Developed SIDAR (Shelter Information Damage Assessment and Response) database—address-based, role-specific access, and linked with governmental systems.
- Impact: 85,000+ individual addresses recorded; 40+ NGOs and several government agencies using the system.

### 4.2 Rapid damage assessment in post-disaster and conflict settings – Remote Sensing Approaches - Matt Wencel, IMPACT Initiatives

- Approaches: Manual interpretation (gold standard), simplified binary analysis, and radar-based analysis (SAR).
- Limitations: Optical imagery availability, vertical-only views, and lateral damage undetectable.
- AI Potential: Slow uptake; many initiatives underway but need refinement.
- Call to Action: Invest in scalable, sustainable systems and enhance operational relevance of data for field actors.

### 4.3 Rapid Damage and Detailed Repair Housing Assessments - pros and cons – Afghanistan & Turkey Earthquakes – PROS & CONS – Dr. Kit Miyamoto, Miyamoto International

- Afghanistan 2020 & Turkey 2023 Earthquakes: Combined satellite and rapid in-person assessments.
- Local materials and vernacular construction sometimes outperform modern methods.
- Rapid tagging (e.g., green/yellow/red) helped prioritize assistance.
- Community engagement is essential—engineers must communicate clearly with affected people.
- Link rapid damage identification with immediate repair strategies and clear communication.

### 4.4 Rapid Damage Assessment, Beirut Blast 2020 - – Regina Wenk, Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit / SET

- Response Timeline: Deployed within 40 hours; surveyed 1880+ buildings.
- Coordination: Partnered with local authorities and UN; trained local engineers.
- Tools: Used structured forms, visual damage scales, and regular team meetings.
- Best Practice: Translated structural assessments into easy-to-understand guidance for affected residents.

### 4.5 Household and Building Damage Assessment (HBDA toolkit): Actionable Insights for Effective Post-Crisis Recovery - Arnold Njogu, UNDP

- Tool: Household and Building Damage Assessment (HBDA).

- **Scope:** Covers buildings, livelihoods, services; useful for both rapid and in-depth assessments.
- **Method:** Sampling based on satellite + government + open-source data (e.g., OSM).
- **Applications:** Used in Afghanistan, Vanuatu, Honduras for reconstruction planning, debris management, and policy development.
- **Outcome:** Enables targeted recovery planning with inclusive and disaggregated data.

## 5. Themes & Challenges

- **Speed vs. Depth:** Rapid assessments inform funding & initial response; detailed assessments guide recovery.
- **Data Integration:** Combining satellite imagery, local knowledge, and standardized forms enhances accuracy.
- **Community Engagement:** Essential to build trust, ensure relevance, and promote safe returns.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Construction practices and local norms must be respected in assessment design.
- **Scalability:** Requires resources, standardized frameworks, and open data sharing.
- **Communication Gaps:** A recurring issue where governments or engineers fail to explain findings to communities.

## 6. Recommendations

- **Use hybrid assessment models:** Combine remote sensing with localized data.
- **Strengthen data platforms:** Invest in tools like SIDAR and HBDA.
- **Develop universal guidance:** Harmonize templates, scoring systems, and tagging standards.
- **Engage communities early:** Foster two-way communication during and after assessments.
- **Enhance collaboration:** Link humanitarian clusters, governments, and the World Bank for unified approaches.

## 7. Conclusion

The session emphasized the evolving landscape of damage assessment. While technology and data systems are improving, the human aspect—community interaction, cultural context, and informed consent—remains central. To strike the right balance, assessments must be fast, fair, and deeply informed.