

# Peace IT!

Using ICTs to prevent, manage and resolve crises • 1/2008



## International Agency for Source Country Information (IASCI)

IASCI is an Austrian based NGO working with vast experience in field-based information management systems supporting evidence-based decision-making by providing data, information and analysis. In the article, the Director/CEO Nicolaas de Zwager states, that “there is no substitute for field-based information gathering.”

Turn to page 3 to read more about IASCI's activities in providing mission critical information.

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## Editorial

Information management and information sharing appears to be an ongoing topic in the field of crisis response. Work on this is conducted in many fronts with many different settings. The recent disasters in Burma and China have once again revealed the importance of accurate information for effective response.

In this first 2008 edition of Peace IT! we have gathered examples of initiatives and processes that are contributing in making information management and sharing more efficient. We have an update on the recent developments of the ICT4Peace, the process which has been followed in our journal. The article about International Agency for Source Country Information (IASCI) presents field based evidence on the importance of accurate data and information in post disaster and post conflict situations. In a slightly more academic setting, but having close links to the field, series of ISCRAM conferences gather academia and field practitioners to present and discuss solutions for crisis response.

Sanjana Hattotuwa, one of our most supportive contributors, presents a Human Rights Monitoring, Reporting and Advocacy platform that was created by his organization InfoShare to support the work of two Sri Lankan human rights NGOs.

Already earlier this year, after the disturbances that followed presidential elections in Kenya, a group of individuals set up a tracking system called Ushahidi to follow incidents and events that took place all over Kenya. This is a marvellous example of the possibilities that modern technology offers. More importantly, the technology is at the disposal of ordinary people by not requiring a strong organisational or economical background.

Also, the possibilities that Google Earth and Google Maps offer are numerous. In one of the earlier editions of this journal, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's cooperation with Google Earth on Darfur was presented. In this issue, you will find information on Google's and UNHCR's established cooperation in supporting humanitarian operations.



**Juha-Matti Seppänen**  
ITCM Project Manager  
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## State of the art initiatives to strengthen peace and security through ICT

### Strengthening crisis information management at the United Nations

Given the increasing role that United Nations agencies play in crisis management globally, it is vital to understand, at a strategic level, the state of its institutional crisis information management capabilities. Crisis information management capabilities refer to relevant organizational structures, work processes, standards, and technology tools that support decision-making, resource-allocation, communications and advocacy during all stages of a crisis, including early warning, crisis prevention, conflict, humanitarian response, peace-building, and reconstruction. A comprehensive stocktaking of such activities will provide the UN System with the insights and information needed to improve its overall crisis management capabilities. The ICT4Peace Foundation aims to identify and raise current knowledge of best practices, capabilities and challenges and plot a way forward to improved response to crises at the UN through a stocktaking exercise with the office of the Chief Information Officer at the UN. In February 2008, Sanjana Hattotuwa, Special Advisor to the ICT4Peace Foundation met informally with a number of high-level representatives at key agencies based at the United Nations in New York in preparation for a stocktaking exercise on crisis information management capacities and best practices. These meetings with heads of agencies, units and departments, IT administrators and key Knowledge Management (KM), Information Management (IM) professionals and consultants gave vital insights into some of the best practices and key challenges facing crisis information management at the UN including the gaps and needs that had already been identified, the challenges of KM and IM at the UN within and between agencies and ideas for meaningfully addressing some of these challenges. The stocktaking process with high-level input from UN agencies, currently on-going, intends to:

- raise awareness about the contribution and potential of ICT in crisis management
- foster exchange of best practices in the field of ICT for crisis management
- contribute to the establishment of broad principles derived from operational best practices, help integrate them into UN processes and make ICT part of UN evaluation exercises.

### Training at the Cairo Regional Centre for Training on Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping in Africa (CCCPA)

Egypt set up the Cairo Regional Centre for Training on Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping in Africa (CCCPA) to support peacekeeping efforts in the African continent and to respond to the needs of African countries to assume a more active role in dealing with crises and conflict emanating from within

the African continent. Since its inception in 1995, the targeted beneficiaries of the Centre's training programmes are mainly African and Egyptian diplomats, military personnel, police and law enforcement officers as well as civilians involved in peace-keeping operations, crisis management, conflict resolution and preventive diplomacy. With the assistance of the UNDP and on the invitation of the CCPA, the ICT4Peace Foundation will lead, in collaboration with the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) a core programme for CCCPA that would constitute a unique and state-of-the art integrated, multi-stakeholder training programme for Egyptian and African peacebuilders and peace keepers, including *inter alia* the role of ICTs in peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations. This will include the development of syllabi for courses that will be delivered online as well as conducting physical classroom sessions. It is expected that the emphasis on the use of ICT throughout the training programme will lead to greater multi-stakeholder cooperation and awareness of how new media, the Internet and web communications can be leveraged to support complex peace processes, response to humanitarian crises and strengthen democracy.

### Creation of expert system for crisis information management

Cyclone Nargis brought to light the significant challenges of responding to a disaster in a region with little or no disaster preparedness, infrastructure, communications and the political will to support international relief efforts. In the first two weeks, the most critical period after the cyclone, there was almost no field presence of international aid agencies and a near complete information blackout from the regions in the Irrawaddy delta most affect by Nargis. The ICT4Peace Foundation conducted a media monitoring exercise and mapping of ICTs proposed for use in the relief efforts and as a result of its findings will create a website / wiki that allows for,

1. a non-expert to get information on relief and aid agencies (including the UN) who are able to support information / communications provisioning
2. a vendor or agency to ascertain what similar products, tools, services and solutions are there to support crisis information management
3. solution providers to evaluate the pros and cons of various platforms
4. experts who want to get details on a specific tool, product or service in terms of deployments, technical details, capacities including power requirements, user testimonials and other feedback.

It is expected that this website will be functional later this year.

Daniel Stauffacher and Sanjana Hattotuwa

IASCI staff collecting data on vulnerability profiles in an IDP Camp in the earthquake-affected area of Pakistan. Between 2006 and 2008, IASCI implemented the Information Clearinghouse of the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Agency (ERRA) of the Pakistan Government. (Photo: IASCI).



## The International Agency for Source Country Information (IASCI):

**“There is no substitute for field-based data gathering”**

Experience in post-disaster and post-conflict scenarios has repeatedly shown that timely access to relevant and reliable data and information provides the practical elements for making informed and nuanced decisions. Such inputs enable Governments, responsible agencies and individuals to develop targeted and tailor-made solutions on a number of levels and issues of concern.

As this is so self-evident, and with all the modern tools and technologies available to us, one would assume that the aid workers in the field, politicians in the capitals and affected populations have more or less adequate access to the information they need to take well-informed decisions. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case.

When facing an emergency, especially in a developing country, reliable information of direct relevance continues to be one of the scarcest commodities available.

A combination of factors conspire to frustrate the responders and victims, including insufficient coverage, erratic and contradictory historical records and lack of accuracy or relevance.

In many cases, information of relevance simply does not exist as it was never collected. Where it was collected, the gathering was very often far from systematic, using formats that are not easily shared - even when agencies are willing to share, which unfortunately is often not the case.

Moreover, national and local governments are often overwhelmed - not only by the disaster itself - but also by the sheer number and types of humanitarian organizations that suddenly arrive on their doorstep.

### **Practitioners founded specialized agency**

It is in this context that the International Agency for Source Country Information (IASCI) was created in May 2004. Based on their experience in field-based information management systems - as they relate to humanitarian relief, migration management and displacement, reconstruction and economic development - the founders saw an opportunity to directly support evidence-based decision-making by providing key client groups with access to tailored, accurate and unbiased field-based data, information and analysis.

### **Field-findings not always convenient, but always important**

According to IASCI Director Nicolaas de Zwager, IASCI's IM methodologies and implementation capacities have proven to be particularly applicable to complex humanitarian interventions and mass displacements: “There is simply no substitute for field-based data and information gathering.



*A sick woman is hand-carried from her village for three days for medical assistance in the isolated Northwestern Frontier Province of Pakistan. During its assessment on basic health facilities, IASCI discovered that, contrary to the 'official records' on which interventions were based, many health units recorded as functional were not operating, sometimes already for years. This is a classic example of "round-trip-ping" of the same errors in fact. (Photo: IASCI)*

In practical terms, and when all is said and done, somebody has to get their boots on the ground and collect the necessary data.

Given time and resource restraints, careful consideration should be given to the actual requirements of the decision makers; and it should be ensured that the timeliness, reliability and format of the data meets or exceeds those requirements. Then expertise and day-to-day discipline needs to be applied to ensure that systematic informational support is provided, and by the most direct and efficient means available."

In the intervening years, IASCI has developed a proven track record in consistently meeting the varied information requirements of its clients. IASCI has implemented research, information management and related capacity building projects in Afghanistan, Albania, Armenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, DR Congo, Kosovo, Moldova, Pakistan, Serbia, Somalia, Sri Lanka and others.

Acting in line with the internationally accepted "Best Practices in Humanitarian Information Management and Exchange", IASCI's experts and strategic partner organizations collaborate with managers, teams and individuals to generate result-oriented outputs matching the objectives and internal requirements of their clients.



*Wolfgang Gressmann, IASCI's Head of Operations, in a IDP Camp in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo. In February 2008, IASCI systematically analysed the information management requirements for camp coordination and camp management (Photo: IASCI).*

"Delivering reliable evidence-based information is not a process of always telling the client what they want to hear but rather a matter of providing them with what they need to know", informs Nicolaas de Zwager.

### **IASCI always contacts the primary source directly**

In order to ensure reliability and timeliness, and hence impact, IASCI responds to client demands for data by directly obtaining 'statements of fact' from qualified primary sources in the field (rather than from secondary sources such as reports, statistics or the internet). By using economies of scale, IASCI is able to carry out this challenging field-work under conditions which would otherwise be prohibitively expensive.

Importantly, IASCI's systematic "Primary Source and Strategic Information" (PSI) methodologies eliminate bias and agenda from the research process. By these means IASCI has enabled decision-makers at all levels to confidently carry out evidence-based critical decisions on a markedly more confident and efficient basis.

Ten years of practical experience in a wide variety of challenging field operations has shown that PSI-based projects offer practical partnership opportunities and fully quantifiable benefits to institutional partners and clients involved in areas such as emergency response, humanitarian intervention and migration management.

One of the latest examples include the implementation of the Information Clearinghouse for the earthquake-affected areas of Pakistan, as part of the governmental "Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority" (ERRA), where IASCI processed over 8,000 individual information requests for over 40 agencies involved in the relief and recovery processes. This capacity, duly built and tested by IASCI, was then successfully handed over to the Prime Minister's Secretariat.

### **Consulting services and research**

IASCI also provides its clients with research and independent consultancy and project development/implementation services. Such services are primarily related to humanitarian intervention and economic development.

Working closely together with the client, evaluation and analysis includes issues such as the re-assessment of the rationale for the intervention, options appraisal, monitoring, evaluation and feedback to facilitate learning about "what works" and introducing mid-course corrections where necessary. The result is a series of practical guidelines and manage-



*Roshan Perera, Program Manager IASCI, Dr. Nihal Edirisinghe, Dir. Health Services Nuvara Eliya, and Werner Wendt, Dep. Director IASCI (left to right), initiating training programmes for community health volunteers to assist public health midwives in Sri Lanka (Photo: IASCI).*

ment decision-making tools, not an evaluation process that is “bolted on” as an afterthought.

Recent examples of the expanding portfolio of studies, surveys and rapid assessments include the assessment of camp coordination and camp management IM requirements in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo for UNHCR, as well as research related to the possible establishment of a National Rapporteur on Trafficking of Human Beings in Kosovo on behalf of the OSCE.

### IASCI's key recommendations

#### - More and better baseline data required

IASCI offers some observations and key recommendations in regard to the gaps identified during their field operations.

Experience shows that one of the key and recurrent challenges is the lack of baseline data supporting humanitarian interventions of all kinds. The required information may be unreliable, or wholly inappropriate, leaving responders, humanitarian programmes and donors to rely on scarce, outdated and often inaccurate information.

Other familiar problems include value-driven multiple assessments in some areas and lack of assessments in others. Most of the time, data is collected in different formats by different agencies; and information, when obtained, is not shared in an open and efficient manner.

Obviously, base-line data gathering and processing work should be done before the time-hungry environment of the emergency response starts. This is no time to start experimenting.

A more strategic approach is required to ensure that baseline data is available before, during and after a complex emergency. Only this will allow humanitarian work to be more effective, especially in those developing countries prone to natural disasters or complex emergencies.

Therefore, pre-positioning and targeted capacity-building in this area is especially important, as governments in developing countries frequently do not possess the resources to systematically collect and store data in the necessary formats.

One integrated system should ideally support all phases of disaster management, recovery, and longer-term reconstruction/development.

This would fit easily into supporting capacity development for governments. With appropriate information dissemination strategies in place, humanitarian agencies would then be able to plug into the data systems immediately upon deployment, enabling a quicker, more targeted and coherent emergency response and providing a framework for handover when the intervention inevitably moves to early recovery, recovery and developmental phases.

Such pre-positioned IM systems need to reflect local conditions and viable technologies, as well as remain flexible and responsive. They should therefore be based as far as possible on standardised global norms while firmly located within specific high-risk countries. Full ownership of the respective national governments is a necessary prerequisite, with preparatory works, upgrades and operations duly supported by specialised agencies in IM.

Secondly, and closely related to all of the above, are the recurring inconsistencies and unsystematic sequences used in data gathering and information management at field level, i.e. the process of data collection, cleaning and sorting, evaluation, analysis, dissemination and action. This, together with lack of accurate base-line data, is the core underlying reason for the habitual misjudgement of facts, lack of learning and knowledge transfer and, ultimately, improper or misplaced action.

Simply put: “Nobody should be satisfied by the production of colourful maps and charts, when the data on the basis of which they were created is evidently insufficient or simply wrong”, states Nicolaas de Zwager.

## What is IASCI?

The International Agency for Source Country Information (IASCI) is a service organization established in May 2004 as an Association of Members and Partners under the laws of the Republic of Austria. IASCI is politically independent, non-partisan and wholly impartial. Its activities are exclusively non-profit in nature. Operating in field locations where systematic access to reliable and unbiased field-based information is often mission-critical to clients, IASCI naturally works on the basis of absolute integrity and discretion.

IASCI engages with its partners and clients to tailor-make practical ‘tool kits’ of data-gathering and information solutions for their specific needs. In doing so, IASCI naturally takes into account both client requirements and place-specific conditions. Thereafter, proven modular approaches ensure unparalleled reliability while simultaneously allowing the system to efficiently respond to fluctuating demand. This combination provides IASCI's clients with capacities that are uniquely flexible and cost-effective, while remaining focussed on ‘the real issues’, even within the most fluid of environments.

During implementation, strict maintenance of agreed-upon methodological processes ensures that all data collection occurs in a consistent, transparent and wholly neutral fashion. As a result, IASCI's clients are confident in receiving a consistent

quality and hence impact of the outputs - irrespective of the challenges posed by the field location.

Any solution put forward by IASCI always incorporates two critical determinants of success: meeting the specific technical, legal and other needs of the client or sector and, crucially, reflecting and responding in due time to the rapidly changing circumstances on the ground.

Simultaneously, real and quantifiable economies of scale ensure that the data-gathering process is both cost- and time-effective. The result is the consistent promotion of continuous efficiency gains within our client and partner organizations.

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The Humanitarian Information Management panel featuring Joe Becker (American Red Cross, left) and Alta Haggerty (UN OCHA, standing) presenting their views and taking questions from the audience. Author of the article sitting on right.



## ISCRAM2008

### The Fifth International Conference on Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management, Washington DC, May 4-7 2008

*A report by Bartel Van de Walle, ISCRAM2008 Conference Chair*

Early last May, more than 200 people gathered in Washington DC for the fifth annual meeting of the ISCRAM R&D community - with ISCRAM short for Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management. Academics, practitioners, students and policy makers could attend a variety of paper presentations, panel discussions, technical demonstration sessions and - not less important - some excellent social activities. All conference activities, technical and other, were kept on track by the excellent local organizing team of Professors Frank Fiedrich and Jack Harrald of George Washington University.

Traditionally, the conference runs from Monday morning till Wednesday evening, and is preceded by two important events on Sunday: the PhD student Colloquium and the 'informal getting together' at a local pub. While the latter is a cheerful opportunity for ISCRAM members to meet up and socialize before the serious work begins, the PhD Colloquium is an intense day of hard work for the PhD students who have been selected to participate. From about 30 participants, 10 students are invited to present their work, and are then given detailed advice or suggestions by their peers and a group of senior researchers in the domain. Under the leadership of Dr. Jonas

Landgren (Viktoria Institute, Sweden) and Professor Leysia Palen (Colorado University, USA), the PhD students take back home valuable recommendations on their work.

Equally traditionally, the conference is kicked off by an excellent keynote on Monday morning, this time by Professor Ben Shneiderman from the University of Maryland in the USA. In his keynote, Professor Shneiderman focused on the new opportunities for disaster and emergency prevention, response, and recovery offered by the remarkable social connectivity generated by today's networking services. Innovative socio-technical systems can be harnessed to strengthen communities in ways that can prevent some disasters, raise resident awareness of dangers, and prepare them to cope more effectively. Studying these innovative solutions and validating their effectiveness will require new research methods and a fresh outlook that Professor Shneiderman defined as "Science 2.0" - a term which provoked continued discussion at the conference following this exciting presentation.

Following this opening keynote, the conference participants then could move to on of the different parallel sessions that were offered continuously throughout the entire confer-



The ISCRAM demo and poster session provided for an unique opportunity to discuss informally and in-depth the design, implementation and deployment of systems. Alec Pawling, University of Notre Dame, USA (left) and Dragos Datcu, Delft University, the Netherlands in the midst of discussion.

## ISCRAM. 2008

ence program. Each of the sessions provided for a variety of presentations, with a focus ranging from technical to social perspectives and back. In total, the program provided for more than 20 dedicated session themes, including Geographic Information Systems, IT Governance, IT Security, Command and Control Systems, Intelligent Systems, Visualization, Information Overload, Human-Computer Interaction, Research Methods, and Information Systems for Humanitarian Operations.

A most interesting closing of the first day was the panel organized by Professor Murray Turoff (New Jersey Institute of Technology, USA) on « *Information Seeking Behavior and Needs of Emergency Preparedness and Management Practitioners* », in which selected panelist discussed the findings of a recent report to the National Library of Medicine focusing on the problems of information overload and information seeking by emergency response practitioners.

The second day started with a keynote from Joe Becker, Senior Vice President of Disaster Services for the American Red Cross and leading the organization's disaster relief. Joe Becker was leading the organization's largest US relief effort to date for Hurricane Katrina. In his presentation, Joe Becker described the many challenges and opportunities that Red Cross faces every day during a disaster and where the organization is going in the area of technology to better serve America. This talk was complemented by a panel on "Humanitarian Information Management", in which Joe Becker, Alta Haggerty (UN OCHA), Markus Goldstein and Samia Amin (World Bank) and Dennis King (US Humanitarian Information Unit) presented their views on this topic and initiated numerous discussions among the participants.

A few hours later, the second highlight of that day was offered by the technology demonstration and poster presentation session held during lunch time. Chaired by Dr. Susanne Jul of INSTEDD, the ISCRAM demo and poster session provided for an unique opportunity to discuss informally and in-depth the design, implementation and deployment of systems, and offered all attendees the opportunity for detailed examination of a variety of implemented systems, and encouraged to expose and address the issues that arise in practical application of theoretical ideas.

The third and last day of the conference started off with the final keynote of the ISCRAM2008 program, offered by Dr. Gary Klein, Chief Scientist of Klein Associates. Dr. Klein is one of the founders of the field of Naturalistic Decision Making. His work on recognition decision-making has influenced the design of new systems and interfaces, and decision training programs. He has extended his work on decision making to describe prob-

lem detection, option generation, sensemaking, planning and replanning. In order to perform research on decision-making in field settings, Dr. Klein and his colleagues have developed new methods of Cognitive Task Analysis. In his presentation, Dr. Klein stressed that while we can access more information than ever before, crisis managers need to go beyond information management. They have to be able to use the information to make decisions, make plans, and make sense of events. Dr. Klein vividly described how people actually perform these cognitive functions and how to take the cognitive dimension into account in developing information systems.

The final memorable moment of the conference was the closing session, in which the ISCRAM community wraps up its annual meeting by awarding those members who made a special professional contribution. For the first time, a *best paper award* was given at the conference, which went to John McGuirl (The Ohio State University), Nadine Sarter (The University of Michigan) and David D. Woods (The Ohio State University) for their paper "Seeing is believing?: The effects of real-time imaging feedback on emergency management decision-making". The ISCRAM2008 *Mike Meleshkin Award for best PhD student paper* went to the 'crisis informatics' PhD students team (Amanda L. Hughes, Sophia B. Liu and Sarah E. Vieweg) at Colorado University at Boulder. This group contributed no less than three excellent papers. Last but not least, the *ISCRAM Community Distinguished Service Award* was given to Professor Simon French of the Manchester Business School for his continued unconditional support to the ISCRAM Community.

Also at the closing session, an announcement was made that ISCRAM will start with its own journal, the International Journal for Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management, or IJISCRAM in short. The new IJISCRAM journal will be published from 2009 onwards on a quarterly basis. The first issue consists of invited contributions by leaders in our community, and from the second issue onwards submissions are invited. This journal is intended to become an active instrument in growing the publication opportunities and publication quality standards in the ISCRAM community, and will strive to provide research results and news as quickly as possible. The Call for Papers is available at [iscram.org](http://iscram.org).

Finally, it was announced that ISCRAM2009 will take place in Sweden in the city of Gothenburg, from May 11 to 13 2009. This sixth edition of the ISCRAM conference will without any doubt build on the success of the preceding editions, and we cordially invite you to contribute or otherwise actively participate in the next meeting of our global community!

[www.iscram.org](http://www.iscram.org)

# Supporting human rights protection, monitoring and advocacy

ICT can be used many ways for the protection and advocacy of human rights. Recent experience in Sri Lanka suggests that a regime increasingly savvy in ICT for its own propaganda raises the stakes for human rights defenders and civil society to present well documented cases for international and local human rights advocacy. A context of increasing human rights abuse and violence also makes it imperative for organisations to collaborate, with interoperable system supporting this collaboration in a secure manner. To meet these needs in the context of the on-going violence and human rights abuses in Sri Lanka, InfoShare created a Human Rights Monitoring, Reporting and Advocacy platform for two leading human rights NGOs based locally in 2007.

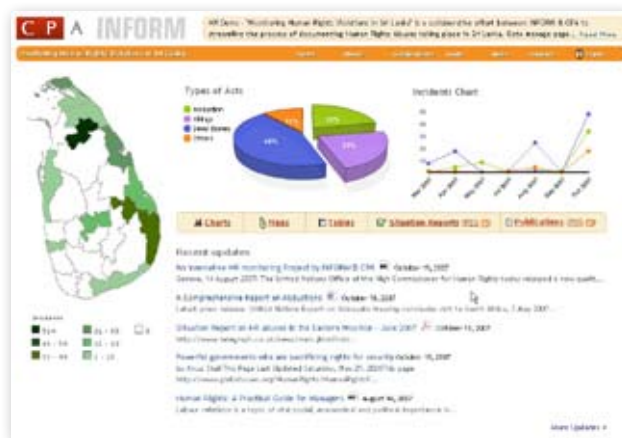
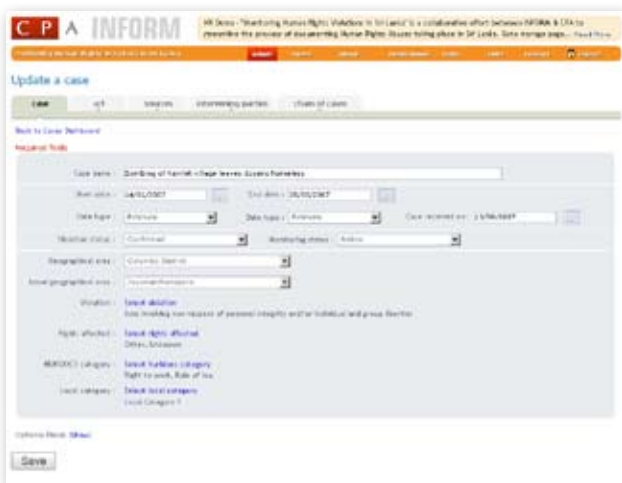
Strategically, the system came at a useful time for the two organizations. Moving away from the collection of case records in Microsoft Word, Excel and Access in a relatively haphazard manner onto a comprehensive and interoperable standard, based on HURIDOCS, helped activists ascertain gaps in information and share case details more easily and securely in a timely and sustainable manner. Challenges faced in the implementation of the system were more organisational than technical. Activists, unfamiliar with the need for robust collection of facts and case details, had to be trained in data entry. An initial resistance to the technology was soon overcome when users saw the real benefits of systematic case storage and dissemination within their own organisation and externally, in their advocacy networks. Our system, through its use of maps, email lists and a secure collaborative platform for HR documentation work, allowed a degree of comprehensiveness that was not otherwise possible, adding credence and value to the work of the organisations as a whole and the HR activists who were charged with HR protection in them.

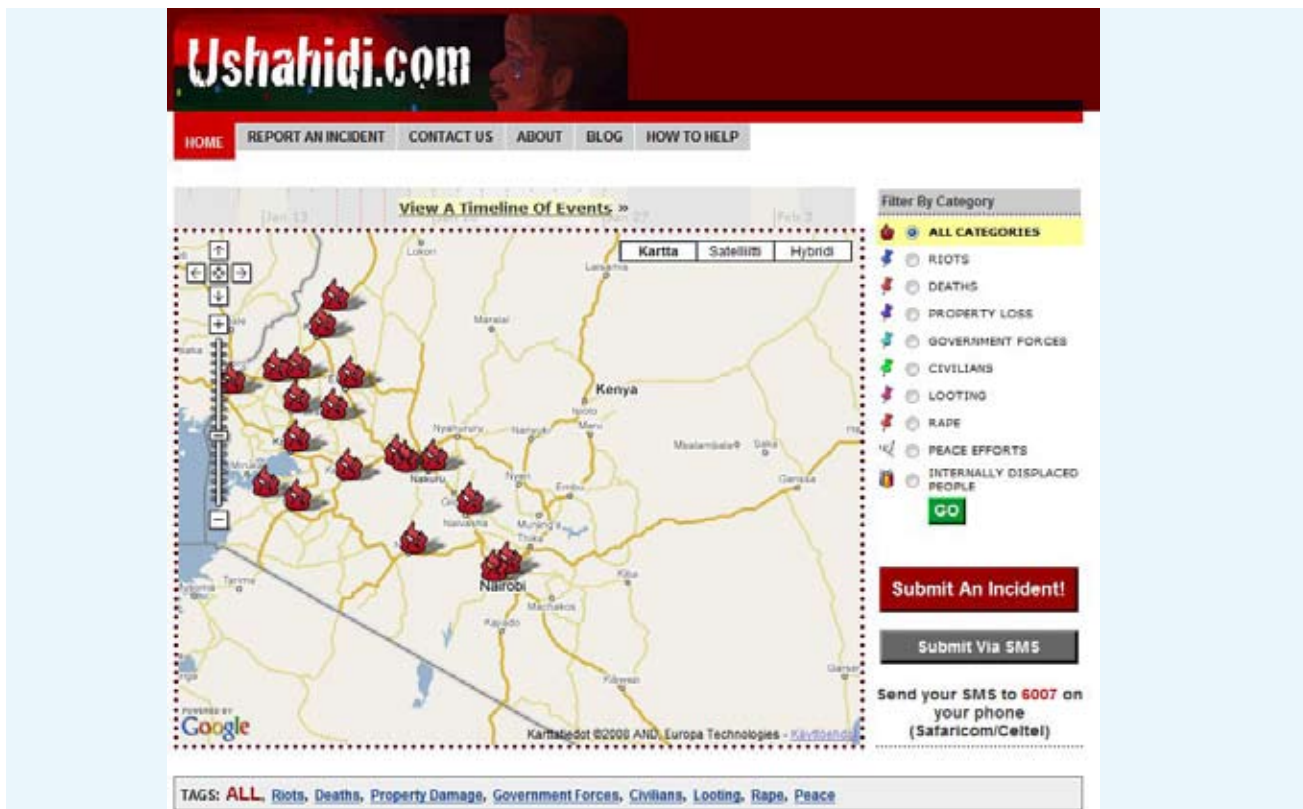
The system has web based interface and runs on any PC, on any OS, over any Internet connection. Data is backwards compatible with old databases like WinEvSys from HURIDOCS and the system is highly resilient to breakdowns in connectivity. If necessary, data can be saved securely to flash drives and imported into the system. Based on HURIDOCS, the system was tailor made to fit the advocacy needs of the two organisations but is essentially flexible to meet the needs of any organisation or network engaged in HR protection - big or small. A key feature of the system is the public advocacy

side of it which displays aggregate data on the current human rights context through reports, tables and charts, GIS maps and other linked publications, articles and news related to human rights. The platform is also very flexible in terms of user access. Administrators or trusted users are able to define access by others to the site and vet information that is entered. This enables organizations to give selective access to data in the system to individuals and partners that they may wish to bring into future monitoring work. The platform is based on UNICODE language standards which enables the system to accommodate place and person names in Sinhala and Tamil, in addition to English (in Sri Lanka or any other UNICODE based language internationally). These vernacular fields are also fully searchable, an important feature because of a lack of standardised translation of vernacular place / person names to English, with differences in translation leading on occasion to duplicate records. Our system is able to minimise this and also helps organisations to retroactively search through records, weed out duplicates and other information conflict and harmonise victim records. The RSS feeds of public content enables critical updates of human rights incidents and processes to be accessed via email, SMS, mobile phone, PDA and newsreaders. There are also automated periodic (day end/ weekly/monthly) situation reports published on the website, available as an RSS feed as well as through email. From the point of view of information security, secure encryption technologies are used for over the wire transmission. With all key data stored on off-site servers, even if it a computer is stolen, confiscated or forcibly entered into, vital information cannot be accessed.

In sum, the InfoShare Human Rights Monitoring, Reporting and Advocacy platform is more robust, reliable, user friendly, configurable, scaleable and compatible with operating systems. More development is planned including full mobile and PDA integration and advanced data visualization for trend analysis and the addition of GIS and other mapping tools. InfoShare invites those with allied goals to help it to further develop this system that through experience we strongly feel can meaningfully strengthen and support the protection of human rights globally.

Sanjana Hattotuwa





## Ushahidi

### A tool for ordinary citizens to report on Post-Election Violence in Kenya

Ushahidi.com (Swahili for testimony) was initially set up very quickly, over a two day period, in January 2008 in the aftermath of presidential election held in Kenya in December 2007. The incumbent President Mwai Kibaki was declared the winner of the election which was contested by opposition due to alleged electoral manipulation. Peaceful protests escalated into a violent rampage in several parts of the country leading to numerous deaths of demonstrators.

The Ushahidi website was created by a group of Kenyan bloggers, mainly Erik Hersman, Ory Okolloh and David Kobaya. The aim was to get a more complete picture of the events by offering for ordinary citizens in Kenya a tool both to report and document the incidents of violence. The general perception was that the situation in Kenya was much worse than was publicly announced in media and there was therefore a need for one kind of collaborative cartography.

The Ushahidi portal enables users to report incidents of violence in almost real time via the web or by sending an email or SMS. This citizen-provided data is uploaded to Ushahidi and geocoded (placed on a map) using Google Maps AOI where other users can see and verify the reported incidents. The system also features a tool which allows users to browse the events placed on a visual timeline and track points of escalation and de-escalation.

The data in Ushahidi is in a common KML format (used for instance in Google Earth and other Geo Viewers). The

KML format and Google Maps mash-up allows users to report incidences of crime and violence by description and location and mapping mash-ups with other projects and systems as well. According to the developers of the portal, there are still some development challenges ahead of Ushahidi which are related how to handle duplication of content or how to get better geocoding and map overlays.

Ushahidi can be seen as a book of collective memory preserving the track of events, which has both value as historical record and as a valuable resource for future peace and reconciliation efforts. Perhaps more importantly, Ushahidi raises awareness both among the citizens of Kenya and the international community and gives a voice for the victims. Bringing the severeness of the situation into attention of international community will give weight to calls for action and may also constrain local governments from relying on the use of force. On the other hand, the information in Ushahidi can be utilized in directing emergency aid to affected areas.





## UNHCR and Google unveil new map programme for humanitarian operations<sup>1</sup>

Google and the UN refugee agency UNHCR have unveiled a powerful new online mapping programme that provides an up-close and multifaceted view of some of the world's major displacement crises and the humanitarian efforts aimed at helping the victims.

The "Google Earth Outreach" programme gives UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies the ability to use Google Earth and Maps to highlight their work on behalf of millions of refugees and other populations of concern in some of the world's most remote and difficult areas.

Google's outreach programme provides humanitarian agencies with the skills and resources to use Google Earth and Maps to highlight their work to a mass audience. The agencies can overlay text, audio and video information onto Google Earth in what is known as a "layer," enabling them to explain and illustrate their humanitarian work to a worldwide audience.

Unveiling a new UNHCR layer in Google Earth before invited guests at UNHCR's Geneva headquarters in April, Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees L. Craig Johnstone hailed the project as means to educate people worldwide on the plight of refugees and on the humanitarians who help them. "Google Earth is a very powerful way for UNHCR to show the vital work that it is doing in some of the world's most remote and difficult displacement situations. By showing our work in its geographical context, we can really highlight the challenges we face on the ground and how we tackle them."

The new UNHCR layer shows three levels of detail. The first provides an overview of UNHCR itself and takes the user on a journey to three major displacement operations - in Darfur/Chad, Iraq and Colombia. The impact on neighbouring countries, including Sudan, Syria and Ecuador, is also explored, and refugee camp locations are highlighted on the Google Earth maps.

The second layer brings the user even closer to the life of those in exile, exploring such elements as refugee health,

education, water and sanitation. Pop-up windows linked to precise geographical points in camps and refugee communities provide written explanations, photos and videos of specific needs and operations.

The third level, the "macro-view," takes the online visitor right down to the local level within a refugee camp, allowing examination of schools, water points and other infrastructure found in a typical site. The new Google Earth Outreach programme includes grants for licences of the professional versions of Google Earth and Google SketchUp (the 3D modelling software) plus text and video tutorials on how to use these powerful tools.

UNHCR's technical experts say that as it grows, the Google Earth programme will allow UNHCR and its humanitarian partners to build and share with each other a visual, geographic record of their joint efforts on the ground to help refugees. This could include, for example, cross-border mapping of population flows as well as the location of displaced persons in relation to their places of origin - useful information in logistical planning for eventual repatriation operations.

According to Rebecca Moore, head of Earth Outreach at Google: "Charities and NGOs are constantly looking for new ways to make people aware of the issues they are trying to solve. Putting information into its geographical context makes it possible to show the complexity and the effect of the work of organizations such as UNHCR."

To date, 350 million people have downloaded Google Earth around the world. There are 13 layers in the Global Awareness section of Google Earth and thousands of KML (Keyhole Markup Language) layers have been created by individuals and organizations around the world.

Further information available at [www.unhcr.org/press-releases](http://www.unhcr.org/press-releases), [www.unhcr.org/googleearth](http://www.unhcr.org/googleearth) and [earth.google.ch/outreach](http://earth.google.ch/outreach).

1. This is a résumé of UNHCR Press release dated 8 April 2008 ([www.unhcr.org/press-releases](http://www.unhcr.org/press-releases)).

## Recent publications

### Wireless Technology for Social Change: Trends in NGO Mobile Use

Second publication of The United Nations Foundation and The Vodafone Group Foundation's Access to Communications Publication Series examines innovative uses of mobile technology by groups working to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals.

[http://www.unfoundation.org/files/pdf/2008/vodafone/MobilizingSocialChange\\_full.pdf](http://www.unfoundation.org/files/pdf/2008/vodafone/MobilizingSocialChange_full.pdf)

### Global Symposium +5 on Information for Humanitarian Action - Final Report

Final report of the Symposium held in Geneva at the Palais des Nations on 22-26 October 2007.

<http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/>

### Information sharing model and interoperability

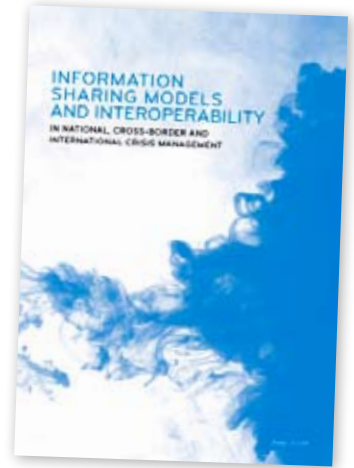
Final report of CMI's project aiming to improve the understanding of information sharing models and interoperability in national, cross-border and international crisis management.

[http://www.cmi.fi/files/Interoperability\\_report.pdf](http://www.cmi.fi/files/Interoperability_report.pdf)

### Handbook for Bloggers and Cyber-Dissidents

New version of the handbook by Reporters without Borders.

[http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/guide\\_gb\\_md.pdf](http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/guide_gb_md.pdf)



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