

**Global Symposium +5**  
**Information for Humanitarian Action**  
Geneva, 22-26 October 2007

**Outcomes**

**Version 7**  
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**KEY ISSUES/THEMES**

Symposium participants highlighted the following key issues that need to be systematically addressed to improve humanitarian information management and exchange:

- **Strategic use of Information and Analysis.** Information management cannot be an end in itself but must serve as one of a suite of tools for decision makers, including those involved in humanitarian financing. Evidence-based decisions require information on needs, capacities and resources and must be balanced against media and political pressure that can influence resource allocation decisions. Information should be narrative and quantitative, relevant to the strategic and operational information needs of decision-makers and be timely, accurate and objective, tailored to the different phases of an operation.
- **Communications with Affected Communities.** The power of dialogue between humanitarian actors and affected communities to support, enhance and make more effective and accountable all aspects of risk reduction, humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery is poorly understood by the humanitarian community which often mistakes this activity for traditional public information. Two-way communications with affected communities needs to be better integrated into the financing of humanitarian action. Local authorities and affected communities must also be recognized as decision makers.
- **Professionalisation.** Humanitarian information management needs to be recognized as a valued and important profession within the humanitarian sector. Formal and non-formal education related to Humanitarian Information Management should be developed for appropriate and supportive careers in this field.
- **Partnerships.** The value and risks associated with private, public and academic partnerships needs more discussion and wider understanding in order to maximize their benefits for all parties involved and better manage expectations.
- **Preparedness.** One of the most important aspects of humanitarian information management and analysis is preparedness, i.e. having readily available data upon which to base decisions from the onset of the disaster. Information management efforts that are incrementally resourced and initiated only as emergency situations unfold tend to remain reactive, failing to provide timely and useful information.
- **Technology/Innovation.** Humanitarian information tools and services can be perceived as difficult to use and unwieldy; where as they should be intuitive, user-friendly and easily deployable, increasing user confidence and reducing technical dependency. Diversity of available technology should be embraced while ensuring their applicability according to the context.

- **Standards.** Symposium participants highlighted the need to build upon existing standards, indicators, guidelines and principles in their work. Two approaches to standards development were recognized: 1) a top-down approach, which adopts ISO standards to drive grass-roots standardization, thus, amplifying access to, use of, integration and streamlining of information flows; and 2) bottom-up approach sees standards evolve organically based on grass roots adoption/value/suitability for local needs.
- **Capacity Building.** Humanitarian information management requires high-level leadership, commitment and support as a function within humanitarian organizations and as a benefit for the entire humanitarian community. This support includes regularized funding to support dedicated information management professional personnel, routine purchases and upgrades of needed technology, donor support for valued-added information projects, and surge support for new information projects and initiatives.

## CATALOGUE OF BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

In support of the Statement, Symposium participants highlighted a number of best practices and lessons learned that should be considered when developing and implementing humanitarian information management and exchange systems.

### Strategic Use of Information and Analysis

- Information management should be driven by analysis required for decision-making and the operational information needs of decision makers. Information for analysis should be timely, accurate, relevant and objective.
- Information used strategically on under funded emergencies improves access to funds. Contingency planning and information collection to identify gaps can improve proposal quality and promote trust amongst humanitarian actors, donors and national stakeholders.
- Effective humanitarian financing resource allocation decisions are based on the principles of collaboration and information exchange between humanitarian actors in real time at field and headquarters level. Despite the Good Humanitarian Donorship and other initiatives, challenges remain in the sharing of information among donors, particularly at field level. Transparency and coordination in resource allocation decision-making process allows for more impartial humanitarian financing for all humanitarian actors.
- Recognize the important linkage between resource mobilization tools and assessments. Assessments that provide ‘information in stages’ and allows for the immediate release of funds for initial response, while focusing on more in depth assessment at a later stage ensures immediate needs are met.

### Preparedness

- Field pre-testing of technologies, processes and partnerships, and preparation, stockpiling and maintenance of equipment and available data is fundamental to preparedness of in-country capacity. This generates local support, identifies operational shortfalls, and supports sustainable data, and information and communication technology infrastructure. Responses to emergencies are more effective when baseline data, technology, and process capability are available in advance, discoverable and accessible to a wide variety of responders.
- Preparedness measures such as baseline data preparation for high risk areas, national level capacity building, nurturing of institutional relationships prior to deployment, and realistic local level operational simulations enable information managers and analysts to effectively support

humanitarian assistance efforts. Preparation also includes planning for sustainability and exit strategies.

### **Preparedness/Disaster Risk Reduction**

- Although the humanitarian community has accumulated much experience with disaster risk reduction through the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, more consideration could be given to how humanitarian information can better reinforce and complement the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters.

### **Communications with Affected Communities**

- Humanitarian responses that have put into place effective communications with affected communities have proven to be more efficient, empowering communities to better help themselves, particularly when developed in conjunction with local media actors and systems.

### **Partnerships**

- Peer review, and sharing assessments and evaluations between humanitarian actors in country can foster better informed funding decisions.
- Civil-military collaboration on assessments can be very effective and can contribute to the provision of timely information.

### **Standards**

- A common understanding of information management and respective roles and responsibilities across sectors/clusters, as well as among humanitarian and recovery actors, ensures better inter-agency collaboration and integration within the humanitarian reform process. Similarly, an awareness of existing standards among the humanitarian community allows for greater interoperability and improved efficiency.
- Participants also drew attention to the importance of guidelines, vocabularies, thesauruses and similar glossaries (such as those of the International Organization of Standardization, ISO) as useful tools to guide humanitarian information management. Broader humanitarian policies and guidelines such as Sphere were raised as possible vehicles into which information management could be integrated

### **Capacity Building**

- Funding of information management at the onset of an emergency directly impacts on the quality and quantity of data available to decision makers. Funding mechanisms should be in place to ensure that initial life-saving decisions are made on the basis of the best possible information available.
- Funding for communications to affected communities is a critically neglected area of humanitarian response with few donor financing mechanisms dedicated to supporting initiatives in this area.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In acknowledging the above, participants agreed to work proactively within their respective organizations to promote recognition of, and investment in, information management practices with the explicit aim of improving risk reduction, preparedness, response and recovery. As part of the Humanitarian Reform process, the Symposium recognized information management as a horizontal function to be mainstreamed into cluster work plans. The possibility of this being conducted through an IASC Sub-Working Group on Information should be explored, which may also consider the adoption of standards within the community.

The Symposium reaffirmed OCHA's leadership role in the area of inter-cluster humanitarian information and recommended that OCHA, in consultation with the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the community of practice on humanitarian information develop an action plan by March 2008 taking into account the following recommendations :

### *Strategic Use of Information and Analysis*

- **Assessment methods.** Develop improved methods for assessments and humanitarian classification at all levels, with the goal of reaching a higher degree of comparability over time and space and incorporating these methods into decision-making processes at global, regional, national and local levels. Assessment methods and initiatives should be reviewed to reach technical consensus on methodologies, thresholds and definitions. Multi-sectoral needs assessments with a broad scope on the overall humanitarian situation should be considered for financing by donors.
- **Common Situation Analysis.** Develop a Common Situation Analysis template in consultation with stakeholders, taking into account existing tools, for application in forthcoming emergencies to provide key evidence-based information to decision-makers to further humanitarian action, performance benchmarking and accountability.
- **Field Assessment Summary Template (FAST).** Develop a one-page FAST to be completed for each field assessment conducted by collaborating UN, NGO, government and/or academic organizations. The FAST would be a simple format to briefly describe the assessment's methodology and key findings. These could be made discoverable on OCHA's survey of surveys.
- **Common Humanitarian Classification System (CHCS).** Develop the concept of a common humanitarian classification system by building upon existing tools such as the Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification (IPC) but explicitly including analysis of additional humanitarian sectors. The CHCS would form a platform where different information systems and common assessment forms are linked together and analysed relative to the degree of severity of crises. Accelerate the development of a phased assessment process comprising techniques such as rapid proxy indicator assessments and multi-cluster assessments.
- **Financial Tracking.** Build on existing financial tracking mechanisms for key emergencies based on better information sharing, including aspects of institutional strategies, among those mobilising resources for humanitarian action, to help avoid duplication and to identify gaps. Establish shared platforms to improve and structure coordination on resource mobilization (including information sharing on resources which exist and how to channel them), exploring why this is not already done as a matter of routine.
- **Information collection and exchange.** Develop systems for timely information collection and exchange which include two-way sharing with affected communities.

### *Communications with Affected Communities*

- **Community Engagement.** Foster dialogue between humanitarian practitioners and affected communities in disaster response preparedness, response and risk reduction consultations, supported by the integration of two way communications with affected communities into standard operating procedures for emergency preparedness and response (through IASC contingency planning guidelines). Funding for communications to affected communities also should be incorporated into the cluster approach.
- **Messaging.** Provide easily understandable information to affected communities, to encourage and empower people to take action and strengthen their resilience. The information should be developed with affected populations, incorporate relevant traditional and indigenous knowledge and culture heritage, and be tailored to different target audiences through both media and non-media communication channels, taking into account cultural and social factors.

### *Professionalisation*

- **Training and Certification.** Promote the inclusion of information management in tertiary studies through increased cooperation with academic institutions and practitioners working in information management, including the development of a standard training and certification program. Learn from existing IM programs such as cluster/sector lead trainings and emergency response programs, as well as within other disciplines, including improving such trainings and programmes.
- **Outreach.** Develop training and learning programmes in information management targeted at specific audiences; including the promotion of community-based training initiatives for national disaster management agencies and agencies in high risk countries. In doing so, ensure trainings and systems are multi-lingual.
- **Guidance Materials.** Develop at the IASC and organizational level, guidance and training material, including standard operating procedures on the collection, processing, classifying, dissemination and archiving of humanitarian information.
- **Performance Indicators.** Develop performance indicators for information management; including organizational and individual accountability measures.

### *Partnerships*

- **Humanitarian Information Network.** Strengthen the existing community of practice on humanitarian information, the Humanitarian Information Network (HIN), expanding its membership and building upon its work to date on best practices and information exchange.
- **Cross-Disciplinary and Cross-Sectoral Dialogue.** Promote dialogue, cooperation and collaboration among scientific and academic communities, the private sector and humanitarian practitioners working in information management.
- **Emergency Services.** Promote cooperation among humanitarian organizations and emergency service organizations working in information management to identify best practices from other disciplines and explore how their knowledge would be shared and, where feasible, integrated.
- **Humanitarian and media.** Promote collaboration among humanitarian and media development communities, in collaboration with national heads of disaster agencies and local professional networks, to collaborate in research and mapping of best practices and potential of ICT.

- **Study.** Undertake a study to help appraise, or assess, the business case for appropriate investment in information management within all phases of humanitarian action.

### Preparedness

- **Holistic approach.** Strengthen coordination among early warning, disaster risk reduction, disaster response, development and other relevant agencies and institutions at all levels, with the aim of fostering a holistic approach towards information management.
- **Data Preparedness.** Using the IASC Contingency Planning Guidelines as a basis, promote the availability and accessibility of minimum common operational data sets in the preparedness phase particularly those linked to existing initiatives by UN country teams building capacity of local and national institutions and statistical systems. Data collected in the response should be discoverable by users, particularly institutions and individuals within the affected country.
- **Service Directory.** Develop a global user-friendly directory categorized by region/country/location with an inventory and information-sharing system for the exchange of best practices, cost-effective and easy-to-use humanitarian information management technologies, and lessons learned on policies, plans and measures for their application.
- **Risk Reduction.** Place more emphasis on the need to reinforce activities relating to the identification, assessment and monitoring of disaster risks and enhanced early warning; as well as strengthening disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels and linkages with disaster risk reduction actors, while taking into account ongoing work on these issues on the basis of the Hyogo Framework for Action.

### Technology/Innovation

- **Technology.** Promote the use, application and, where necessary, adaptation of user-friendly information and communication technologies, to better support risk reduction, preparedness, response and recovery, taking into account the knowledge and capacities of local and national institutions and systems, information management practitioners and humanitarian actors, and assist in building that capacity where possible.
- **Impact assessments.** Measure the impact of any new technology or means of communication such as new media by conducting assessments/evaluations by the users.
- **Innovation.** Foster innovation through the development of linkages with private sector and academic fora and conduct a conference possibly under the auspices of OCHA to promote the exploration and adoption of appropriate and proven and emerging technologies. Involve all stakeholders in the innovative process, including end users, managers and IT practitioners, to ensure that systems are appropriate, usable and useful.
- **Social Networks.** Strengthen social networks among information experts, managers and planners across sectors and between regions by drawing upon cross-sectoral and cross-regional experience, expertise in information management, and new media technologies.
- **Sustainability.** Promote the use of Open Source Software to improve access to information and information management systems by all stakeholders in the humanitarian community.

### Standards

- **Standards.** As members of the community of practice on humanitarian information, participants recognised the revised Principles of Humanitarian Information Management and Exchange for

their value and guidance in their work. Similarly, existing humanitarian and information fora, including the IASC, were recognized as platforms through which new indicators and standards should be developed or existing ones streamlined.

- **Terminology.** Update and disseminate existing international standard terminology related to humanitarian information management in order to strengthen credibility of information and analysis of needs. Examples of such terminology include ISO, Sphere and the Protection Information Systems Taxonomy, among others.

**Security/Confidentiality.** Promote the use of international information security standards when dealing with sensitive data.

### **Capacity Building**

- **Continuity of Funding.** Ensure continuity of funding for information management at the global cluster level.