

UN Crisis Information Management (CIM) Strategy

Points arising from Breakout Groups 1 and 2 from Day 1 at Tarrytown Estate retreat

Challenges to overcome

- Culture of information sharing lacking within and between agencies
- Lack of incentives to share information / Intra-agency priorities greater than sharing information with other agencies.
- Budgetary barriers driving decision making in agencies may be inimical to information exchange

Definitions, scope and planning

- Use OICT and the CITO as anchors of the CIM strategy
- Plan for information sharing outside of crises / Construct regular opportunities for information exchange
- Differentiate between disaster, crisis and emergency
- Include telecoms in planning and envisioning CIM
- CIM strategy could take incremental steps over the short term, leading to bigger impact over the long term
- Define clearly whether CIM will include HQ, RO and CO levels.
- Place emphasis on interoperability of systems within and between agencies
- Empower staff to leverage new technologies and new media without compromising on information and data integrity of the organisation. Recognise that staff are already leveraging public infrastructure and ICT services and products for crisis response.
- Emphasise information security – what's secure, why, who can access it
- Define core data to include:
 - Who, what, where information including staff manifestos
 - Humanitarian datasets from IASC working group
 - Basic operational data
 - Details of affected population
 - Plug into external data sources like the Economist Intelligence Unit and CIA World Factbook
 - Frameworks of discovery – so that information needed in crisis response can be accessed easily (also linked to interoperability of these systems)
 - Leverage existing projects such as OneSource DevInfo, UN SDI, FAO baselines, OCHA, UN Statistics, Country statistics.
 - Ascertain who owns what information (linked to mapping noted below).

Technology / Data

- Classification of information vital and must include classification of staff members, policies for clearance
- Use standards to drive information exchange
- Ensure that data is verified / verifiable and credible – develop mechanisms to help agencies deal with the challenges of timely data verification
- Coupled with the above point, address ways through which crowd sourced information can feed decision making and situational awareness

- Ensure redundancy – ensure proper backups amongst CIM actors / groups / individuals.
- Standardisation should focus on innovation and solution sharing / not the development of a behemoth system. Components in this process can include:
 1. Document management
 2. Data capture and sharing (e.g. use geoRSS on existing systems to make location data and related baselines information more easily accessible)
 3. Use mobile phones
 4. Statistical analysis
 5. Mashups
 6. Community building / blogs / wikis (E.g. Facebook, Second Life, MySpace)
 7. Visualisation (Google Maps, Google Earth, Dashboards, Satellite imagery)
 8. Interoperability
 9. Security considerations / tiered access
 10. Federated identity management
 11. Connectivity and bandwidth considerations (e.g. developing systems that work in austere conditions with little or no bandwidth)
 12. Crowd source information (e.g. plugging in with Ushahidi)
 13. Cloud computing – Move to public infrastructure and services, not necessarily reliant on UN owned IT but ensure reliable information access and exchange during crises and plan for redundancy

Ideas ad ways forward

- Structured risk assessments on information sharing for senior management – ability to generate action / improve decision making amongst senior management
- Sharing of intranets – UNDP is leading an effort with 14+ UN agencies
- Sharing of specific data sets through RSS feeds and related technologies
- Need to develop baseline information – ascertain what information and data the UN already has, where, who has access and who owns the information
- Keep it simple – simple directories of information to catalogue what's available where
- Need for an iterative design and implementation process / cycle for UN CIM
- Clearly articulate roles and responsibilities of UN agencies / actors under auspices of CITO office.
 - This will include fleshing out necessary information management policies and standard operating procedures as well as identify the custodians of data.
 - This process will also have to standardise and unify definitions / meta data of information
- Interoperability to be paramount in CIM – develop better institutional IM governance, apply standards evenly within and across agencies, develop technical governance standards and mechanisms
- Develop sample projects. In the short term for example, share data sets using geoRSS feeds.
- Develop CIM systems that mainstream and fully integrate policies of agency accountability and transparency of funding and delivery (e.g. add layer of reporting, create easily produced metrics of outcomes, outputs and effectiveness), create evidence base for agency work