



Report on mission to Haiti, 3 – 6 November 2009

Meeting with SRSG, Principal DSRSG, DSRSG, Force Commander, UN Agencies, ICRC and NGOs

- Dr. Soon-Hong Choi, CITO of the UN Secretariat in New York presented the mission and explained the reason for the visit to Haiti. Dr. Choi gave an overview of the CiM strategy. Dr. Daniel Stauffacher, Chairman of the ICT4Peace Foundation explained the history, structure and role of ICT4Peace
- There was a brief Discussion of CiM strategy, its relationship with WMO global early warning initiative, the challenges of validating crowd-sourced information, the role of local media in shaping public perceptions and the need to engage with local government and population to strengthen crisis preparedness and recovery.
- In separate meetings both the SRSG and DSRSG confirmed their willingness to offer Minustah as platform for a CiMS pilot project.

Meetings with Pakistan FPU, Chief of Regional Office and UN regional team in Gonaïves¹

Discussion notes

- Though it is not clear, apart from weekly meetings with the UN, how requests are made to and prioritised by the UN, Regional Office staff noted that the UN supports activities of NGOs operating in the region.
- The underlying communications systems run on Lotus Notes. There was no mention at all of Microsoft Exchange or Sharepoint.

¹ Gonaïves (Gonayiv in Kréyòl) is a city in northern Haiti, with a population of about 104,825 people (2003 census). In the early 2000s, Gonaïves was the scene of substantial rioting and violence primarily motivated by opposition to President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and on February 5, 2004, a group calling itself the Revolutionary Artibonite Resistance Front seized control of the city, starting the 2004 Haiti rebellion. But in recent years the city has seen a complete return to calmness. In September 2004, Hurricane Jeanne caused major flooding and mudslides in the city. 3,006 people were confirmed dead in Haiti, and the death toll in Gonaïves was believed to have topped 2,000. Every building in the city was damaged by the storm and 250,000 people were left homeless. Four years later, the city was again devastated by another storm, Hurricane Hanna, which killed 529 people, mostly in flooded sections of Gonaïves, where the destruction was described as "catastrophic" and 495 bodies were discovered as of late on September 5. Haitian authorities said the tally could grow once officials are able to make their way through Gonaïves. "The assessment is only partial, because it is impossible to enter the city for the moment", Gonaïves Mayor Stephen Moïse said. At least 48,000 people from the Gonaïves areas were forced into shelters. Some people slept on the roofs of their houses to protect them from possible looters. The catastrophe left many homeless begging for food and clothes. Others left for the mountains hoping to wait out the next storms on the horizon. Excerpt from Wikipedia - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gonaïves>

- Meteorological information is sourced by the UN through the web and also through their own weather station. A daily forecast is disseminated to key staff and also to NGOs. Some NGOs are also provided with security updates.
- The JOC / JMAC interact weekly with other UN agencies and NGOs. Both mechanisms also interface with informants in the community to gather intelligence regarding security conditions.
- The UN works with government on joint emergency planning. There are disaster reduction committees set up by the Haitian government, and UN information goes out to them.

Observations

- Examples of wireless networking to support community development can be drawn from Nepal, a country with similar austere topography (For example, *The rural wireless broadband network in Myagdi District in Nepal*, <http://www.ictregulationtoolkit.org/en/PracticeNote.3176.html>).
- It must be stressed that such connectivity in Gonaïves can also help with community level disaster risk reduction and education strategies.
- It is not clear whether the UN employs a system of warning community leaders through SMS, using systems such as FrontlineSMS that can be integrated easily with existing systems and for little or no cost.
- It is not clear whether MINUSTAH is working with leading cellphone providers (e.g. Digicell) on ways through which information vital for early warning and recovery can be prioritised on their network and carried for free (e.g. through cell broadcasts and the development of an XML based common alerting protocol, examples of which can be found from the tsunami affected countries in South and South East Asia)²

Meeting with Chief of Regional Office and UN staff in Les Cayes³

Discussion notes

- The CRO placed a very heavy emphasis on the UN's relationship with civil society.
- The UN funded and operated multimedia centres were also discussed in detail, with the suggestion made by the CITO that they are called community centres, reflecting more accurately their *raison d'être* in the community.
- Communications backbone with Port au Prince HQ over microwave, allowing in the near future high quality throughput and more bandwidth for UN voice and data needs.

Observations

- It is not clear whether the multimedia centres are used only for UN outreach, training and community empowerment or whether they are also used as a virtual interface with the UN, for example, by encouraging users to leave structured feedback and information of ground condition for analysis and verification by JOC / JMAC.
- It is not clear where these multimedia centres are located, and whether this geo-physical location privileges access to certain members of the community.
- More information on the community centres as a vital link to the community would be key to a CIM strategy.

² See *Two LIRNEasia projects feed to World Meteorological Organization on Common Alerting Protocol*, <http://lirneasia.net/2008/12/wmo-cap/>

³ Les Cayes, formerly Aux Cayes (Haitian Creole: Okay), is a town and seaport in southwestern Haiti, with a population of approximately 45,904 people (1995 estimate). Estimates from 2008 place the population at close to 70,000 people. Due to its isolation from the political turmoil of the capital, Port-au-Prince, it is one of Haiti's major ports. Excerpt from Wikipedia - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_Cayes

Meeting with ICT4Peace Crisis Management Team, Agencies, NGOs and media

- Presentations by the UN CITO and by the Chairman of the ICT4Peace Foundation on the CiM strategy and history laid the framework for the discussions.
- The representative from the UN's OHCHR⁴ noted strongly that the UN needed to change its approach to information sharing. The representative pointed to multiple and sometimes overlapping databases, the uncooperative nature of UN staff as key problems in information sharing. It was also noted that a database was being created by OHCHR, that would also be open to other, facilitating information flows and also allowing for the archival of vital information.
- Participants noted the need for a single point of entry to the UN system to both feed in and get out information. They also said that those in charge of information needed the authority to share, with inter-connected, centralised systems facilitating this.
- An example was cited where in recent years, political instability had led to the sudden blockage of all vehicular movement in Port au Prince. Early warning to plan such eventualities needed information to be shared.
- Participants repeatedly articulated the need for simulations as close to real world scenarios as possible, and conducted, wherever appropriate, in the field. The example of the recent air crash in Haiti involving a UN chartered aircraft was noted, where communications equipment and mechanisms failed to varying degrees.
- Representatives of the JOC stated that it was the natural place for all information to be aggregated and shared at the UN. Information at these two nodes came from, and where shared with all UN agencies, UNPOL and the military. The validation of information from the field was acknowledged as a challenge, especially when sources were outside the UN system.
- Participants noted that local NGOs rarely gave any information to the UN, but constantly asked the UN for information. Reciprocity was poor.
- The representative from OCHA noted that the UN didn't know the knowledge and resources it had, leading on occasion to duplication and also challenges in accurately sourcing information. The participant spoke about the need for accurate geo-spatial information for GIS, which Amy Weesner from OICT noted was very much part of the UNGWIG SDI framework.
- The CITO noted that what was important for CiM was the identification of a minimum dataset, commonly owned and shared, that would help in the crisis warning and recovery lifecycle.
- Some participants noted that mobiles failed during crises, and that they were only useful in peacetime. Network congestion and the destruction of network infrastructure in natural disaster they pointed to as major challenges for CiM mechanisms reliant on mobile communications. Other said that satellite phones were more reliable than mobile phones.
- The ICT4Peace Foundation's Chairman noted in response that a menu of options and alternatives regarding tools, technologies and platforms online and using mobiles needed to be drawn up, so that depending on the crisis scenario, the UN was better placed to identify, respond and recover from it.
- Another participant spoke of the Extended JOC (E-JOC), which had developed a database better suited to meet the CiM needs of the UN. The E-JOC conducted simulations and also incorporated after action reviews into the design and development of this database.
- Support by NGOs, and in particular ICRC to discuss ways and means to improve CiM as part of a local working group.

Observations

- The emphasis on information centralisation is not the same as the CiM strategy's emphasis on interoperability. The virtual and / or geo-physical centralisation of information is technically challenging and even undesirable. The CiM strategy emphasises more the ability of information to be discovered, and constantly polled for accuracy in a shared repository, which can in fact reside on the existing ICT architecture of agencies.

⁴ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/LACRegion/Pages/HTSummary0809.aspx>

- There was no presentation on Radio MINUSTAH, which is one of the most listened to in the country. Public service broadcasting over radio, supported by the UN, could be a powerful mechanism through which the public is education on aspects of voting and democracy. Radio can also serve as a public information gathering mechanism in conjunction with short-code SMS's provided by mobile phone service companies, facilitating information gathering and situational awareness.
- There is no in-country, shared minimum dataset to identify, respond to and recover from a crisis. Some participants seem almost resistant to the idea.
- It is not clear how many use the E-JOC database and how well it is integrated into the larger UN system.
- Related to this, it is not clear how much trust the JOC / JMAC's have with other UN agencies.

Meeting with Mr. Floriano Peixoto Vieira, Force Commander

Notes from discussion

- The General noted that there was no problem at all in information sharing amongst the Units under the Force Command's office. He also noted that preparation for hurricanes was very good.
- Communications amongst other actors, for example amongst NGOs, could be better he noted.
- The General repeatedly said that JOC / JMAC worked very well. When asked why he said that sharing the same building with other UN staff and agencies as well as the constitution of the JOC / JMACS at MINUSTAH contributed to this. He also said that Daily SitReps aided the work of the JOC / JMAC.
- Pointing to the growth of mobiles, he said that the growth of mobile phone users in the country contributed to the spread of rumours. He pointed to what he say as the amazing capacity for Haitians to congregate in their thousands at short notice (flash mobs⁵). However he did note that in a country as impoverished as Haiti, these mobiles gave people hope, and the prospect of communicating with others easily, quickly and for low cost.
- Nothing MINUSTAH did, he noted, could occur with the support of the military. The military was involved in everything from logistics support to security, enabling the civilian agencies of the UN to carry out their work.

Observations

- It has to be independently confirmed as to whether the JOC / JMAC work as flawlessly as the General opined, and if not, how these mechanisms can be strengthened, given their inextricable nature in the functioning of MINUSTAH.
- Flash mobs in Haiti have been used for party political agitation and rioting. Their potential for more peaceful purposes remains unexplored.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flash_mob

Visit of Mr. Rudy Sanchez
Director, Information and Communications Technology Division
3 – 6 November 2009

Tuesday 3 November 2009

12:58	Arrival from NY flight 435 Delta Airlines
13:00	Meet at the airport by CMS, CMIS, CCITS Protocol, DSS close protection detail
13:30 - 14:30	Travel to Christopher Hotel
14:30 - 15:00	Meeting with SRSG, PDSRSG, D/SRSG <i>Location: Hotel Christopher</i>
15:00 - 17:00	Meeting with Crisis Management Team, Agencies and NGOs <i>Location: Hotel Christopher</i>
17:00 - 17:30	Travel to Hotel Montana and check-in <i>Location: Hotel Montana</i>
17:30 - 19:15	at the disposal of VIPs
19:15 - 19:30	Travel to Oasis restaurant
19:30 - 21:30	Dinner with SRSG, PDSRSG, D/SRSG, CMS, CMIS, CMAS, SAO, CCITS, CCO, CITU, ICT focal point from agencies <i>Location: Oasis Restaurant</i>

Wednesday 4 November 2009

08:30	Pick-up <i>Location: Hotel Montana</i>
8:30 - 9:30	Travel by road to Logbase/ Helipad
9:30 - 11:30	Visit to Gonaives via helicopter
11:30 - 13:00	Lunch with Pakistan FPU <i>Location: TBC</i>
13:00 - 15:30	Visit to Les Cayes
16:00	Arrival at Logistics Base
16:00 - 17:00	Briefing by CCITS and CITS Unit Chiefs <i>Location: VTC room in Logistics Base</i>

17:00 - 18:00	Visit of CITS infrastructure <i>Location: Logistics Base</i>
18:00 - 19:00	Return to Hotel Montana by road
19:00 - 19:30	At the disposal of VIPs
19:30 - 21:30	Pick-up for dinner

Thursday 5 November 2009

08:00	Pick-up – travel by road to Logbase <i>Location: Hotel Montana</i>
8:45	Arrival at Logistics Base
8:45 - 9:30	Meeting with CMS, CMIS, CCITS <i>Location: Logistics Base</i>
9:30 - 12:00	Meeting with ICT4Peace Crisis Management Team, Agencies and NGOs <i>Location: Logistics Base</i>
12:00 - 13:00	Lunch <i>Location: to be determined</i>
13:00	CITO departure for Airport Toussaint Louverture
13:00 - 18:00	Bilateral meetings with Amy and ICT4Peace <i>Location: Logistics Base</i>
18:00 - 19:30	Return to Hotel Montana - at the disposal of VIPs

Friday 6 November 2009

08:00	Pick-up <i>Location: Hotel Montana</i>
8:45	Arrival at Logistics Base
8:30 - 11:45	Meetings with ICT4Peace <i>Location: Logistics Base</i>
11:45	Departure to Airport Toussaint Louverture