

Crisis Information Management CiMAG Retreat, 10 – 12 June 2012, Dolce Palisades, New York

Day 1

On the first day sessions began with an introduction to the Crisis Information Management (CiM) strategy and the origin of the Crisis Information Management Advisory Group (CiMAG) by UN ASG and CITO Dr. Soon Hong Choi and Ambassador Daniel Stauffacher from the ICT4Peace Foundation. Sanjana Hattotuwa from the ICT4Peace Foundation followed with a presentation on the state of play with information architecture and technology tools that were already used in or had great potential for improving crisis information management.

Presentations from a number of UN agencies followed these introductory remarks and the framing of CiM with reference to what were already robust tools and platforms outside the UN system. The agencies that presented were (in no particular order),

1. OICT
2. OCHA
3. DPKO
4. UNHCR
5. WFP
6. UNOHCHR
7. Global Pulse
8. UNOSAT
9. UN Crisis Operation Center

All agencies present at the retreat welcomed the CiMAG process as an essential vehicle to share best practises and work towards convergence under the CiM Strategy. ICT4Peace informed that there would be another high-level luncheon meeting with UN member states in New York in July to inform them about the results of the retreat and progress made under the CiM strategy.

Presentations focussed on recent developments related to the four central pillars of the CiM strategy, namely, information architecture, technology development, stakeholder management and capacity building. OICT reported on the establishment of the [Foundation for a Digital UN](#), and of meetings with leading technology companies in Silicon Valley including Facebook on how they could interact better with the UN system. There were also updates on the work of the UN Spatial Data Infrastructure (UNSDI) project, which Robert Kirkpatrick from UN Global Pulse also referenced in his presentation that followed. The CITO noted that CiM was one of the potential projects that could be funded by the Foundation for a Digital UN.

OCHA updated on <http://www.humanitarianresponse.info>, the Common Operational Dataset website and the <http://cod.humanitarianresponse.info> website and progress made to populate the datasets (it was noted that around 85% was completed), the development of a common information requesting format and platform so that there was greater understanding about what data needed to be collected, how this data could be stored, and the development of a common data repository. OCHA also spoke very briefly about the development of HXL and a Humanitarian Open Data Initiative, including the establishment of a working group to looking into what datasets could be part of the initiative. There was also some discussion on how and why the IASC Task Force on Information Management officially ceased to exist.

DPKO presented on, inter alia, the larger systemic issues they faced when dealing with crisis information management. DPKO noted a number of challenges in the peace operations: clear data governance, handling of sensitive information, lack of a data privacy policy in the UN, difficulties of information verification and taking subsequent action over, within tight timeframes, unverified and often error ridden data, and infrastructural challenges. In response, the CITO made some very interesting points over the mutability of content classification, and that classification regimes that worked in some contexts and for some missions would possibly not work in other missions and responses. The CITO spoke about the need to look at the Tasmanian Government's metadata policy that was instructive for the UN to create its own.

UNHCR noted that it was important to look at the field level and not just the HQ, and that CiM was primarily a field level exercise, not one anchored to HQ alone, or primarily. UNHCR spoke of the need for faster response and update time of crisis information within the UN system, the need for a master data set, to not be bound by technology when one designs and deploys information architectures for CiM and the paramount importance of the flexibility and access to use ICTs as they see fit and best geared to meet the demands of CiM. UNHCR also championed the idea of the UN Humanitarian Data Day, pegged to possibly the ICCM in Washington DC later this year. In the presentation, UNHCR also noted that the field needed to build the capacity to do their own mapping, assessments and other CiM related work. When asked by the CITO as to whether it was possible for UNHCR to maintain R&D during perennial crises, the answer was yes, because the agency had no choice. In the evening, in discussions with Google Crisis Response, it was mentioned to the ICT4Peace Foundation that if the UN Humanitarian Open Data Day were to go ahead, Google Crisis Response would look very favourably at sponsoring a large part of such an initiative.

WFP noted that it does not have a central ICT fusion hub but that this may change because of organisational changes in the offing. WFP stressed the development in mobile based field data collection, a Master Data Management Project that was anchored to an identifier on every bit of geo-information, the development of HEWS 2.0 with UN JRC and the overwhelming need to ascertain if big and open data, along with social media could help the predictive capabilities and capacities of UN agencies.

UN Global Pulse presented their work in Indonesia in particular and how big data was revolutionising the way the UN and governments interacted with their citizens. The deeply ethnographic nature of Big Data was flagged, and that for the privacy issues alone, Global Pulse received intensive help from an attorney.

UNOSAT presented on how eyes in the sky could and have helped with crisis information management when on the ground sources were scarce, unreliable, at risk or a combination of all three. It was noted that 50% or more of imagery in the future would come from UAV and not satellites, which could be helpful for camp management purposes for example, provided over fly rights were obtained. It was strongly noted that technology should not drive the solution, but that it was necessary to leverage it at the right moments. The best crowdsourcing and crisis mapping occurred, it was flagged, when volunteers were gathered around a central mission or task. The issue of licensing was flagged as a major problem that seriously bedevilled more effective information sharing even amongst UN agencies, for example, using maps.

Big themes that emerged during the day included the dual use of technologies and best to create guidance notes and progressive policies regarding this (e.g. Big Data could be both very useful and lead to privacy nightmares and possibly even border on surveillance in less democratic regimes). It was also flagged that the sheer volume of data could, given the myriad of metrics collected for each customer on mobile networks, and user of web based social networks for example, lead to a high accuracy in determining personal information, including traits, credit history and location data. Given that the likes of CNN and Facebook had asked the UN to present a coherent approach if they wanted to be featured *primus inter pares* in their respective information space, it was asked as to what the UN could do in this regard.

There were concerns over the privatisation of CiM and crisis related information, with the likes of Google, Twitter, Microsoft and Facebook now as corporations involved in data collection, archival and dissemination that is fundamentally different to the operational ethics, guidelines, practices and standards of the UN system, with obvious concerns over data retention, use and release. There were questions over the effectiveness and efficiency gains, if any, with the use of social media and bounded crowdsourcing. Some participants flagged that the selection of the bounded crowdsourcing frame impacted the nature of the information produced, which can be very important to not forget when dealing with Complex Political Emergencies (CPEs). It was noted that CiM tools, practices and platforms that worked for humanitarian disasters would not be those most appropriate for generating, capturing, archiving and analysing information around CPEs. Questions were also raised on the statistical models for social media in CiM and whether social media based situational awareness was most useful and appropriate only in high frequency, geographically framed contexts, and that difficulties over verification when they were few and far between undermined social media's value. The issue of translations was flagged, and the idea was mooted whether the CiMAG could be a marketplace of ideas responding to challenges faced by its constituency members.

Overall, CiMAG members discussed whether anyone, including the UN system, had a full understanding over the risks of using crowd-sourced information. It was noted that the debate wasn't about whether to use crowd sourced information or not, but how best to do it in light of the larger responsibilities of the UN system to its stakeholders and member states. It was also repeated, as with CiMAG meetings before, that those involved in CiM needed to institutionalise CiM practices, policies and platforms *before* a crisis, and not just start thinking about them after one. Re-purposing existing platforms was noted to be far more effective than the sudden introduction of new platforms, no matter how good they were. Some said that it was important to listen carefully first before protecting one's own pre-suppositions and biases towards the information received from the field, especially from CPEs and humanitarian emergencies within CPEs. Around stakeholder management, there was also some discussion over the need to create more CiM API's for the UN, and that one of the best uses of Global Pulse within the UN system would be to see it as a service, and less as a standalone platform or initiative.

There was a presentation of the UN's soon to be established 24/7 crisis operations centre and discussion around its operations, analysis routines, foci, interaction with the CiMAG membership, reporting formats and information architectures. In the evening, there was a presentation made by Ushahidi's SwiftRiver, demonstrating for the first time to the CiMAG members screenshots of the operational beta of the platform, and the concept behind it.

Day 2

At the invitation of the ICT4Peace Foundation, several leading private sector and non-profit actors involved in CiM participated in the retreat, providing a valuable opportunity for rich discussions on shared challenges and opportunities with the CiMAG members. Though not all invited could make it to the retreat, these participants from outside the UN were requested to interact with CiMAG members because, since at least the Haiti earthquake in 2010, their tools, technologies (HQ, field based and mobile) and platforms (web as well as offline) are significantly and indeed, increasingly used in crises ranging from natural disasters to more complex political emergencies. Participants included,

1. Google Crisis Response
2. YouTube and crises
3. Meedan
4. ESRI
5. Development Seed
6. Open Technology Institute of the New American Foundation

All CiMAG members were emailed the presentations made by those above, that looked at geospatial applications, private sector CiM efforts, real time language translation and verification, data visualisation and data security, especially in CPEs. These actors were chosen with the advance knowledge that what they presented would be of vital importance of the challenges faced by the CiMAG members. Some actors, like Development Seed, already had established relationships and with UN agencies like [OCHA](#), [WFP](#) and [UNICEF](#) (on portal development, open data, data collection using mobiles and data visualisation), and the idea was to present to the broader group what they had done with a specific UN agency, so that solutions could be shared, rather than reinvented. Others like ESRI presented ideas for how they thought geo-spatial information anchored to the UN could be archived and presented, while Meedan focussed on how sustainable, scaleable and reliable language translation services could be provided to those who needed this and how to provide a service layer or API for translation - or, alternately, a way to pilot a [Checkdesk implementation](#) for a crisis information management scenario.

In response to the presentations, the UN CITO asked how best they could all collaborate and present a unified vision to the UN, just as much they asked the UN to provide the same. The UN CITO also underscored the need for APIs, and pitched some ideas as to how models of open source could help in the development of open CiM platforms, supported by those in the room. Google Crisis Response noted that the days of custom applications for CiM were over, and that the future resided in open databases and APIs. There was renewed interest over OCHA's COD/FOD platform.

Outcomes

1. CiMAG members agreed to continue working on the convergence within CiMS and the UN and with the crisis mapping community over data architecture, technology development, stakeholder management and capacity building.
2. Continue the CiMAG process with a retreat/meeting in second half of 2013.
3. Some CiMAG members including CITO, OCHA, DPKO will be invited to participate in a high-level briefing session for UN Members States at the Swiss Mission on 10 July 2012 on the results of the CiMAG. ICT4Peace and OICT will prepare briefing note for that meeting.
4. Sponsoring for UNHCR and CiMAG supported Humanitarian Open Data Day via Google Crisis Response
5. Developing a high-level approach for how the four pillars of CiM could be applied, with appropriate data mobilisation and web visualisation, to the situations in Syria, Sudan and possibly other evolving crises, by the CiMAG as its joint endeavour.
6. A repository of CiM platforms that can be accessed via the web, that helps CiM members identify platforms and systems useful in a crisis based on previous deployments, use cases and capabilities.

Sanjana Hattotuwa and Daniel Stauffacher 5 July 2012

Annex 1: Agenda

10th June, Sunday

- 5.30pm Departure from UN HQ, Visitors Entrance
7.00pm Welcome dinner, Dolce Palisades

11th June, Monday

- 08.30 – 08.45: Welcome and comments by Dr. Soon-hong Choi, ASG/CITO, United Nations Secretariat
- 08.45 – 09.00: Welcome and comments by Mr. Daniel Stauffacher, Chairman, ICT4Peace Foundation and Sanjana Hattotuwa, Special Advisor, ICT4Peace Foundation
- 09.00 – 10.00: Lightening talks on progress made over CiM strategy and framework during 2011 – 2012 by,
1. OICT
 2. OCHA
 3. DPKO
 4. UNHCR
 5. WFP
 6. UNOHCHR
 7. Global Pulse
 8. UNOSAT
- 10:30 – 10.45: Coffee break
- 11.00 – 12.00: Comments and outcome oriented responses to presentations and updates by CiMAG members, including specific issues and projects not covered in previous session (Moderated by ICT4Peace Foundation)
- 12.00 – 13.30: Lunch break
- 13.30 – 14.30: Discussion around Haiti 2010 and Pakistan 2011 disasters, looking at how and if 2011 – 2012 technology and platform development may or will result in different outcomes in coordination, collaboration and information sharing. What are enduring challenges? (Led by Christina Goodness, UN DPKO)
- 15.00 – 15.15: Coffee break
- 15:15 – 17.00 What's on the horizon? Commitments and tangible outcomes, anchored to Humanitarian Open Data Day and Open Data, digital humanitarians/V&TC community engagement, licensing and verification and sense-making.
Ian Sinclair, Chief Peacekeeping Situation Centre, DPKO, will make a 15 minute presentation at this session.
(Moderated by OICT / ICT4Peace)
- 17.00 – 17:15 Concluding remarks by Dr. Soon-hong Choi
- 18:30 Cocktail for all participants (including also for those attending 12 June sessions) and parallel presentation by Nathaniel Manning from Ushahidi (focussing largely on SwiftRiver)
- 19:30 Dinner for all participants

12th June, Tuesday

- 08.30 – 08.45: Welcome and comments by Dr. Soon-hong Choi, ASG/CITO, United Nations Secretariat
- 08.45 – 09.15: Welcome and comments by Mr. Daniel Stauffacher, Chairman, ICT4Peace Foundation followed by topline presentation of first day's discussions and challenges by Sanjana Hattotuwa, Special Advisor, ICT4Peace Foundation
- 09.15 – 10.30: 10 – 12 minute presentations on key private sector platforms focussing on their use and potential for humanitarian response and aid,
1. Google Crisis Response
 2. YouTube and crises
 3. Meedan
 4. ESRI
 5. Development Seed
- 10.30 – 10.45: Coffee break
- 10.45 – 12.00: Comments and responses to presentations and updates by UN CiMAG members, (Moderated by OICT / ICT4Peace)
- 12.00 – 13.30: Lunch break
- 13.30 – 14.30: Breakout group discussions on,
1. Open Data and Humanitarian Response
 2. Data licensing
 3. Verification of crowd-sourced information and situational sense-making
- 14.30 – 15.30: Reporting back to plenary and discussion
- 15.30 – 15.45: Concluding remarks by Dr. Soon-hong Choi and Daniel Stauffacher
- 16.00 departure to UN in New York (Visitors Entrance)

Annex 2: Participants list

| | Name | Organisation | Email Address |
|----|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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Annex 3: Email from David Saunders, UNOCHA to UN CITO and CiMAG

Subject: Thank you for organising CIMAG, partnerships especially with the technology world are the key to any innovative steps forward for large institutions.

Date: 19 June 2012

Dear Dr Choi,

I wanted to personally thank you for leading and engaging ICT4Peace in organizing the CIMAG, as you know I was very disappointed that with less than 2 weeks to go I had to defer to Suzanne Connolly to present on my behalf and attend a very important internal retreat. Like many organizations in the current economic crisis OCHA is currently undergoing some soul searching to ensure it is truly fit for purpose as we face the coming years.

However I would like to underpin the importance I place on collaboration and mutual engagement amongst information organizations and companies as we move forward in an ever more dynamic, demanding and rewarding world for those of us focused on maximizing the value of Information to support positive change.

Taking a look at the Humanitarian Environment a number of trends stand out, notably the increasing diversity of humanitarian actors, the rise in the impact of humanitarian crisis on youth, the reasonable and rising expectation of affected populations to be engaged in their own recovery. This at a time when mobile computing is rapidly on the ascent, different social tools becoming the way to connect and share information, and barely noticed, mobile banking and electronic payment becoming increasingly common. Information collection, sharing, value and usage is being democratized, and as ever, there is a gap between traditional response mechanisms and what is required to support those in need most effectively.

One thing I am sure of, it will take new, untested and no doubt radically different approaches by all of us to ensure that information is most efficiently shared and used to affect genuine change, no doubt we shall continue to be on the sidelines. Whilst independently we are inevitably largely irrelevant with this groundswell of change, the question is whether we can facilitate or support change for the better? I believe that we can hopefully have a greater influence than incremental change, thank you for bringing us together.

I am particularly aware that large lumbering institutions certainly cannot innovate appropriately in this rapidly changing information world, one could argue that UN organizations can only ever be as effective as the range of partnerships and relationships they maintain. In Information, one might argue that our partnerships dictate our effectiveness at all levels, to that end I am particularly glad that a range of outside partners from the private sector and non-profit world joined CIMAG, I do hope this is something we can build on going forward.

Best wishes,

David

David Saunders
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