

Crisis Information Management in the United Nations

Report on the Retreat of the Crisis Information Management Advisory Group, 2015

On 8 and 9 June 2015, the United Nations system-wide Crisis Information Management Advisory Group (CIMAG) met for its annual review and discussion on progress made towards the goals of the UN Crisis Information Management Strategy of the Secretary-General (CiMS). This year's retreat focused on: lessons learned since the system-wide response to the earthquake in Haiti in 2010; and, the recent system-wide UN Ebola Response. Ambassador Per Thöresson, Sweden, ASG UN CITO Ms. Atefeh Riazzi, Dr. David Nabarro, UN Special Envoy on Ebola and UNMEER SRSG Peter Graaff also participated by video-conference in the workshop.

Conclusions

1. The priorities of the Crisis Information Management Strategy (CIMS) endorsed by the Secretary-General (ref. A/65/491) in 2010 were re-validated: 1. Data Architecture and Governance; 2. Technology Development; 3. Stakeholder Management; and Capacity Building.
2. The UN system has made notable progress in two of the CIMS goals: Data Architecture; and Technology Development. The implementation of Common Operational Data Sets, the Humanitarian Data Exchange and other architectures and tools has led to better management of data and information in the sudden onset of a crisis. More progress is needed in order to reach a harmonized data system.
3. Yet, this progress is at risk of being undermined by the absence of effective, UN system wide governance regarding information. Clear links between chains of command, definition of information collection and analysis roles and accountabilities, and rules for sharing and distributing data are key for the provision of actionable, timely and reliable data. Close integration with operations will be key to capitalise on state of the art technology.
4. Improved engagement with stakeholders including governments, international organisations and other key responders will be fundamental to enabling more coordinated responses. These relationships cannot be shaped in times of crisis but need be developed on a year-round basis.
5. There is a severe shortage of staff with the required technical and analytical skills, institutional expertise and experience in crisis response. Current recruiting and deployment mechanisms are insufficient. Effective usage of data requires improved data literacy amongst non-information management staff.
6. Important shortfalls were recognized in two of the other goals: Stakeholder Management; and, Capacity Building. It was specifically noted that there was not a common understanding of the Information Management (IM) analytical skillset nor, human resource profiles, and that training for a crisis response fell short of the needs during the Ebola Response. It was identified that ongoing year-round engagement of Stakeholders was a needed to make greater progress.
7. The increasing interest and support of the Secretariat and Member States to CiMS was noted (ref. Report of the Secretary-General on Information and communications technology in the United Nations, A/69/517). Participants also recognized the critical role that the CiMAG plays as a lever to implement the Strategy, and recognized the need for informal CiMAG working groups, at headquarters level and in the field, between the annual retreats, to advance common objectives.

Recommendations

1. CiMAG members to establish a working group in order to develop and recommend templates for CiM data governance structures for several potential crisis scenarios: e.g. Peace-keeping, peace-building, humanitarian missions (Nepal), Ebola-type, Hybrid type (Peace-keeping and humanitarian);
2. CiMAG members to develop guidelines for sharing and distributing data in crisis situations within the UN, with partner organisations and governments;
3. CiMAG members to carry out (online and in person) CiM Training Simulation exercises including the first steps in the design phase i.e. determining the appropriate for CiM tools and structures;
4. CiMAG members to establish an online working group on coordination of CiM Training activities, to (1) Exchange and compare content (curricula, modules) of CiM training courses; (2) Inform about ongoing training activities; (3) Help build a roster of CiM trainers; (4) Identify those due to go on an IM assignment in a mission as potential participant for training courses;
5. CiMAG members to review and make recommendations on the human resource options and profiles available to rapidly staff IM capacities during crisis;
6. CiMAG's 2008 Stock-taking report will be updated by CiMAG with the support of ICT4Peace;
7. CiMAG Members to hold a mid-term session in January 2016 to review progress regarding the above recommendations. The next CiMAG Retreat is planned for June 2016 in New York;
8. CiMAG to include operational, non-information management, non-information technology staff in the working group to optimise the provision of actionable insights;
9. UN Secretariat and CiMAG members, within existing resources, to establish a small ad-hoc secretariat to support the implementation of the above recommendations.

Daniel Stauffacher and Sanjana Hattotuwa, ICT4Peace Foundation (www.ict4peace.org),
Geneva, 29 June 2015

Annex

Background Information on UN CiMS and CiMAG

The 2010 Report of the Secretary-General (A/65/491) on the Status of implementation of the information and communications technology strategy for the United Nations Secretariat, prominently underscores the Crisis Information Management (CiM) Strategy, Under the section 'United Nations system-wide harmonization efforts', the report notes (Pg. 38):

"Crisis information management strategy. The Crisis Information Management Strategy is based on the recognition that the United Nations, its Member States, constituent agencies and non-governmental organizations need to improve such information management capacity in the identification, prevention, mitigation, response and recovery of all types of crises, natural as well as man-made. The strategy will leverage and enhance this capacity and provide mechanisms to integrate and share information across the United Nations system. The Office of Information and Communications Technology, together with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support, has worked closely with United Nations organizations such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and WFP and other entities such as the ICT for Peace Foundation in developing and implementing this strategy. It is envisaged that membership will be expanded to include other United Nations organizations in the near future."

In December 2014, the UN General Assembly approved the update of the UN Secretary-General's Strategy, to better exploit the enormous potential of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) for decision-making and delivery capacity of the United Nations in the areas of peace and security, humanitarian operations and development, human rights and international law. The strategy is contained in the SG's report of 10 October 2014 on Information and Communication Technology in the United Nations (A/69/517). The report mentions: "The (UN) Office of Information and Communications Technology will explore opportunities to develop capacity in analytics and potential means of collaboration with other United Nations entities throughout the global ICT community on the development of analytics solutions to allow for operational flexibility in support of the delivery of their mandates. Analytics could assist in crisis management efforts and the Office would seek to work with the Crisis Information Management Advisory Group (CiMAG) to seek to explore this further."

Subsequently, the General Assembly in its resolution dated 26 December 2014 (A/C.5/69/L.26*) welcomed the new Information and Communications Technology Strategy in the United Nations, as contained in the report of the Secretary-General, and requested him to provide, in 2015, detailed information on the implementation of all the elements of the proposed new strategy.

Members of CiMAG include inter alia: UN CITO, Office of SG, OCHA, DPKO, DFS, DPA, UNHCR, WFP, OHCHR, UNDP, UNICEF, DSS, UNFPA, PBSO, ICT4Peace.

Reports on the CiMAG Retreats of previous years are to be found below:

- Report of Crisis Information Management Advisory Group (CiMAG) Retreat 2014, <http://ict4peace.org/crisis-information-management-advisory-group-cimag-retreat/>
- Report of Crisis Information Management Advisory Group (CiMAG) Retreat 2013, <http://ict4peace.org/report-of-crisis-information-management-advisory-group-cimag-retreat-2013/>
- Report of the Crisis Information Management CiMAG Retreat 2012, <http://ict4peace.org/report-of-the-crisis-information-management-cimag-retreat-10-12-june-2012/>

- UN Crisis Information Management Advisory Group (CiMAG) Meeting 2011, <http://ict4peace.org/cimag-19-5-2011/>
- UN Crisis Information Management Advisory Group meeting 2010, <http://ict4peace.org/un-crisis-information-management-advisory-group-meeting/>
- UN CiMAG Retreat 2010, <http://ict4peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/CIM-Strategy-Key-Points.pdf>