INTER–AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
55th MEETING

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Auditorium (Basement)

IASC TF on Field Information Management: Background Note

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IASC Taskforce on Strengthening Field Information Management

A. Report on Activities in 2003
Background
A short-term IASC Taskforce on Strengthening Field Information Management was established by the IASC WG in September 2003. The Working Group indicated that OCHA and WHO should co-chair the initiative and that a report should be provided on the next meeting of Mid-November, with the understanding that the report might suggest develop in a longer term collaborative effort on the subject.

Achievements
OCHA and WHO developed together Terms of Reference for the Taskforce (see enclosed). These were shared with IASC/WG members and UNHCR, UNDP, UNICEF and UNJLC associated themselves to the initiative, identifying relevant focal points in their organizations and thus satisfying one of the Taskforce's
Terms of Reference

A preliminary and informal exchange of ideas between OCHA, WHO and WFP took place in Geneva on 14 October during the meeting of the IASC Subsidiary bodies. The notes from that meeting (also enclosed) was shared with TF members for comments: TF members responded with interesting reflections that were tabulated by WHO (also enclosed).

The TF identified how field information management cuts across the draft IASC 2004 Workplan of 14 October (see enclosed overview). The relevance of the theme is self-evident in terms of a) targeting vulnerability reduction and the protection of livelihoods, b) setting indicators for effective humanitarian coordination, c)improving performance and accountability, d) strengthening early warning and preparedness and emergency response capacity, e) common needs assessments, f) monitoring and evaluation. Therefore it has also linkages with good humanitarian donorship, advocacy and other coordinating mechanisms. It can also contribute to humanitarian/military interfacing. In general, this perception seemed to be shared by all those who participated in the IASC 2004 Working Plan meeting on 29 October in Geneva.

Meanwhile,
- OCHA
    - reviewed the recommendations of the *2002 Symposium on best practices in humanitarian information management and exchange* and started analysing the actions undertaken for their follow-up.

- drafted a questionnaire to collect opinions from field agency representatives and, hopefully, stimulate their reflections on best practices in this area
- WHO circulated among the members of the Taskforce a presentation on its current position about the management of information at field level in crisis settings.

Constraints

Time was short and interfering commitments were many. This period of the year is always busy, especially so this year, with the ongoing processes of the UNDG/WB need assessment and Madrid conference for Iraq.

An interesting point was that some agencies found difficult to identify their focal points, either because information management is centralised "far" from humanitarian desks (and, thus, far from HIC actual or potential counterparts), or because several of their programmes share the feeling that the topic is vital to their functions.

Due to the above, exchanges between the members of the Taskforce were scarce and almost only by E-mail. However, as testified by the working sheet in the attachment, quite substantial)

B. Workplan 2004

In 2004, the Taskforce will:

- Participate in the workshop on needs assessments in the CAP, to move forward the work that UNICEF and WHO have carried out as part of the IASC plan of action for strengthening the CAP, in particular recommendation 17, "Develop standardised guidelines for Joint Assessments and Evaluation to strengthen the programming aspects of the CAP".
- Hold, in the margins of the CAP Needs Assessment Workshop, a first Taskforce meeting to find a common platform for a common context specific methodology to carry out surveillance and extrapolate information out of accessible services in an environment where space/information is limited by security concerns.
- Assess what are the main bottlenecks in information management at field level and propose ways to overcome them; an early product could be to give IASC/WG members greater access to HIC tools, in order to:
- Have HIC fill the needs in information that are not covered by the different agencies;
- Identify the measures that HIC can adopt in order to best focus its products a) at the country/regional level in specific humanitarian operations and b) at the global level, and
- Facilite inter-agency exchanges of relevant technical and scientific reference material;
- Analyze the global follow-up on the recommendations of the *Symposium on best practices in humanitarian information management and exchange*;
- Support with inter-agency technical consensus to the various elements of the IASC workplan mentioned above and facilitating that the products of those processes enter the day-to-day information management in the field;
- Make the agencies more familiar with what and to which extent they can count on HIC in their humanitarian work.

3 November