

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP

XIXTH MEETING

27 September 1995 FAO, Rome

CREATION OF REGIONAL INTEGRATED INFORMATION UNIT FOR THE GREAT LAKES

PRESENT SITUATION

1. The Great Lakes has been the scene of considerable instability for a number of years. Civil conflict and genocide in Rwanda, increased ethnic and political violence in Burundi and the effects of massive movements of Rwandese and Burundese within their own countries and across the region have created turmoil and untold human suffering. These mass movements reflect both the cause and effect of internal social, political and economic disorder and their impact is equally felt in those countries presently providing refuge.

2. Although the problems of the region are clearly inter-related, information sharing has been largely confined to either sectoral or in-country exchanges. There are no mechanisms yet in place to provide a regionally integrated cross-sectorial view of the humanitarian situation to decision makers. The need for such mechanisms was recognised by the IASC in its meeting of 2 June 1995 and highlighted in detail at the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group meeting on the Great Lakes on 25 July 1995 when it was agreed by participants that information exchange within the region should be strengthened. It was emphasized that this network should involve UN Agencies and NGOs. A further conclusion was that there was an urgent need for a more systematic and collaborative analysis of factors impacting programming and of hypothetical scenarios.

3. It is recognised that there is a growing need to ensure that the humanitarian community within the region has a broader and more integrated view of the humanitarian requirements and available resources in the region. This need reflects not only from the complexity of the situation, but also the limited resources from the international community which call for increasingly prioritised and flexible relief programming. With these concerns in mind, the following proposal suggests the modalities of the regional information network:-

OBJECTIVES OF THE UNIT

4. a. to enable the humanitarian community to anticipate and plan more effectively for humanitarian responses to the region.
- b. at the same time, to enhance the capacity of regional organisations, including the OAU, to promote humanitarian action in the region;
- c. to increase the flow of information on humanitarian needs, response capacities and activities of humanitarian organisations within the region with a view to enhancing the overall understanding of problems affecting the region;
- d. to monitor the overall flow of donor contributions to the region in conjunction with DHA's Financial Tracking Sub-Unit in Geneva, and to provide more analytical and detailed regular updates on the gaps between anticipated needs and available resources.

FUNCTIONS OF THE UNIT

5. The Integrated Regional Information Unit will be established in Nairobi. The Unit will identify existing sources of information and work closely with information gatherers/report officers based in the region to bring together information on the current situations within each country. This will include the analysis of humanitarian needs and responses. The implications of pressures/problems in one country on neighbouring states will be highlighted. The Unit will produce comprehensive monthly reports to assist organisations and donors set their priorities, identify potential problem areas, as well as take steps to mitigate developing emergencies. The reports will be made available to agencies and organisations throughout the region, to UN Headquarters and to other interested parties. In addition to the monthly reports, the Unit will issue weekly updates providing information on the main developments in the region during the week. Daily bulletins will be produced should new crises develop.

6. The Unit will also collect information necessary for contingency planning, including stock piles, and availability of resources. A data base will be established and regularly updated. The Unit will monitor shortfalls in resources and any new needs which may arise and report these to donors. Information briefing packages will be produced for media and visitors, including donors, to the region.

7. The Unit would also, if so requested, facilitate regional meetings of UN Agency representatives, NGOs and donors to discuss specific issues and appropriate responses.

Finally, the Unit would interface closely with the DHA ReliefWeb project in order to provide timely and appropriate information to the users of the system.

OPERATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

8. In the respective countries, information focal points for the Unit would be within the Special Representative of the Secretary General or UN Resident Coordinator structures.
9. In Burundi, where there is a dearth of information and no established mechanisms for inter-agency reporting, at least in the short-term it may be necessary for DHA to second an Information/Field Officer to work within the SRSG's office (in addition to the Humanitarian Officers already seconded to the SRSGs Office to support his mission), in close collaboration with the UN Resident Coordinator. For Tanzania and Zaire, visits are necessary to examine what mechanisms currently exist and their capacity to provide relevant and timely information and the possible need to re-enforce them.
10. UNHCR, through its Special Envoy has established a Regional Office based in Nairobi and is exploring ways to better track refugee and returnee flows. The Integrated Information Unit will be working closely with the UNHCR Regional Office.
11. WFP has a Regional Information Office in Nairobi handling media and public information. This Office also covers Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan. A Regional Logistics Office is being opened in Kampala. Information generated through these Offices should be accessed. ICRC is considering reopening its Regional Public Information Office in Nairobi.
12. NGO information on the region will also be crucial to the process. In the absence of other mechanisms, a number of key NGOs have already established informal sharing of information on a regional basis and are involved in regional contingency planning. Many of them have expressed the need to have a focal point within the UN system with which they can relate. The integrated Information Unit should have one NGO-seconded information officer to maintain close contact and information sharing with major NGOs.

STAFFING

13. Based on the objectives, the Unit would need the following staff in order to fulfil its functions:

14. One Unit Coordinator who would manage the Unit, act as a focal point for information, and be overall responsible for the collection, analysis of information, drafting and dissemination of reports and briefing papers.

15. Two Information Officers to assist in the collection of data, drafting of monthly reports, and briefing materials, as well as establishing and strengthening mechanisms for the collection of information and dissemination. One of these Officers should be a secondment from the NGO community to ensure linkages to NGOs and encourage them to participate fully in information sharing and analysis. The second officer would also assist in data collection and drafting but should also have skills in Desk Top Publishing and E-mail. A data-base expert would also be required for a short period to establish a data base in support of contingency planning.

16. As part of DHA's overall efforts to strengthen early warning, it is also proposed that one senior French-speaking field officer with extensive knowledge of the region should be attached to the unit to maintain continuous contacts with the respective countries. This officer would be a floater, spending most of his/her time visiting the countries of the region to handle any problems and bottlenecks which arise and, where necessary, supplement information gathering on specific issues or concerns.

17. One national secretary/receptionist and two messengers/drivers to help collect and disseminate information would also be required.

18. While it may be possible to arrange with UNDP to handle administrative matters, including local purchases, the possibility of posting one DHA Administrative Officer to the Unit will be explored as an alternative.

TIME FRAME

19. The start up phase of the IRIU is scheduled for October through December 1995 which will be followed by phase II, January - end June 1996.