INTER–AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
52nd MEETING

12-13 March 2003

FAO Headquarters, Rome
Philippine Room (C277)

HIC: Background Note

Circulated: 26 February 2003

Summary

Humanitarian response in emergencies generally subject to chaotic and fast-changing environments and multiple actors, often lacks even the most basic shared information systems. Centralized information management can help to avoid such common problems, ending the isolation in which humanitarian actors often work. Too often a common approach to information management is seen as secondary to operational response, and this then contributes to poor coordination and confused and unclear guidance to decision-makers

To address this situation in the past few years the establishment of **Humanitarian Information Centers (HICs)** has become a favored approach to resolving information management problems in the field. In the same way as "co-ordination" and "information management" are umbrella terms for a range of activities; a "Humanitarian Information Center" is an umbrella for implementing those activities. An HIC is not an activity in itself. Most of the HICs that have been set up so far have been interagency in nature, and this seems to be one of the keys to success; an HIC is normally a convergence of many needs, not a single-issue office.

The HIC concept has not been developed in isolation but in close liaison with other UN agencies, donors, private sector and civil society actors, with the aim of supporting information management in emergencies as well as during the reconstruction and rehabilitation stages. National and regional information systems exist in most countries where HICs are set up. The HIC will use information products already available through indigenous systems, complementing and reinforcing them. The HIC's developed human and technical capacities, as well as relevant equipment will be phased over to local resources once the humanitarian / emergency phase is completed.

The HIC will be evaluated on a number of different levels, including the meeting of information needs in the community, the quality of service provided to customers, resource management capacity, provision of services and products, co-ordination with other organizations, and marketing of the work of the HIC. This range of issues highlights the fact that, while an HIC is a coherent entity, its work is inextricably linked to the work of others and can only be judged in the context of how well it serves the needs of others.

Several HICs – for example in Kosovo and Sierra Leone – have been successful in motivating the humanitarian community to collaborate in rapid common assessments of sizeable numbers of affected communities. This information was analyzed and returned to HIC users in a variety of products, notably maps that combined a variety of sectoral themes and indicators.

Key issues:

1. The HIC is an interagency initiative and as such it will not achieve its goals unless buy in from the humanitarian community at large is forthcoming

2. The HIC is a neutral space available to the humanitarian community. Although it operates with the support of OCHA, its activities respond to the needs of all humanitarian actors.

3. The HIC collaborates closely with Agency capacities such as WFP-VAM, HCR-GIMU, FAO-GIEWS, UNJLC, MAC's and others.

4. The HIC concept has with strong support from the donor community which has invested time and resources in its development.

Proposed Actions/Decision by the IASC-WG:

1. **Endorsement of the HIC concept as a Humanitarian Information Management common resource.**

2. **Endorsement of Statement of Intent that outlines the HIC generic TOR, to be the base of reference for all HIC activations.**

3. **Commitment to collaborate with and participate actively during HIC deployments with data and information, staff secondments and other issues as may be collectively decided.**

4. **Commitment to nominate focal points for HIC related matters. These focal points need to have the necessary links to the IASC and response activities so as to secure an active level of participation on HIC deployments.**

Information and access to all existing HIC resources can be found at:
www.humanitarianinfo.org