

Report on the Outcome of the IASC Task Force on Information Management Workshop

24-25 February 2011
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I Workshop Summary

The IASC Task Force on Information Management (Task Force) convened a two-day workshop in Rome on 24-25 February 2011, to look at strategies and approaches for strengthening information management (IM) in humanitarian crises. The workshop focused on redefining humanitarian IM, identifying key services and features of an enhanced *modus operandi* as well as outlining an action plan for improving humanitarian information management.

The workshop was attended by 33 participants from a wide range of organizations, including UN Agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and Non-Governmental Organizations. It also included participants from ten out of eleven global clusters as well as OCHA.

A number of broad conclusions were drawn from the workshop, which are summarized in overarching statement, with 12 specific recommendations for action.

II Enhancing the Role of Information Management in Humanitarian Crises

1. Humanitarian IM is the systematic process for the collection, collation, storage, processing, verification, and analysis of data and information from one or more sources, and the dissemination of relevant data and information to humanitarian stakeholders, to support effective and timely humanitarian action. It enables situational understanding, coordination, strategic and operational decision making, accountability, advocacy, and fundraising. It also allows sense-making and the production of knowledge, when quality information is combined with the expertise of humanitarian practitioners. Humanitarian Information Management is undertaken during the preparedness, response and recovery phases of humanitarian crises.
2. Humanitarian Information Management practices need to adapt to the changing external environment, presenting both obstacles and enablers. The changing humanitarian environment in the field include a growing number of humanitarian actors, new technologies, increasing information volume, new volunteer technical communities (VTC), and the rising engagement and scrutiny of affected populations in humanitarian action. The new externalities necessitate a framework defining how

new tools and practices can be integrated into the information management *modus operandi*.

3. The current model for the delivery of information management in humanitarian crises – as defined in the IASC *Operational Guidance Note on Information Management* – has proven difficult for some clusters to resource and implement, even in light of the *provider of last resort* concept. In early 2010, the IASC initiated a process through the Task Force, to review the *Operational Guidance Note on Information Management* and formulate options for improving it. Building on the review, the Task Force convened a two-day workshop to look at short-term and long-term strategies and approaches for improving the management of information in humanitarian crises.
4. Priority humanitarian IM services include information management advice to needs assessment, humanitarian profiling, reporting services, response mapping and provision of Common Operational Datasets (CODs). Obstacles to effective IM include systemic issues, inconsistency in reporting practices, a lack of agreed data standards, and for some clusters a lack of political will and understanding of the importance of IM, and interoperable tools, as well as resource constraints (human, financial and time). Opportunities that offer potential and need further investigation include new open source solutions, the VTC, new data standard initiatives, non-traditional donors, and beneficiaries' increasing ability to directly communicate their needs.
5. The IM services and products required in supporting effective and timely humanitarian action (preparedness, response and recovery), need to be further defined and prioritized, before revising the *Operational Guidance Note*. The definition and prioritization should be conducted by a global steering committee mechanism – possibly the Task Force. The roles and responsibilities of OCHA and the cluster/sectors for providing these prioritized IM services and products are currently well defined but are not being fulfilled; thus the challenge to ensure that each party implement its agreed mandate for IM.
6. There is a need to fill IM gaps in the field when some clusters do not have the capacity to undertake their functions. This should be done through an inclusive common services approach, and to build local and national capacity in order to optimize IM opportunities. The common services approach would need to be further defined and developed.

1.1 Workshop Recommendations

1. The current model for the delivery of IM in humanitarian crises, as reflected in the IASC Operational Guidance Note, can and should be improved. Workshop participants opened discussions on this by listing IM services and products and considering possible options for improved IM service delivery at the country level. Options ranged from working within the current parameters as set out in the Operational Guidance; to more radical approaches, drawing on the capacity of outside service providers to strengthen common IM services. Modalities should be considered further by the IASC Task Force on Information Management, taking into account the recommendations below.

Action: Task Force, OCHA and Global Cluster/Sector Lead Agencies

2. Increased understanding, recognition and political support is required, at the highest levels, for the important contribution that appropriate IM makes or can make to delivering effective and timely humanitarian action. Agencies should work together to build a greater understanding of the role and value-added of IM, as well as of the resources and requirements necessary to deliver IM services. Increasing political support for IM can greatly contribute to addressing the current under-resourcing of this function. OCHA has a key mandate in the area of inter-agency IM, and OCHA senior management should be encouraged to provide the level of support and resources necessary to fulfil this important mandate. As a community we struggle to “make the case” for the value of IM, in part because we don’t clearly communicate the component services that IM provides at the global, field, inter-cluster and intra-cluster levels.

Action: Task Force, OCHA and Global Cluster/Sector Lead Agencies

3. Efforts should be undertaken to collaborate on an inter-agency level on expanding and improving the existing human resources available to deliver IM in the humanitarian context. These should include reaching out to expertise that exists within technical communities of practice outside of the humanitarian context and explore how these can contribute to or possibly become an integrated element of Humanitarian IM. These should also explore ways in which to tap into national level capacity. The value of training was noted in this regard, including the contribution the Task Force has made to this, as was the need to develop an attractive career path for IM officers in many organizations. Also recognised was the need to further explore the tapping into volunteer technical communities to support IM in humanitarian crises.

Action: Task Force, OCHA and Global Cluster/Sector Lead Agencies

4. Increasing the financial resourcing of IM in humanitarian crises is of critical priority. IM is still too often under-resourced, relative to other activities within humanitarian action, and in consideration of the important contribution it can make to effective and timely humanitarian

action. New mechanisms for financing IM should be considered, within agencies and clusters at the global and country levels. IM capacity is still inconsistently resourced between Clusters/Sectors, between organizations, and across contexts. Some clusters are very strong while others struggle. OCHA and Clusters need to ensure that they are appealing for the necessary resources to meet their IM responsibilities, including through the request of earmarked funding for IM.

Action: Task Force, OCHA and Global Cluster/Sector Lead Agencies

5. The need for accountability to beneficiary communities has been recognised, as has the value of involving beneficiaries in the design and delivery of humanitarian action. IM can contribute to this process, and can enhance the ability of humanitarian actors and beneficiaries to communicate with each other. Efforts should be undertaken to explore how IM can help support accountability to beneficiary communities, including through beneficiary feedback mechanisms.

Action: Task Force, OCHA and Global Cluster/Sector Lead Agencies

6. Information management responsibilities and services should be reflected in a more detailed manner in the terms of reference for cluster lead agencies at the global and country levels (e.g. Cluster Coordinators), in the terms of reference of OCHA in its support of the Humanitarian Coordinator, and in the responsibilities of cluster participants. A clearer articulation of responsibilities for providing IM services will greatly enhance accountability within the humanitarian system.

Action: Task Force, OCHA and Global Cluster/Sector Lead Agencies

7. Support the standardization of information management services and products delivered at the Cluster/Sector and inter-Cluster/Sector level in support of humanitarian action (including strategic decision-making, needs assessment and monitoring, operations and programming, humanitarian financing, communications and public information). This could include the development of a “product” and “service” catalogue. Such catalogues, should be used in helping to identify the expertise required of IM officers.

Action: Task Force, OCHA and Global Cluster/Sector Lead Agencies

8. Detailed guidance and standards should be developed to support cluster lead agencies, OCHA and cluster participants in meeting their IM responsibilities. Guidance should reflect the importance of system inter-operability and the need to use common, agreed standards in system development. Data standards are also recognised as essential contributions, and the contribution of data standard initiatives was recognised.

Action: Task Force, OCHA and Global Cluster/Sector Lead Agencies

9. The identification and codification of Common Operational Datasets (CODs) and the work being undertaken on the Fundamental Operational Datasets (FODs) are an important step in ensuring stronger, more efficient, and more predictable information management in humanitarian crises. Efforts should now focus on supporting Humanitarian Country Teams, as an integral part of their preparedness and contingency planning efforts, in making sure that the CODs are available. This work can be done in cooperation with the IASC Sub-Working Group on Preparedness.

Action: Task Force, Sub-Working Group, OCHA and Global Cluster/Sector Lead Agencies

10. Improving the predictability of information requests made by OCHA to Clusters/Sectors is of critical importance to producing quality information products, and to minimising the burden placed on Clusters/Sectors relative to information provision. OCHA should seek to multi-purpose information received by Clusters/Sectors. Improving the predictability of information requests should be met by willingness to share information.

Action: Task Force, OCHA and Global Cluster/Sector Lead Agencies

11. Opportunities exist to usefully draw information from social media. The conditions and modalities for using social media need to be considered further and more clearly defined, in order to optimise the use of social media and to ensure it meets a defined information requirement. The potential of social media as a communication channel with beneficiaries was also noted.

Action: Task Force, OCHA and Global Cluster/Sector Lead Agencies

12. The key humanitarian indicators developed by the IASC Needs Assessment Task Force were noted as a valuable contribution to supporting standard collection of data. It was noted that these indicators are owned by the Clusters/Sectors. IM focal points within the Clusters/Sectors at the Global Level are encouraged to work with Global Cluster/Sector Leads in reviewing and refining the indicators technically.

Action: Task Force, OCHA and Global Cluster/Sector Lead Agencies

III Proposed Actions by the IASC Working Group

1. Endorsement of the recommendations arising from the Information Management Workshop.
2. Request the cluster lead agencies, other partners, and OCHA to move forward in implementation of the recommendations through the work of the IASC Task Force on Information Management.
3. Request OCHA to report to the IASC Working Group on progress achieved in the implementation of the recommendations at the autumn 2011 meeting of the IASC WG.