

An Evaluation of Humanitarian Information Centers

*including Case Studies of HICs for
Iraq, Afghanistan, and Liberia*

Submitted by

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Acronyms & Abbreviations

AIMS	Afghanistan Information Management Service
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
CAP	Consolidated Appeal Process
CHAD	Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department
CHAD OT	CHAD Operations Team
CIMIC	Civil-Military Cooperation
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
DFID	Department for International Development
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General
ECHA	Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs
ECHO	European Community Humanitarian Office
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
ESB	Emergency Services Branch (of OCHA)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FIS	Field Information Support
GIS	Geographic Information System
GIST	Geographic Information Support Team
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HIC	Humanitarian Information Centre
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IDP/s	Internally Displaced Person/People
IMS	Information Management Service
IMU	Information Management Unit (of OCHA)
IO	International Organizations
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Network
JLC	Joint Logistics Centre
MoU	Memoranda of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OFDA	US Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance
OSOCC	Virtual On Site Operations Coordination Centre
PROMIS	Programme Management Information System (FAO)
RC	Resident Coordinator
SCHR	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
SHARE	Structured Humanitarian Assistance Reporting
SLIS	Sierra Leone Information System
SRSA	Swedish Rescue Service Agency
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Mission for Afghanistan
UNAMI	United Nations Mission for Iraq
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHAS	United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
UNSECOORD	United Nations Security Coordinator
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VVAF	Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive Summary

General

- Humanitarian Information Centres are having a positive impact on their operating environment. They are widely used and there are few agencies that are not familiar with their products. If all they manage to do is provide some basic common data (such as standard village lists) there is value in this. The potential is far greater however.
- There is a contested vision among stakeholders with regard to the role of HICs despite terms of reference which are currently being considered by the IASC for endorsement. Some see the HIC as solely an instrument for supporting coordination, whereas others view it as an agent for promulgating information management practices and standards. Such perceptions raise differing expectations and can cause confusion regarding the purpose of the HIC, both among users and staff.
- Despite much activity in the area of data collection, the humanitarian community is not harnessing the full potential of modern information management capacity. Agencies, donors and OCHA must share the blame – collection is often amateurish, the competitive environment often acts against sharing and there is not consistent leadership. The humanitarian field urgently needs to agree and adopt a framework for assessments and for monitoring implementation to move forward in this area.
- The HIC's contribution to the creation of a common information management framework for the humanitarian community can be meaningful only when organisations subscribe to a common approach and devote the necessary resources to support it. Otherwise, the results of the HIC effort in this regard, no matter how good, are diffuse and fleeting.

How an HIC performs at the onset of a crisis

- HICs have the most proven value at the beginning of large, multi-actor responses to complex emergencies. Their impact is related to their speed of deployment.
- The inputs provided so far from DFID and OFDA have been invaluable. This support should be continued and expanded to ensure success.
- HICs main proven value is in supporting coordination and supplying some basic common data. Despite this the relationship with OCHA in the field has often been difficult. This needs to be overcome for them to be fully effective.
- HICs have not been able to provide a quick analysis of the 'needs and gaps' at the beginning of a response, despite this being widely desired. More thought needs to be given to how HIC and OCHA can work together on this critical aspect of humanitarian information.
- HICs staff are known for their hard work and technical competence, although there have been problems with finding qualified staff in the early stages of deployment. Having the right person as the HIC manager is crucial to the success of the HIC's operation.

The HIC role in supporting decision-making.

- The role of an HIC changes after the initial, often chaotic response period. Its added value changes from a coordination function, to one that supports decision-making although its role as a repository of certain standard data remains constant.
- The full potential of the HIC in the area of supporting decision-making has rarely been achieved. Information Management projects have their best success when they are discreet projects meeting a clear demand. Collecting and combining many types of information provides a repository but does not necessarily achieve the next step of informing decision-makers.
- The role of analysis also needs further consideration.
- There is a tendency in the evolution of the HIC to switch its focus to the information management services at the expense of maintaining its coordination/orientation products up-to-date.
- The HIC needs strategic direction to help it prioritise in accordance with the information needs of the wider humanitarian community. Some projects carried out by HICs had value in their own right, but seemed to fit only tangentially with the HIC mandate.

- The HIC has been effective in eliciting the cooperation of other agencies, particularly for information-sharing activities. Much of this is due to its customer service approach and its willingness to perform information management tasks for individual agencies. However, the HIC has to balance carefully the need to make itself useful with the danger of becoming just a “data processing shop” for the humanitarian community.

How an HIC transitions

- HICs typically build up large repositories of information and some valuable datasets over their lifetime. Some of this information is useful to recovery actors, government and later, development actors.
- An HIC can play a significant role in the recovery phase. A good example of this is its role in monitoring the progress of the national recovery strategy in Sierra Leone. Often transition strategies miss this distinction, treating the transition as one from relief to development, rather than relief to recovery.
- A constraint to making this transition is that the architecture for supporting coordination in the recovery phase is less clear than that in the emergency phase. The current UNDG - ECHA working group on transition could consider how the HIC capacity might be best used in recovery and institutional arrangements for handing over.

Key recommendations

- i. FIS should draw up a strategy on the establishment of the common information management framework and submit it to IASC for endorsement. This should link with other IASC 'common framework' initiatives. (rec. 7)
- ii. More effort needs to be put into getting agencies to share information and develop agreed indicators and assessment methods. FIS should work with their key donors to use their leverage with the large UN agencies as a starting point. The good donor-ship initiative may help in promoting such a common approach, and the current assessment framework developed by the IASC CAP sub-working group under this looks promising. (rec. 1 & 2)
- iii. The timing of deployment is critical in achieving the greatest success for HICs. The earlier the deployment, the more impact they will have on their environment. The best way of achieving this is to deploy a core team from headquarters that would stay until it can be replaced by roster staff. The equipment should also be expanded to include smaller deployable units. (rec. 24 & 25)
- iv. HICs will fail in their stated goal of supporting decision making unless analytical capacity is added to the information management capacity. There are several options for this – analytical capacity can reside within a lead agency, within the office of the humanitarian coordinator, within the OCHA office or in the HIC itself. (rec.3)
- v. The relationship with OCHA in the field is critical for an HIC to perform to its potential. Ideally HICs should form an interface between the coordination hub and the wider humanitarian community. There is a delicate balance here, with OCHA needing to support and enable the HIC, without subsuming it. Codifying this relationship in more detail would help those in the field to manage this balancing act. (rec. 11)
- vi. There needs to be more participatory governance of HICs and the HIC endeavour for it to truly be a common service. In the field an advisory board consisting of OCHA, UN agencies, I.O.s, NGOs and possibly government should be put in place as a matter of course. Secondments should be routinely considered from the different stakeholders. This arrangement would also ensure that HIC projects are relevant and part of a strategic vision. At a global level the GIST needs to be reinvigorated. (rec. 9, 10, 12, 18)
- vii. The donor input has been essential to the success of HICs to date and should be continued. An HIC is a valuable service in its own right, but can also be seen as an investment in information management technology for the benefit of the humanitarian endeavour.
- viii. To help ensure the investment put into the HICs builds long term capacity, a more systematic after action review should be established. This should include end-of-project reports, documented lessons learned, and an assessment report when a HIC ceases to be. A process should be established where the HICs are expected to report on their performance against predetermined indicators and benchmarks. (rec. 20)
- ix. There needs to be better consideration given to low technology systems for disseminating information. Many organisations at the beginning of emergency responses do not have the capacity to access the Internet. The innovation of Internet cafes is highly useful in this regard. E-mails and physical resource centres should also be considered. The websites should also be designed with general users in mind. (rec. 33, 34, 35)

Introduction

Terms of Reference

The evaluation team was comprised of two independent consultants hired by USAID/ OFDA and DFID/ CHAD. The team was asked to examine the success of HICs in servicing the humanitarian community. Three case studies were to inform this – Liberia, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Specifically the team was asked to examine:

- The relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability¹ of HICs on their intended target audiences.
- Ways in which OCHA can improve HIC's services and products
- Ways in which DFID/OFDA can most effectively support the HICs' objectives.

Success factors, constraints and recommendations were examined in a number of areas .

- HIC inputs
- HIC outputs
- HIC policy issues
- HIC operational issues
- Technical issues

Methodology

The evaluation took place over a two month period (April and May of 2004). It was based around a series of semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Interviews focused on what users information needs were in emergency situations, and to how well the HICs met those needs. Three field visits were undertaken – to Liberia, Jordan and Afghanistan and the headquarters of NGOs, UN agencies and donors were visited in London, Washington, New York, Geneva and Rome.

In addition the evaluators examined in depth and tested many of the HIC products and the website. The evaluators also completed the first HIC training course held in the UK.

Report Structure

The report is based around three main sections – the policy guiding the HIC concept, the operational management and the products and services HICs typically offer. Some analysis of practice to date is made and recommendations put forward on this basis. Much of the discussion on policy is based around the terms of reference for an HIC, waiting for endorsement by the IASC (see Appendix vii).

What is a Humanitarian Information Centre?

The Humanitarian Information Centre (HIC) is a common service of the UN System, managed by the Field Information Support Unit (FIS) of OCHA. The HIC is deployed into the field at the onset of a humanitarian emergency when requested by the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC). It is usually comprised of a small staff (3-6 people) with expertise in information management and geographic information systems (GIS). The two main purposes of the HIC are to support “the coordination of humanitarian assistance through the provision of information products and services”; and “the decision-making process at the headquarters and field level by contributing to the creation of a common framework for information management within the humanitarian community”.

The HIC establishes a physical space (a centre) where it can perform its functions in meeting the information needs of the humanitarian community. In many cases, a website is also created to disseminate information via the Internet. In partnership with the organisations, the HIC performs a number of functions for the benefit of the community such as providing a neutral platform for the exchange of humanitarian information, producing orientation and operational information, collecting data on Who's doing What Where and on the beneficiaries, developing and promoting data standards, providing advice and training in information management, supporting needs assessments, and compiling data sets from all sources.

General findings

General

1. There are systemic issues that do not assist in the sharing of information. UN agencies often withhold their information. The reasons for this might be about perceived confidentiality, not wanting to be held to account for it or simply that they see an advantage in not sharing. NGOs don't share because they don't see the value or are suspicious of the UN. Underpinning all of this is the highly competitive nature of the aid environment – in effect much of humanitarian information can be seen as 'commercial' and therefore to be protected.

2. This problem is exacerbated by a paucity of agreed indicators and methods for understanding humanitarian need. A well-understood system for assessing need would make the act of collecting information far more valuable – currently there are few objective methods for determining how to prioritise assistance. Without this, the potential of sophisticated information management techniques is unlikely ever to be used to full potential. The current good donor-ship initiative may have something to offer in this regard.

Recommendation 1: Donors should renew their attempts to get agencies to routinely share information with HICs. The current system has commercial incentives for not sharing information. It is not within the remit of this evaluation to suggest how this might be changed, but clearly small steps could be taken to reduce this 'skewed' incentive scheme.

Recommendation 2: OCHA and donors should look at ways of developing indicators from the good donor-ship initiative that help with objective assessment of need. Potentially the full power of information management systems could then be harnessed.

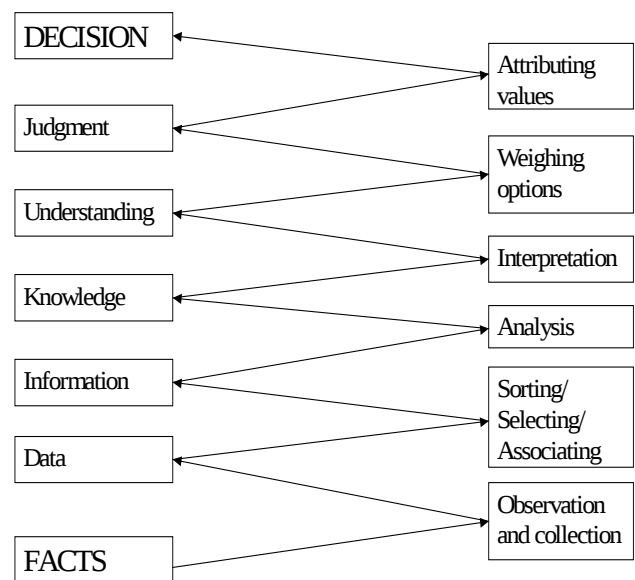
Policy

The role of the HIC in humanitarian decision-making

"OCHA humanitarian affairs officers should do analysis. If they're not there then the HIC should – the priority is the operation"
Senior UN official in charge of field operations.

3. One of the main objectives in the HIC mandate is to support humanitarian decision-making. Throughout the evaluation, there was much discussion with respondents about the ability of the HIC to perform this task. To answer the question of how well the HICs have done in this regard, it is necessary to have an understanding of how information management can assist the decision-making process.

4. The process can be captured conceptually in the following schema. There are a number of steps (represented on the left) ascending from 'facts' to a 'decision'. The sequence moves from one step to the next through a processing stage (represented on the right). What is relevant to note regarding the HIC is



that it can perform the processing required to move from the 'facts' stage to the 'information' stage, but is not able to go further. As can be seen, a number of subsequent steps need to be taken in order to achieve a decision.

5. This diagram clearly illustrates the reality of what happens; the output (information) produced by the HIC does not lead directly to decision-making. There are still other intermediary stages of the process that need to be taken before a decision can be made – a key stage is analysis.

6. The connection between the preparation of information and its analysis is central to determining the HIC's effectiveness in contributing to decision-making. Data compilation in itself, or even its presentation cannot necessarily inform decision making on its own. It is a necessary first step, and this is where the HIC contribution can assist the decision-making process.

7. Quite a few evaluation respondents left the impression that if the HIC simply combined several thematic layers of data in a GIS system, a powerful analytical picture of the situation would emerge. The assumption is that by taking, for example, nutritional data, health data, and physical infrastructure data, and layering them according to a common geographical location that a picture of relative needs and gaps will emerge. This is not necessarily the case – in a multi-sector environment, with the lack of universally acknowledged indicators of need, someone with the requisite knowledge still needs to make judgements about what this combination of data means. Without some analysis you are often just left with a jumble of numbers, getting you no closer to understanding whether village X is really needier than village Y.

8. Where the combination of data can be very powerful is in single sector investigations. The key is a well-conceived demand and a relatively simple set of questions to be answered. A good example of this is provided by UNHCR in Afghanistan. They wanted to know where to prioritise their resettlement assistance in Afghanistan following a year of providing such kits (in essence where the gaps were). Several different agencies were involved. Using the village lists provided by AIMs as the way to combine the data of the different agencies, they discovered that in some villages there had been twice as much assistance as there were returning families; in other villages there had been hardly any. Given the scale of Afghanistan – 32,000 villages – it is hard to imagine this could have been 'analysed' any other way.

9. The 'combination' theory is also predicated on the idea that people will not be able to understand there are gaps until this 'visualisation' exercise is undertaken. In reality humanitarian response rarely

works this way. Populations in need are usually quite vocal about their need – through representatives or otherwise. Humanitarian agencies are not static, waiting to be told where to go but are often mounting assessments, searching for undiscovered pockets of need. Quite often agencies will find need locally and respond to it – this may not always be known by the wider humanitarian community or those charged with coordination – an HIC can help here although this is merely after the fact reporting. We did not find any examples of where a simple combination/visualisation exercise had been carried out and led to action that was not otherwise occurring.

Recommendation 3: Analytical capacity should be added to information management capacity if the expressed desire is to support decision-making. There are several options for this – analytical capacity can reside within a lead agency, within the office of the humanitarian coordinator, within the OCHA office or in the HIC itself. For discreet projects (like an IDP survey) analytical capacity can be attached to the project. Merely assuming analytical capacity exists within individual agencies is not enough, however.

Recommendation 4: Information management works best when the need for the project is clear and the task set reasonably simple. Better guidelines on how to commission pieces of IM work would help agencies understand how best to use HIC capacity to its full potential.

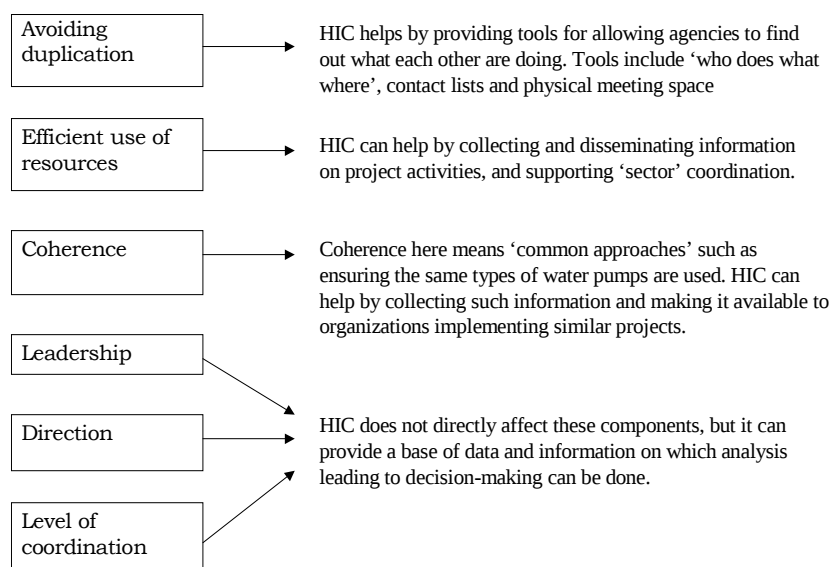
Role of an HIC in coordination

"It's the role of the humanitarian coordinator to be saying what the problem is and where the gaps are" Senior UN policy-maker.

"Coordination without information is desperate. Information is the heart of coordination" Senior UN official in charge of field operations.

10. The second major objective in the HIC mandate is to support coordination. Its role in coordination goes to the heart of the OCHA mandate.

Six components of coordination and how the HIC can help



11. OCHA have recently defined coordination² as having 6 components – avoiding duplication, having coherent approaches, providing leadership, direction (prioritisation), efficient use of resources, and action at the appropriate level (local, provincial or national). The HICs can help to achieve three of these aspects of coordination.

12. As the chart above shows, the HIC can support the different components of coordination by producing a number of products and services which include the provision of a physical space to meet, contact lists, meeting schedules, a Who-What-Where (W3) matrix, and a website. Though it does not have a direct influence on the components of leadership, prioritisation and deciding the appropriate type of coordination for each administrative level, the HIC does provide an information platform that supports activities such as analysis that do have an impact on these components.

13. Essentially, for humanitarian action to be effectively coordinated, i.e. resources prioritised and agreed on, and commonly understood analysis of the problem, there needs to be robust leadership within the UN system. This should come from a combination of the Humanitarian Coordinator, the OCHA Head and the UN Country Team. It is only then that HICs' potential for supporting coordination can truly be realized. Without this leadership, the HIC can still provide support to the first three components of coordination but its impact on overall coordination will be limited.

14. In addition to the information products and services the HIC provides in the support of coordination, the actual process of engaging the participation of organizations in information sharing creates an atmosphere of cooperation and trust that can facilitate coordination activities.

Role of an HIC in Assessments

15. Strictly speaking the HIC's role in assessments is to give technical advice within the purview of its competence, i.e., information management as it applies to database management and GIS. The HIC has a role in promoting standard data formats and this includes data collected by surveys; and in particular, insuring that the P-Codes are captured for mapping purposes.

16. There is a notion that HICs have the expertise to advise on survey methodology. This is only true in a very specific sense and only when one is talking about how the data is to be structured. The type of questions to be asked, the population to be sampled, the timing of the survey, the actual collection of the data, its editing and finally its analysis should be done by the appropriate sector specialists who are familiar with survey methodologies. The HIC can provide its GIS capability to produce maps based on the analysis done.

17. HICs have tried several times to run 'rapid assessments'. This was successful in Kosovo but not elsewhere. A main reason for the Kosovo success was context – the type of information needed (destruction of housing) lent itself to basic survey. In a nutritional emergency this type of survey would not be relevant – instead well-developed epidemiological techniques would be used. In later attempts to replicate the success of the Kosovo rapid assessment the complexity of the context has not been sufficiently acknowledged. In Iraq the rapid assessment also sought to capture two different things – a quick and dirty overview of humanitarian

Recommendation 5: for an HIC to achieve its maximum potential it needs good assessment information. OCHA is in the natural position to provide this, and should take the initiative both in terms of promoting common assessment methods and leading rapid initial assessments of need.

need, and baseline data. In the end this mix of objectives led the project to failure.

Recommendation 6: HICs should confine their role in assessments to advising on data capture and collecting base line data. Where HICs do get involved in surveying humanitarian need they should bring in expertise. If advice on survey methodology were added to an HICs portfolio of services this would be widely appreciated by the agencies and would almost certainly have a positive impact on quality. The qualifications required for this sort of person would include statistical expertise and ideally knowledge of the relevant sectors of humanitarian work.

A dual mandate dichotomy?

18. There is an unintended but real tension between the two halves of the HIC's Terms of Reference. On the one hand the HIC is to support coordination of humanitarian assistance and on the other, contribute to "the creation of a common framework for information management within the humanitarian community". In principle, there should be no contradiction between the two goals and in fact, it can be argued that striving for one helps to achieve the other. Nevertheless, practice has shown this is not a straightforward proposition and actually can lead to conflicting priorities.

19. Most of the HIC's output, particularly in the early phase of its deployment is aimed at supporting coordination in the field, covering who is doing what where, and identifying immediate needs and gaps. The whole orientation of the HIC, its staff and resources are focused on producing the products and services that answer those coordination needs. With the transition to the more settled, reconstruction phase the HIC starts re-directing its resources and attention to improving the common information management framework and supporting decision-making, usually at the expense of providing the more basic products associated with coordination.

20. In the life span of a HIC, there thus appears a point when the HIC needs to be conscious of this growing bifurcation in its mission in order to allocate its resources efficiently. Tasks need to be prioritised and the HIC has to make a decision as to the balance of products and services it offers. The tendency is for the 'Information Management Service' (IMS) to take precedence. Though demand for coordination products continues, it can be argued that it is not as urgent as it was in the early stages of the emergency. HIC should either pay sufficient attention to these products to do them well, or it should dispose of them.

Responsibility for their production could be passed on to other agencies (for example, UNOCHA has maintained the contact and meeting lists in other missions).

Role in Supporting the Common Information Management Framework

21. What is the "common information management framework" and what is HIC's role in it? In the first instance, the HIC's have appropriately interpreted their role as providing advice on data management and promoting standards. Often they have gone beyond that however, for example collecting and processing data that may or may not support humanitarian operations, or taking it upon themselves to build databases for other organizations. It is difficult to say how these activities contribute to the common framework, and at the same time, they risk tying up resources that could be more effectively used elsewhere.

22. The HIC's contribution to the creation of a common information management framework for the humanitarian community can be meaningful only when organizations subscribe to a common approach and devote resources to support it. Otherwise, the results of the HIC effort in this regard, no matter how good, are diffuse and fleeting. For example, the HIC's promotion of data standards (e.g., SHARE) will only have lasting effect when such standards are accepted and used on an ongoing basis throughout the agencies.

Recommendation 7: FIS should draw up a strategy on the establishment of the common information management framework and submit it to IASC for endorsement.

Operations

Wider 'system' issues

23. Position within OCHA, strategic vision - Overall the HIC concept is well regarded within OCHA. Both the director's of OCHA in New York and Geneva were well informed about the HIC activities and potential and it was obvious that senior management had taken a keen interest in the development of HIC. The evaluators felt there was a strategic vision driving the HIC development; that in the long term OCHA wanted to invest in information management technology in the hope of harnessing new capabilities to facilitate humanitarian action. Given OCHA's delicate position within the system this is seen as one of the few areas where they can genuinely and legitimately play a role. The HIC is not the only 'new technology' project within OCHA. Relief-web is even more successful and HIC is perceived as part of a suite of projects in this area.



HIC Liberia

24. The HIC and FIS are suffering from being 'disconnected' from Geneva. There was a strong sense in Geneva that the HIC should be located there, and joined at the hip with the Emergency Services Branch (ESB). The 'plotter' incident in Liberia (where it took 9 months to procure) may have stemmed from FIS being so far away from Geneva, thus making it difficult for FIS to follow up with the relevant people in person. The process of getting contracts processed quickly may also be facilitated by an FIS presence in Geneva.

Recommendation 8: The HIC should have a presence in Geneva if the ESB continues to stay there (if not entirely locate there). Its current location in New York is anomalous in relation to other 'field oriented services' and means that it misses out on potential linkages with complimentary services such as the 'virtual OSOCC'. Not having a presence in Geneva possibly constrains its ability to deploy quickly.

25. Common services – the HIC is a 'common service' of the UN, like JLC and UNHAS. It is peculiar in this respect as it is managed by OCHA, whereas the other two 'common services' sit within WFP. The idea of common service is excellent and is gaining increasing currency both within the system and with donors. OCHA will need to gain the confidence of the other UN agencies that the HIC is a common service for all agencies and not just a mechanism to be used for its own purposes.

26. The 'common services' model that JLC has is far more 'inter-agency', with secondments and an inter-agency steering committee. In the past, when the

leadership of FIS was someone seconded from WFP, the HIC too could claim an inter-agency pedigree. Now it looks more like an OCHA project. To dispel this perception it would be wise for FIS to invest more in GIST, as this has a wide base, and on this basis FIS and HIC can claim impressive inter-agency credentials.

27. There is a tension that has not been fully resolved between the 'common-services' role of HIC (broadly, serving all humanitarian actors) and the fit with OCHA. This often plays out badly in the field with an impossible reporting structure 'through' the OCHA head of office to the Humanitarian Coordinator. More clarity on exactly what HIC can do for OCHA, and what it should be doing for the 'community' and 'leadership' would help this relationship.

Recommendation 9: The GIST should be revitalised. It is an excellent inter-agency body that both helps FIS/ HIC in its aspiration to common service, and allows for the widest collection and dissemination of material in the preparation phase.

Recommendation 10: FIS should try to secure inter-agency secondments on a more regular basis.

Recommendation 11: There needs to be more clarity about how OCHA and HIC fit. There is a danger that HIC will just become the target version of OCHA's new 'information management units'. This would not be about common services, but about servicing OCHA. A framework should be written that outlines how HIC fits with OCHA and what the responsibilities of each are in the field. This would also help other agencies understand the division of labour.

go for a UNOPs 'solution' for now, instead continuing to use them on a case by case basis, simultaneously working with their own support services to see how they might be improved.

Recommendation 12: FIS should continue using the patchwork of partnerships they currently have while working on their internal capacity. They should resist the temptation to contract out administrative functions, instead working towards a goal of being self-sufficient.

28. Partnerships – the HIC has built up a number of partnerships over its time in operation, mostly due to expediency. OFDA and DFID have funded, given people and in the case of OFDA valuable data. The Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAFA) played a large role in the Iraq crisis, providing most of the skilled people at the outset. UNOPs have also been tried out as an operational partner.

29. Of these partnerships, OFDA and DFID have been the least problematic. They have a reasonably clear idea of where they fit and what they want and although DFID in the past have put unreasonable pressure on HIC staff to provide information (notably Afghanistan), generally the parameters of these partnerships are well understood. In the case of OFDA and DFID there are also larger institutional partnerships that set these parameters.

30. The relationship with VVAFA has been both fruitful and frustrating. VVAFA have provided some excellent staff and in the case of Iraq invested substantial amounts of money. Their commitment and competence was noteworthy. For the staff concerned working for VVAFA was often much easier than dealing with the UN bureaucracy. On the down side, the VVAFA vision is different to that of FIS. It is bolder and more ambitious, and it seems more appropriately suited to a non-governmental organisation than to an inter-governmental organisation with all of the constraints that entails. It would be a great loss to OCHA if the link with VVAFA was severed, but it would also be foolish to become over-dependent on them. More discussion needs to take place between the policy makers in each organisation about the vision in particular.

31. The partnership with UNOPs was the most straightforward. They are a contracting agency within the UN, and FIS hired them to implement their administration in Iraq. While this was certainly easier than dealing with the UN Secretariat bureaucracy, their performance was uneven in places. In part this is because this is not their normal way of working – normally UNOPs undertakes the project in its entirety; trying to be a 'support service' is new to them. If FIS could get the OCHA support services to work better for them, there would be no need for UNOPs. FIS should resist the temptation to

General management

32. Strategic planning – The HIC's assessed during this evaluation had not always been strategic. This is not to denigrate their work – it is a characteristic of evaluations that they tend to focus on the negative rather than the positive. The observations made here are made in the hope that they will further enhance the important and useful work of HICs.

33. There is a tension between establishing the HIC as a meaningful resource for the 'community', and working strategically. The first imperative suggests a mode of working where you take requests from all comers and generally make yourself useful. This 'user focused' method of working builds trust and respect and hopefully gets organisations to contribute their information, building the central position of the HIC. After a certain point however, this method of working can become counter-productive. The HIC tries to do everything at once, not clear where its energies might be best focused. The requirement to produce a strategic plan early on, perhaps to be approved by the 'board' recommended later in this section might ameliorate this tendency.

34. While it is clearly not possible to develop strategic plans in the most 'fluid' early days of an emergency response, it is possible to have a 'quick and dirty' review of action and attempt to plan within the first three months. This was done during the Iraq response and produced a 'road map' that was widely viewed as useful. A one-day session with staff and main stakeholders would suffice.

Recommendation 13: HICs should regularly undertake a 'quick and dirty' strategic planning session within the first three months of operation. This would help them focus, and make the transition to supporting decision-making more easily.

35. Human resources - Finding the right HIC Manager is one of the keys to the success of a HIC. A good manager can always make something of a bad situation whereas the opposite is true. Ideally,

the manager should have experience in humanitarian aid and be familiar with its challenges and the requirements of relief agencies; have an appreciation of information management so as to be able to manage efficiently the HIC's resources, prioritise tasks, and communicate effectively HIC activities to decision-makers in the UN and other organizations; and finally know how to manage under difficult and stressful circumstances. This very demanding position should be accordingly recompensed to attract the best people possible.

Recommendation 14: HIC managers should be recruited at the highest pay grade available. Their performance should be assessed at the end of a mission, if possible with the involvement of staff.

36. HIC personnel tend to be technical and largely involved in data management tasks. Liaison officers are deployed at the outset, but are usually the first to be dropped on the assumption that the HIC manager will assume this role, along with the rest of the staff. This tends to change the orientation of the office decisively toward a 'high end' technical focus, often at the expense of the 'basic' coordination products. A better balance of skills throughout might help. The liaison post should be kept longer, or someone with technical skills given a more explicit liaison role. Another strong possibility would be to get a liaison officer seconded from the NGO community through one of the inter-agency groupings – ICVA, Interaction or SCHR³.

Recommendation 15: The liaison post should be kept for longer, or a staff member tasked with explicit liaison functions (in addition to the manager). One possibility is to use NGO secondments through the major inter-agency bodies.

37. The core team of technical specialists has revolved around a perceived core function of database design, predominantly using GIS technologies. The information needed for humanitarian decision-making and coordination is far wider than this however, as has been pointed out several times in this study. While it is unrealistic to think that HIC would deploy with statisticians or sociologists, a wider pool of specialists could be developed who could be brought in for 'one off' projects. Almost all respondents questioned were enthusiastic about this, assessment expertise in particular would be high value added.

Recommendation 16: There should be thought given to broadening the range of skills within an HIC. Assessment methods and survey design were mentioned several times in the course of this study.

38. The rosters are an excellent idea for helping with rapid deployment, and are touched on below. They



The rapid assessment process in Iraq managed by the HIC - getting good staff is critical to making an HIC work.

will need active management however, to ensure that people are available when needed. This is a fine balance as the more roster staff are employed, the smaller the pool to call on when the emergency hits. The 'IMU'⁴ initiative will help in this respect, especially if roster personnel are deployed for these assignments on the understanding that they can be quickly re-deployed in the case of big emergencies.

39. Another pool of labour that needs to be considered, despite the obvious political hurdles is that of skilled professionals within the large UN agencies. As well as being a good source of technicians there are obvious benefits in terms of information sharing. The more HIC can include these UN agencies in its staffing plans, the more likely it is they will share their information.

40. Prioritisation of work – the evaluators came across several examples of big projects undertaken by HICs that did not seem to have an unequivocal benefit to the entire humanitarian community. While these projects had value in their own right, they seemed to fit only tangentially with the HIC stated mandate of supporting decision-making or

coordination. The common theme linking these 'white elephants' seemed to be a lack of clear direction from the 'community' itself.

Recommendation 17: FIS should design a strategy for getting skilled staff seconded from UN agencies. Paying for the posts, awareness raising within the agencies and targeting key individuals should all be considered.

41. Direction for HIC projects would ideally be filtered through OCHA's central coordination role. In many cases, however, the HIC-OCHA relationship was not working in the field. Given that the HIC is meant to be a hub for multi-agency information exchange and advice, attempting to meet the information needs, soliciting the participation and buy-in of other organizations it makes sense that an organisational mechanism such as an advisory group be established to oversee the work of the HIC. It could provide advice and set general policy, aligning the HIC more closely with the work of the humanitarian community and better engaging organisations in their work.

Recommendation 18: That an advisory group comprising the representatives from the main UN agencies, the international and local NGO communities and (potentially) government be formed to provide strategic direction and guidance to the HIC.

42. HICs have engaged in major projects in several different places, as mentioned above. It is not clear however, that the costs of these projects are properly evaluated at the outset, and decisions to engage made on this basis. The HIC's emphasis should be on providing technical advice and not performing large data management projects. If, from time-to-time, the HIC is called upon to provide such a service for the benefit of the wider community, provision should be made for hiring or seconding temporary staff with the appropriate expertise.

Recommendation 19: The HICs should be required to submit to a designated authority (such as an advisory board) for review; an estimated budget, rationale and work plan for new projects.

43. Monitoring, evaluation and lessons learning – there has not been a systems based 'lessons learning' culture in FIS, although the continuity of service of key individuals has led to a similar outcome. As the project grows in size and the experiences mount, it

is essential that more lessons are documented and there is more routine monitoring and evaluation.

44. The evaluators did not get time to examine the archives or filing systems of FIS, but it was clear that in the field there is not a standard filing system. In Iraq a consultant was hired to perform this task - an excellent initiative. The pace of work has been such, and the resources spread so thinly that this is understandable. There is a danger now however, that if a uniform filing system is not developed across the 'HIC concept' that the useful experiences will begin to be lost.

45. The lack of systematic monitoring also extends to operational HIC's. While user surveys are conducted they lack consistency and often do not yield necessary information about customers real needs. More surveys should be undertaken more regularly and an experience built of what works and what doesn't.

Recommendation 20: A process should be established where the HICs are expected to report on their performance against predetermined indicators and benchmarks to measure their progress. End-of-project reports and lessons learned should be documented and filed with the FIS. An assessment report should be done at the end of a HIC's mandate, or at the end of the first year.

46. The HICs generally compiled statistics on the use of its services and the products disseminated; status reports regarding the HICs and their work have been produced but all this has been done in an irregular and seemingly *ad hoc* fashion. There is no systematic process of end-of-project reporting that would assess the work of a HIC or document lessons learned that could support better planning and policy-making.

Recommendation 21: More opportunities should be created for HIC staff in different countries to get together to discuss specific issues of common interest, to share experiences and exchange lessons learned.

47. The first HIC workshop held in March 2004 was well received. Attendees suggested that it would be worthwhile to hold workshops from time-to-time on specific topics to share experience and lessons learned. For example, there was an expressed need to discuss common database applications and establish best practices so as to prevent duplication of effort and "re-inventing the wheel".

Deployment

48. Preparation – advance preparation is crucial to the effectiveness of an HIC in its first few days. The preparation of datasets so that there is a baseline to work from is essential. FIS have been excellent in this respect, with substantial support from OFDA. This has been a major factor in the success of HIC to date and must be continued with.

49. OCHA is beginning to expand its early warning and predictive capacity. FIS is already involved in preparedness discussions, but has often lacked the budget to engage fully in preparation work until it is clear that a crisis is breaking. More resources for preparation work would enhance capacity throughout OCHA and help with the current IMU initiative. If the GIST were revived then this work might also benefit the UN family more widely.

Recommendation 22: FIS should be supported to expand its preparation work. OFDA already helps with data through the NIMA agency amongst others and should continue this excellent support. A reviving of the GIST would certainly help in both obtaining the raw data and making preparedness work available.

50. FIS has recently produced a 'toolkit' CD Rom that contains many examples of previous work and templates. This is another excellent initiative that will be useful for deployment. There will no doubt be future iterations – one very practical way of improving on this initial product is to contract technicians who were recently in the field to work on the next draft.

Recommendation 23: Field technicians with recent experience should be used for the next update of the HIC 'toolbox', perhaps through a workshop and contracting of individuals to develop particular templates.

51. Timeliness – the timeliness of HIC deployment is critical to its success. If the HIC is deployed at the outset then the humanitarian community is more likely to use it, and as a result it is more likely to become embedded in the 'fabric' of the operation. This requires not only equipment ready to go but also staff and robust support.

52. The right set of skills for deployment – deployment of staff is arguably the most important factor in getting a HIC started. The type and quality of staff deployed will almost certainly 'make or break' any operation. The HIC in Liberia struggled to find its feet initially as a succession of staff failed to quite

get things going. Probably the only people who can successfully set the tone for a HIC and prove its intense added value in the earliest days are those within FIS. They are also the only people who can be on a plane in literally 24 hours. They already have the most experience of start-up, and would refine these skills and experiences further. If staff from FIS were those who initially deployed to establish the HIC, this would create some space for a proper roster recruitment to be undertaken. The timeline might be something like 2 – 3 weeks for FIS staff (management and technical), to be replaced by roster staff as early as possible. The roster staff might then themselves have to be replaced with longer-term employees, as it is unlikely that roster-type staff will deploy for a year or more.

Recommendation 24: FIS should continue sending out its "core" staff in the initial stages of an emergency to establish a HIC while the recruitment process of roster staff is carried out. One implication of this may be an expanded FIS unit.

53. HIC in a box module/ Equipment – the 'HIC in a box' module seems to be excellent for the purpose it has been designed for. Surprisingly, it has only been deployed once – and that was to Baghdad where it was destroyed soon after being set up. In all other cases since the Afghanistan experience the equipment deployed has been *ad hoc*, including the Basra and Larnaca set-ups during the Iraq crisis. One of the problems may be the scale of it – perhaps there should be a more flexible system that allows parts to be taken – not necessarily the whole. If the system for replacing parts were sufficiently rapid then the problem of it being 'looted' would not be acute.

54. One of the solutions might be for OCHA to put a 'HIC field office' in their warehouse with the proposed 'regular' FIS buffer stock. This is an excellent initiative to pre-purchase several regularly used items and have them ready for immediate dispatch, over-coming the incapacity in regular procurement that led to a 6 month delay purchasing a plotter in Liberia. This could lead to a 'catalogue' approach, much like the logistics department of MSF where you can request modules or individual parts from the store. This obviously requires a degree of management, although with a 'call down' contract with either a supplier or an organisation like UNOPs this could work without too much administrative input. Under this type of system a 'critical mass' of equipment would always have to be maintained that meant a 'HIC field office' could be deployed within 24 hours. This type of system would also avoid the problem of equipment going out of date if not deployed regularly, as all equipment would be sourced through this stock and then back-filled.

55. Under this type of system, DFID would continue to store the full 'HIC in a box'. DFID has the capability to take a 'HIC in a box' with them should they deploy very rapidly. HIC deployment in the early phase is critical to success – there is a real danger that if the only stock was in the OCHA warehouse deployment might be slowed by UN procedure. DFID is able to just make a decision and go.

Recommendation 25: a HIC 'field office' module should be developed to complement the 'HIC lite' (kept in New York) and the full 'HIC in a box' (kept by DFID). This would serve for deployments such as Basra and should be big enough to set up a functioning office, but small enough to take on a commercial aircraft. Both DFID and OCHA should keep one of these modules at least.

56. DFID holds a large stock of equipment in addition to the 'HIC in a box'. If they were to manage their technical stock in its entirety, they might both avoid equipment going out of date and allow a more flexible support. If both OCHA and DFID held at least one 'HIC in a box' and had flexibility to deploy different 'modules' (field HIC for example) then there would always be enough support for any deployment, big or small, and for more than one deployment at a time.

Recommendation 26: DFID should continue to keep a full 'HIC in a box' module on behalf of FIS/ OCHA as they have the capacity to fly it anywhere within 24 hours. This also means that DFID should store their 'HIC in a box' where they can easily access it. DFID should also look at whether they can more actively manage their stock to ensure equipment stays up to date.

57. Logistics and technical support - the HIC needs good logistics support at the start-up phase, as well as excellent technical back up. Setting up the server, the wireless LAN, the 'bandwidth' connection, and installing the software is a complex and specialist job, not to mention finding the premises, power, accommodation for staff, transport, sourcing material, hiring local staff, and meeting people at the airport. The intention to use SRSA at the beginning of every start-up is an excellent one – DFID should also consider sending a logistician at the start, preferably one who also had good technical skills (especially in power and computer hardware).

58. Administration – the HIC has had terrible problems with making the UN administration work for them during initial deployment. They have been unable to secure cash for the simplest logistical tasks (such as purchasing chairs and desks). Contracts have been weeks in coming, staff have deployed without contracts (meaning they are uninsured).

59. FIS have tried several different systems to circumvent the UN administration. The most systematic attempt was during the Iraq crisis where UNOPs were contracted to purchase equipment and provide petty cash. This worked moderately well in Iraq, but there were difficulties where UNOPs had no representation and UNDP were the default administrative support.

60. It is not clear why the Secretariat administration has served FIS/ HIC so poorly. This was explained to the evaluators as part of the 'dark arts' of the UN system. Part of it has to do with a secretariat geared towards serving more stable environments (and not used to dealing with rapid demands). Part of it might be the newness of FIS. In the field trying to get money through UNDP seems perennially unworkable.

61. One of the problems for FIS/ HIC in making the secretariat administration work for them seems to be their location in New York. Being exclusively based in New York means they are divorced from the parts of the administration that are set up to move quickly, and trying to troubleshoot problems across the Atlantic is cumbersome.

Recommendation 27: FIS and OCHA should investigate the possibility of including the HIC as a program item in the core budget for OCHA rather than treating it as a project. This would by-pass some of the money related problems during the deployment of a HIC; and it would strengthen OCHA's commitment to the HIC concept.

62. By far the most effective way for HIC to get access to petty cash (in particular) has been when DFID seconded staff have taken cash with them. If DFID always provided a logistician then this staff member could also carry enough petty cash for the deployment phase, giving the HIC time to establish routine administrative support.

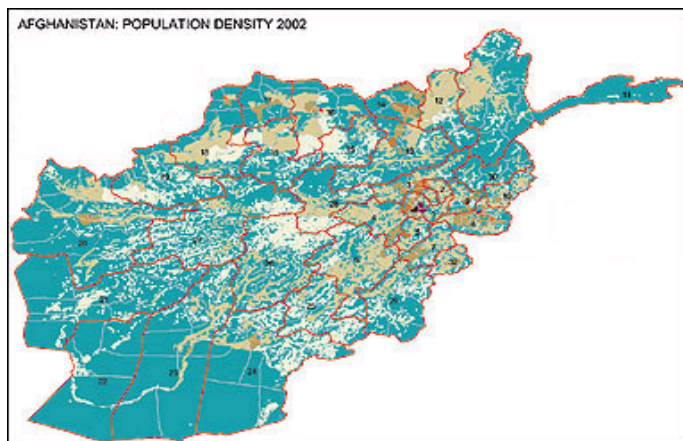
Recommendation 28: FIS and DFID should investigate a more formal arrangement for logistical support at the outset of an HIC deployment.

63. The OFDA rapid deployment fund – one of the key elements that have allowed HIC to deploy with relative speed has been the OFDA rapid deployment fund. This is an excellent initiative that allows FIS to circumvent procedures that can at times be restrictive. These types of funding arrangements are critical to the success of HIC type initiatives and must be maintained and expanded where possible.

64. The trigger mechanism – the trigger mechanism for an HIC is unnecessarily complicated (in theory). In theory the HC is supposed to request and HIC and then the IASC has to sign it off, followed by the key donors. In reality the IASC does not involve itself, which is a good thing. This leaves a tremendous amount of responsibility and power in the hands of the HC, which may also be a good thing, but there should also be a role for the FIS leadership who may have a more global perspective.

Recommendation 29: The FIS unit should be able to trigger an HIC deployment as well as the HC.

Information products and services



Afghanistan population density map 2002

65. Based on the feedback of interviewees and a review of the HICs' outputs, a number of information products and services can be said to form the core of a HIC's operation. Most of the HIC output is for the benefit of the relief community in the field. Some products are also of interest to headquarter staff and decision-makers. The products are nominally aimed at supporting coordination in the field, covering who is doing what where, identifying needs and gaps, improving information management and exchange, establishing an information resource and providing a basis for decision-making.

66. The evaluators received comment on all these activities. The general consensus was that the HIC through its activities contributes more or less to more effective and efficient humanitarian action. However, this has to be qualified by the observation that the information products and services full effectiveness has been at times compromised by uneven execution.

67. In assessing the HIC products, it is important to keep in mind that the HIC and the nature of the demands placed on it were affected by the changing situation from the initial phases of the emergency to a longer term, recovery phase. The need for many of the core services were more acute in the earlier phase when organizations were new to the situation and needed a great deal of guidance and coordination. The later, settled phase called for a more measured approach as epitomized by the technical, information management services (IMS) based on the HIC's GIS and database management expertise. Not only did the IMS aim to meet some of the immediate information needs of the relief community it also strove to improve, what is referred to as the common information management framework.

68. As a general observation, most respondents in the field, but particularly the NGO community

showed a strong appreciation of the coordination / orientation products, even after the initial emergency phase. The NGOs, however, did not have much experience with the IMS activities and thus had few comments to offer in this regard. Respondents from UN agencies, particularly information management professionals, were much more attuned to HIC's IMS products such as the P-Codes, and on the whole recognized their utility. Headquarter staff and senior managers, tended to want current situation reports, especially in the first stages of an emergency. Though they glanced at the individual HIC websites, their preferred sources of information included such services as ReliefWeb and IRIN.

Coordination / Reference Services

69. Meeting Place / Forum - It has been universally confirmed that in the first days of an emergency, a centrally located meeting place / conference room where agencies can come together to find out what is happening and to coordinate their activities is an important requirement. This immediately establishes in the minds of the relief community the HIC as a hub for inter-agency coordination and information exchange. The addition of a Pigeon-hole service and, if possible, an Internet access facility strengthen this idea of the HIC being a central point of contact.

70. Contact List / Meeting Schedule - The compilation and dissemination of a contact list of relief actors was a basic, critical service according to the majority of organizations, not only at the onset of an emergency but also during the recovery phase. A major criticism of the lists produced by the HICs was that they were not updated sufficiently well leading to incorrect and outdated entries. The same can be also said of the Meeting Schedule – another basic product that organizations found very useful but noted that many times it was not up-to-date.

Recommendation 30: The HIC should have proactive procedures in place to insure that products whose value depends on their currency, such as the contact list and the meeting schedule, are kept up-to-date. For example, a system can be put into place, incorporating not only updates submitted by the organizations themselves but also a scheduled routine of checking those organizations not heard from over a given period of time. A clerk or a receptionist can be trained to do this type of work and it would only take a half hour to do each day.

71. Who, What, Where (W3) - Most organizations consider the W3 a necessary product but a difficult

product to do well in terms of currency and completeness.

72. At its simplest, the W3 records the agency name, sector and location usually at the district, or equivalent administrative level. This data is usually placed in a matrix (a spreadsheet for example) and disseminated on a website for downloading, or in printed form. Such a W3 is relatively easy to maintain. Users can use it as an “index” or directory to identify those agencies and areas where they might want to know more. This works well with an up-to-date contact list of organizations to which users can go to obtain further details.

Recommendation 31: an activity tracking system should only be attempted when initiated by a group of agencies with a common interest and motivation to maintain such a system (e.g., a sectoral working group). Experience has shown that once the data has been aggregated (value added), the agencies recognized its utility and were thus more willing to contribute their data on a regular basis. The Iraqi experience also showed that structured forms and common data collection standards were not necessary for agencies to contribute their data (they collected data for their own purposes); what was important to bring data together was that all used the same Geo Codes and in the case of facilities, a unique identifier code so that data about the same facility could be brought together using this code.

73. However, many respondents expressed the view that the simple W3, beyond the initial introduction of a new organization and for those looking for a general overview of the relief situation in a country, was not very useful to those organizations already implementing projects in the field. If anything, organizations at the operational level wanted more detailed data, in some cases, down to the facilities being affected by aid activities in their particular sector. To accommodate this desire, the W3 has to be modified, and, in fact, take on the functionality of an activity tracking mechanism. However, a great deal of effort and cooperation from the participating agencies are needed for it to work.

74. Motivating agencies to contribute data on an ongoing basis has always been a challenge. Some insist that a concerted effort of canvassing organizations in person to collect the data is necessary. In the case of the Iraqi HIC, the motivation came from organizations getting something back that was specifically geared to their sectoral interests and that they could apply in their operational planning. A different perspective was voiced by a few organizations who intimated that by

including their activities in a W3, it somehow legitimized their activities in the eyes of the relief community - it was important for the organizations to map out their “turf”.

Recommendation 32: data collection from agencies has to be a proactive activity if the final product is to be as complete, comprehensive and current as possible. The HIC which is usually the hub of such an activity, should still be prepared to actively canvass participating organizations for their data.

75. Websites - It appeared to the evaluators that the HICs had an uninformed impression as to how useful their websites were to the humanitarian community. Websites are an excellent, cost effective way for storing and making available vast quantities of information to a wide audience; however, their utility is governed by the ability of targeted users to access the Internet. It was pointed out by a number of interviewees that the Internet was not always available, particularly in parts outside of the capital city, and in most cases, connections were very slow.

Recommendation 33: the HIC should be aware when its website is not easily accessible by organizations due to technical difficulties in a country. It is incumbent on the HIC to investigate alternative ways of distributing information produced for the local humanitarian community, including the use of traditional media such as print.

76. Even with adequate Internet access, most users did not visit the websites on a regular basis in order to browse or see what was new. Some organizations reported that they were not always aware of the HIC and its products and that there needed to be some kind of awareness service from the HIC.

Recommendation 34: The HIC should consider using a Listserv (or email group) to send on a regular basis, information on HIC activities and products as well as other announcements of interest to the humanitarian community

77. Given that websites are sometimes difficult for organizations in the field to access, they still serve the purpose of providing information to remote users. The evaluators reviewed the current HIC websites which are based on the same template. Though there is a great deal of information on them and the sites are graphically well designed, they were still

frustrating to use and difficult to find information. For example, most of the emphasis was on large datasets usually GIS related, that most users, unless they are specifically looking for that kind of information, are not interested in seeing. Many of the sub categories such as the assessment section were long, chronological lists of titles which were not clear in describing what the individual assessments were about. Such a list could have been more useful if the titles were classified under sectoral headings as was done in other sub-sections. In fact, it would have been useful to have a menu selection not only by type of information but also by sector (for example, across the top). Another area for improvement would be to have instructions on the appropriate pages on how to contribute information when making a request for input from organizations.

Recommendation 35: The HIC should re-examine the structure and user interface of its website template so that it better facilitates navigation and the retrieval of desired information; that instructions are given were appropriate for the submission of agency data; and that on-line input forms be investigated for capturing data.

78. Orientation Maps - In the early stages of an emergency, organizations found basic maps showing the geography of the country, the location of, for example, settlements, roads, IDP camps, and offices very useful. Maps showing security-related information and maps tracking the movement of IDPs and refugees were also of immediate interest. It was noted several times that these maps did not have to be professionally produced using a GIS or a plotter. Many agencies could get by with map images on A3 paper.

79. Surprisingly, given that there was so much emphasis placed on the maps, the evaluators found a wide divergence of quality. Quite often town maps had no names by which one could navigate, making the maps extremely difficult to use. We also heard stories of roads being out by over a kilometre on the Iraq maps, a potential security hazard.

Recommendation 36: more effort should be put into quality control of orientation maps. There is obviously a balance to be had between getting products out in time and making sure they are pinpoint accurate. User friendliness is another big factor however, and should not be overly time consuming.

80. Situation Reports - A central repository for reports and assessments was considered to be a valuable service. However, in a crisis situation, some respondents, particularly donors and headquarter staff, wanted to receive information that summarized what was happening and identified needs and available resources. This type of information was considered critical for decision-making in terms of the allocation of funds and the type of intervention to be deployed. There was a feeling that the HIC could do more in this regard.

81. Since the HIC does not do analysis – this is OCHA’s job - the evaluators envisaged the possibility of integrating the HIC work of information collection with the production of the sitreps by OCHA staff.

Recommendation 37: In the initial phase of an emergency, OCHA should designate an officer to synthesize the information gathered by the HIC as it comes in from different sources, and write in a standardized format a concise, easily readable sitrep that would be distributed in paper form to all operational staff coming to the HIC, as well as being posted on an electronic forum accessible to headquarter personnel (e.g., using the virtual OSSOC principle).

82. Electronic Library / Resource Centre - A number of respondents thought it would have been a worthwhile service if the HIC had incorporated an “electronic” library into their website to systematically collect and hold significant documents pertaining to the relief situation, including such material as analytical reports, studies, and assessments. Some felt that an actual resource centre holding the hard copy of such reports, space permitting, would also have been of use to the relief community. In Afghanistan, for example, AREU saw a need for such a service and took it upon itself to establish a library.

Recommendation 38: the HIC should systematically compile on the website an “electronic” library of documents on the humanitarian emergency and the work of the relief community; and make them also available in a resource centre where possible.

Information Management Services

83. Under Information Management Services (IMS) the HICs have performed a number of tasks for organizations in the relief community including the provision of technical support, promotion of information processing standards, building databases, data collection, and providing advice and training on GIS, assessment tools and database management. Unlike “coordination” outputs and services which are easily seen and judged by organizations, many of the IMS activities were not directly applicable to them, but could be considered as contributions to the development of IMS in the humanitarian community. In this regard, the most favourable opinions came from technically-minded colleagues involved in information management work in other UN agencies.

84. The HICs placed a high priority on the development and maintenance of standards. One of the most cited standards that the HIC helped to develop has been the P-Codes, a necessary standard for tying data to a particular geographic location. These have been widely accepted by many UN organizations for their own information management purposes. The HIC’s work on identifying settlements and their locations, and keeping track of administrative boundaries have also been seen as an important contribution to the effective management of data.

85. The standards developed by the HIC helped in the production of maps which have been the most popular HIC product, particularly for the purposes of orientation and the presentation of data. Users appreciated the value-added capability of the HIC-produced maps to have their data presented in a clear and understandable way which aided operational planning and program advocacy. The GIS could also have been used to produce analytical maps but the HICs were never fully ready to exploit this capability, due to a combination of a lack of reliable data and analytical expertise.

86. The HICs gave advice on data collection, particularly on the design of survey instruments and the underlying database structures, and provided assistance in the production of output. There are a number of examples where a HIC’s input and technical assistance to a multi-agency survey were greatly appreciated by the participating agencies. Some projects such as the Iraqi Rapid Assessment Project (RAP) failed to realise their promise, due to factors not necessarily under the control of the HIC. Several people pointed out that expertise in survey

Recommendation 39: Given the fact that the HIC provides advice in the design of surveys and assessments, it should consider hiring people with this type of skill set.

methodology is as necessary, for example, as database management skills in obtaining and processing good data.

87. Training was provided to staff of other organizations in the use of Global Positioning System (GPS), GIS technologies and database management. GPS training was found to be useful for the collection of data in a standardized way (e.g., P-Codes) which set the basis for data aggregation and improved the accuracy of the maps that were produced. Though this activity had a community-wide impact, it was difficult to gage the impact of the other trainings particularly those done for individual staff from other organizations.

88. In some instances, the HICs not only gave advice on database management but also involved themselves in the building of customized databases on request from individual organizations. This was certainly appreciated by the particular organization, and just as in the case of the training of individuals, it served to inculcate the spirit of trust and cooperation among the organizations. However, this must be tempered with the warning that these resource-intensive activities had little obvious benefit to the wider humanitarian community.

Recommendation 40: When considering requests from individual organizations to provide specific services such as the building of customized databases or training of staff, the HIC should consider these in light of their value to the general humanitarian community.

89. This touches upon the issue of the cost-effectiveness of HIC activities and how the investment in the technical resources, both hardware and expertise, were employed. Without a strong sense of its mission or strategic overview, the HIC was always in danger of operating on an opportunistic or an ad hoc basis, when choosing what projects to implement. There is an initial need for the HIC to establish its credibility – to market itself in order to attract “customers” – but an eye should be kept to what strategic purpose is being served. Some projects were not necessarily the best use of resources (e.g., the Road and Bridge survey in Liberia).

Recommendation 41: The HICs should be required to submit to a designated authority (e.g., an advisory group) for review; an estimated budget, rationale and work plan for new projects.

90. In the course of their work the HICs compiled datasets (e.g., GIS data, population statistics, data

on educational and health facilities, project activities) from which it produced information products for dissemination. In some instances, respondents pointed out errors in the data which were not necessarily the fault of the HIC but were incurred by the original organization submitting the data.

Recommendation 42: The HIC claims not to take responsibility for the data it receives, but it should first attempt to check the quality of submitted data and second, if it decides to make it available, provide some information to users about any potential errors in the data (metadata).

91. At the end of its mandate, the HIC generally transfers the data to an agency such as the UNDP to be used for development purposes in partnership with the national government. There is a question of ownership when turning the data over to government bodies that traditionally have a strong propriety interest and could restrict access to it.

(Footnotes)

¹ See OECD DAC definition for further details.

² OCHA paper #1: Meeting of the high-level working group on OCHA, 13 – 14th May 2003.

³ This suggestion was endorsed by ICVA who provided the first liaison officer to the Kosovo HIC, one of the factors that seemed to make the HCIC a success. This position should be funded by HIC and their donors.

⁴ IMU – Information management unit. FIS is currently planning an ECHO funded initiative across OCHA to build information management capacity in all field offices.

Summary of Recommendations

Key recommendations

i. FIS should draw up a strategy on the establishment of the common information management framework and submit it to IASC for endorsement. This should link with other IASC 'common framework' initiatives.

ii. More effort needs to be put into getting agencies to share information and take the potential of accurate information seriously. FIS should work with their key donors to use their leverage with the large UN agencies as a starting point. The good donor-ship initiative may help in promoting such a common approach, and the current assessment framework developed by the IASC CAP sub-working group under this looks promising.

iii. The timing of deployment is critical in achieving the greatest success for HICs. The earlier the deployment, the more impact they will have on their environment. The best way of achieving this would be to deploy a core team from headquarters who could be rapidly replaced by roster staff. The equipment should also be expanded to include smaller deployable units.

iv. HICs will fail in their stated goal of supporting decision making unless analytical capacity is added to the information management capacity. There are several options for this – analytical capacity can reside within a lead agency, within the office of the humanitarian coordinator, within the OCHA office or in the HIC itself.

v. The relationship with OCHA in the field is critical for an HIC to perform to its potential. Ideally HICs should form an interface between the coordination hub and the wider humanitarian community. There is a delicate balance here, with OCHA needing to support and enable the HIC, without subsuming it. Codifying this relationship in more detail would help those in the field to manage this balancing act.

vi. There needs to be more participatory governance of HICs and the HIC endeavour for it to truly be a common service. In the field an advisory board consisting of OCHA, UN agencies, I.O.s, NGOs and possibly government should be put in place as a matter of course. Secondments should be routinely considered from the different stakeholders. This arrangement would also ensure that HIC projects are relevant and part of a strategic vision. At a global level the GIST needs to be reinvigorated.

vii. The donor input has been essential to the success of HICs to date and should be continued. An HIC is a valuable service in its own right, but can also be seen as an investment in information management technology for the benefit of the humanitarian endeavour.

viii. To help justify the investment put into the HICs, a process should be established where the HICs are expected to report on their performance against predetermined indicators and benchmarks. The reporting should also include end-of-project reports, documented lessons learned, and assessment reports at the end of a HIC's mandate.

ix. There needs to be better consideration given to low technology systems for disseminating information. Many organisations at the beginning of emergency responses do not have the capacity to access the Internet. The innovation of Internet cafes is highly useful in this regard. E-mails and physical resource centres should also be considered. The websites should also be designed with general users in mind.

General

1. Donors should renew their attempts to get agencies to routinely share information with HICs. The current system has commercial incentives for not sharing information. It is not within the remit of this evaluation to suggest how this might be changed, but clearly small steps could be taken to reduce this 'skewed' incentive scheme.

2. OCHA and donors should look at ways of developing indicators from the good donor-ship initiative that help with objective assessment of need. Potentially the full power of information management systems could then be harnessed.

Policy

3. Analytical capacity should be added to information management capacity where there is an expressed desire to support decision-making. There are several options for this – analytical capacity can reside within a lead agency, within the office of the humanitarian coordinator, within the OCHA office or in the HIC itself. For discreet projects (like an IDP survey) analytical capacity can be attached to the project. Merely assuming analytical capacity exists within individual agencies is not enough, however.

4. Information management works best when the need for the project is clear and the task set reasonably simple. Better guidelines on how to commission pieces of IM work would help agencies understand how best to use HIC capacity to its full potential.

5. For an HIC to achieve its maximum potential it needs good assessment information. OCHA is in the natural position to provide this, and should take the initiative both in terms of promoting common assessment methods and leading rapid initial assessments of need. This is done in places, but not systematically enough.

6. HICs should confine their role in assessments to advising on data capture and collecting base line data. Where HICs do get involved in surveying humanitarian need they should bring in expertise. If advice on survey methodology were added to an HICs portfolio of services this would be widely appreciated by the agencies and would almost certainly have a positive impact on quality. The qualifications required for this sort of person would include statistical expertise and ideally knowledge of the relevant sectors of humanitarian work.

7. FIS should draw up a strategy on the establishment of the common information management framework and submit it to IASC for endorsement.

Operations

8. The HIC should have a presence in Geneva if the ESB continues to stay there (if not entirely locate there). Its current location in New York is anomalous in relation to other 'field oriented services' and means that it misses out on potential linkages with complimentary services such as the 'virtual OSOCC'. Not having a presence in Geneva possibly constrains its ability to deploy quickly.

9. The GIST should be revitalised. It is an excellent inter-agency body that both helps FIS/ HIC in its aspiration to common service, and allows for the widest collection and dissemination of material in the preparation phase.

10. FIS should try to secure inter-agency secondments on a more regular basis.

11. There needs to be more clarity about how OCHA and HIC fit. There is a danger that HIC will just become the largest version of OCHA's new 'information management units'. This would not be about common services, but about servicing OCHA. A framework should be written that outlines how HIC fits with OCHA and what the responsibilities of each are in the field. This would also help other agencies understand the division of labour.

12. FIS should continue using the patchwork of partnerships they currently have while working on their internal capacity. They should resist the temptation to contract out functions, instead working towards a goal of being self-sufficient.

13. HICs should regularly undertake a 'quick and dirty' strategic planning session within the first three months of operation. This would help them focus, and make the transition to supporting decision-making more easily.

14. HIC managers should be recruited at the highest pay grade available. Their performance should be assessed at the end of a mission, if possible with the involvement of staff.

15. The liaison post should be kept for longer, or a staff member tasked with explicit liaison functions (in addition to the manager). One possibility is to use NGO secondments through the major inter-agency bodies.

16. There should be thought given to broadening the range of skills within an HIC. Assessment methods and survey design were mentioned several times in the course of this study.

17. FIS should design a strategy for getting skilled staff seconded from UN agencies. Paying for the posts, awareness raising within the agencies and targeting key individuals should all be considered.

18. That an advisory group comprising the representatives from the main UN agencies, the international and local NGO communities and (potentially) government be formed to provide strategic direction and guidance to the HIC.

19. The HICs should be required to submit to a designated authority (such as an advisory board) for review; an estimated budget, rationale and work plan for new projects.

20. A process should be established where the HICs are expected to report on their performance against predetermined indicators and benchmarks to measure their progress. End-of-project reports and lessons learned should be documented and filed with the FIS. An assessment report should be done at the end of a HIC's mandate, or at the end of the first year.

21. More opportunities should be created for HIC staff in different countries to get together to discuss specific issues of common interest, to share experiences and exchange lessons learned.

22. FIS should be supported to expand its preparation work. OFDA already helps with data through the NIMA agency amongst others and should continue this excellent support. A reviving of the GIST would certainly help in both obtaining the raw data and making preparedness work available.

23. Field technicians with recent experience should be used for the next update of the HIC 'toolbox', perhaps through a workshop and contracting of individuals to develop particular templates.

24. FIS should consider sending out its "core" staff in the initial stages of an emergency to establish a HIC while the recruitment process of roster staff is carried out. One implication of this may be an expanded FIS unit.

25. A HIC 'field office' module should be developed to complement the 'HIC lite' (kept in New York) and the full 'HIC in a box' (kept by DFID). This would serve for deployments such as Basra and should be big enough

to set up a functioning office, but small enough to take on a commercial aircraft. Both DFID and OCHA should keep one of these modules at least.

26. DFID should continue to keep a full 'HIC in a box' module on behalf of FIS/ OCHA as they are the only organisation with the capacity to fly it anywhere within 24 hours. This will also dictate where it is stored. DFID should also look at whether they can more actively manage the various 'boxes' they keep on behalf of OCHA to ensure equipment stays up to date.

27. FIS and OCHA should investigate the possibility of including the HIC as a program item in the core budget for OCHA rather than treating it as a project. This would by-pass some of the money related problems during the deployment of a HIC; and it would strengthen OCHA's commitment to the HIC concept.

28. FIS and DFID should investigate a more formal arrangement for logistical support at the outset of an HIC deployment.

29. The FIS unit should be able to trigger an HIC deployment as well as the HC

Information Products and Services

30. The HIC should have proactive procedures in place to insure that products whose value depends on their currency, such as the contact list and the meeting schedule, are kept up-to-date. For example, a system can be put into place, incorporating not only updates submitted by the organizations themselves but also a scheduled routine of checking those organizations not heard from over a given period of time. A clerk or a receptionist can be trained to do this type of work and it would only take a half hour to do each day.

31. An activity tracking system should only be attempted when initiated by a group of agencies with a common interest and motivation to maintain such a system (e.g., a sectoral working group). Experience has shown that once the data has been aggregated (value added), the agencies recognized its utility and were thus more willing to contribute their data on a regular basis. The Iraqi experience also showed that structured forms and common data collection standards were not necessary for agencies to contribute their data (they collected data for their own purposes); what was important to bring data together was that all used the same Geo Codes and in the case of facilities, a unique identifier code so that data about the same facility could be brought together using this code.

32. Data collection from agencies has to be a proactive activity if the final product is to be as complete, comprehensive and current as possible. The HIC which is usually the hub of such an activity, should still be prepared to actively canvass

participating organizations for their data, no matter how willing they may be.

33. The HIC should be aware when its website is not easily accessible by organizations due to technical difficulties in a country. It is incumbent on the HIC to investigate alternative ways of distributing information produced for the local humanitarian community, including the use of traditional media such as print.

34. The HIC should consider using a Listserv (or email group) to send on a regular basis, information on HIC activities and products as well as other announcements of interest to the humanitarian community.

35. The HIC should re-examine the structure and user interface of its website template so that it better facilitates navigation and the retrieval of desired information; that instructions are given were appropriate for the submission of agency data; and that on-line input forms be investigated for capturing data.

36. More effort should be put into quality control of orientation maps. There is obviously a balance to be had between getting products out in time and making sure they are pinpoint accurate. User friendliness is another big factor however, and should not be overly time consuming.

37. In the initial phase of an emergency, OCHA should designate an officer to synthesize the information gathered by the HIC as it comes in from different sources, and write in a standardized format a concise, easily readable sitrep that would be distributed in paper form to all operational staff coming to the HIC, as well as being posted on an electronic forum accessible to headquarter personnel (e.g., using the virtual OSSOC principle).

38. The HIC should systematically compile on the website an "electronic" library of documents on the humanitarian emergency and the work of the relief community; and make them also available in a resource centre where possible. 48. Given the fact that the HIC provides advice in the design of surveys and assessments, it should consider hiring people with this type of skill set.

39. Given the fact that the HIC provides advice in the design of surveys and assessments, it should consider hiring people with this type of skill set.

40. When considering requests from individual organizations to provide specific services such as the building of customized databases or training of staff, the HIC should consider these in light of their value to the general humanitarian community.

41. The HICs should be required to submit to a designated authority (e.g., an advisory group) for

review; an estimated budget, rationale and work plan for new projects.

42. The HIC claims not to take responsibility for the data it receives, but it should first attempt to check the quality of submitted data and second, if it decides to make it available, provide some information to potential users about any potential errors in the data (metadata).

Appendices

Liberia case study

Background

1. In June 2003 Liberia's capital Monrovia was the scene of fierce fighting between rebels and government troops. The fighting displaced both residents and people from camps who had already been displaced by fighting in the interior. In all over 250,000 people sought refuge in empty public buildings and the city's main stadium.

2. In August a peace deal was signed and incumbent President Charles Taylor was given refuge in Nigeria, opening the way for an interim government including the rebel leaders. Although some humanitarian agencies had remained throughout the fighting, others including the UN had evacuated to neighbouring countries for the period of intense conflict. With the fighting over, and a huge level of need, many of these agencies and many who were new to Liberia established operations in the capital. In September the UN Security Council approved resolution 1509, calling for 15,000 peacekeeping troops and 1,200 civilian police.

3. The Liberia HIC became operational on 22nd August 2003¹ to provide "timely and accurate information essential to making relief efforts more effective".

4. Initially one staff was sent from Sierra Leone together with a FIS staff member. The DFID 'HIC in a box' module had only recently been deployed to Baghdad and had not yet been replaced. As this was not an option HIC staff brought their own equipment to start with and later purchased computers locally. Lack of equipment and a lack of space to work in meant the HIC did not become properly functional until two weeks later.

5. The Iraq deployment had consequences for staff recruitment too. A couple of the early appointments had been mixed, which in turn hampered the early success of the Liberia HIC. DFID seconded two personnel who did have experience, one as a GIS officer and one as a liaison officer. When the current manager took up her post the liaison officer post was not continued. Since the beginning of this year the staffing has been stable with 3 international staff (manager, data coordinator and GIS officer) as well as a number of national staff. Of the national staff, two are technical with a high level of competence. The data coordinator took up his post in September and is the longest serving member of staff.

6. The equipment and staffing problems were compounded by other technical glitches. The patchy deployment of the hardware meant that there was also patchy deployment of software. A plotter had

been promised by UNHCR, which when this did not materialise it took another 6 months to procure through OCHA Geneva.

8. Despite these problems the HIC was providing a basic internet café service and able to distribute some maps by the 27th August 2003. This was one month after the cessation of hostilities and 3 weeks after the first visit back to Monrovia by the UN humanitarian coordinator since the evacuation.

9. Initially the HIC focused on distributing general orientation maps of Monrovia, two of which were compiled in New York in July (general map of Monrovia and a County Boundaries and Major Towns map). By 26th August, a week after opening they had produced their first bespoke map – of IDP camp locations and in greater Monrovia. They also focused at this time on producing a contacts list and a meeting schedule. By the 15th September the HIC had added a security phases map and an updated IDP map and by October 12th the first 'Who Does What Where' map had been produced.

10. Between October and February a great deal of the HIC staff time was absorbed in producing a roads and bridges survey in collaboration with UN JLC. During this time, however, the core products (contact list, meeting schedules, W3, orientation maps) continued to be maintained and the map base gradually expanded.

11. In April and May the HIC has been involved in both DDR planning and data processing in the OCHA led IDP survey. In addition they have continued to build the website as a valuable resource to the relief community.

12. Future plans agreed include a village census for the elections in 2005.

Information Services and Products

13. This section is intended to give a brief overview of the main areas of work of the HIC. Discussion of these areas of work takes place in the following section under conclusions and observations.

Coordination Tools

14. Contact Database - Most agencies agreed that this was a basic and necessary HIC product. However, many entries on the contact lists were incorrect and needed updating.

15. Meeting Schedule - The meeting schedules were used, but some respondents questioned their timeliness. There was a perception from some that they were not up to date.

16. Who's doing What Where (W3) Database - throughout Liberia. In February 2004 the HIC simplified the database structure and decided to concentrate on the agriculture, health, water/sanitation, and later, education sectors. Some maps were created in the early stages for some of the sectors, principally agriculture. The W3 is another staple product of the HIC that has been generally well received. It was considered to be particularly useful for new people/agencies to orientate themselves about relief activities in Liberia. Even those agencies that commented that the W3 was not complete or comprehensive recognized its utility as a first step in finding out who was doing what where in Liberia.

Analytical and planning products

17. Surveys, data layering – The HIC was involved in two large surveys a Roads and Bridges Assessment project sponsored by the JLC and under the auspices of IDP Committee, HIC hired a project officer to manage a survey of IDPS in 20 camps. The IDP Camp Management Database is an example of a more 'analytical' product widely used. There is evidence that occasionally erroneous figures were given by the submitting agencies in the Weekly Camp Data tables. The HIC aspiration is to undertake projects that involved layering data but this activity has been limited to date.

Information Management Support

18. Promotion of Data Standards - P-Codes for Liberia are developed with the help of partner organizations and maintained by the HIC. They are accepted as the data standard for Liberia by OCHA and other UN Agencies such as the WFP and FAO; but the P-Codes have not yet been fully developed because of the lack of good base data and the difficult security situation in the country.

19. Technical Assistance – the HIC provides technical advice, support and training to other agencies in information management areas such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), database development, and assessment/survey methodology. Examples include the development of data capture forms for a WHO rapid district-level assessment of health resources

Orientation/ Reference Information

20. Maps - The HIC produces and distributes a wide range of cartographic and thematic maps, as well as providing hard copies of Satellite Images relating to Liberia. To date a total of 45 maps have been produced. The cartographic maps mainly provide information about administrative boundaries, populated places, and road and rail network. The thematic maps provide more specific information about key humanitarian sectors including DDDR, security and IDPs. These map products can be

downloaded from the website or are freely available from the HIC office.

21. Approximately 1,000 maps were requested from the HIC during November 2003 – January 2004. Maps are definitely the most popular products of the HIC. Agencies mainly used maps for orientation purposes, to identify administrative boundaries, the location of IDP camps, security information, and the sectoral maps showing who was doing what where.

22. Website - The HIC website is a repository of information collected from a wide range of sources in the humanitarian community including the products produced by the HIC itself. It includes: a list of assessments currently being carried out by various organizations working in Liberia, Situation Reports from OCHA and some other agencies, useful links to other sites, news from IRIN, a link to the ReliefWeb front-page, and a "Help Desk" service in collaboration with the Aid Workers Network which provides practical information for project implementation on request.

23. There was general agreement that the website was useful and informative but the point was made that it was still inaccessible from many parts of Liberia. The website was seen as an important information resource, particularly for users outside of Liberia. Some organizations had the perception that the information was only accessible through the website and were not aware of what could be obtained in hardcopy. A number of agencies specifically mentioned the compilation of assessments as worthwhile though some wondered why not all assessments were included. Some suggestions for additional information included donor strategies and guidelines for proposal writing, and job postings for national positions.

24. Assessment reports – this service was widely appreciated and widely used. Almost everyone interviewed mentioned this and said they saw this as one of the most useful sections.

User Services

25. Internet Café - The HIC maintains and houses an Internet Café for members of the relief community. Due to the difficulties of accessing the Internet that still exist in Liberia, the service has many users principally representatives of local NGOs and government officials. In January there were 1,500 users of the Café and demand continues to be strong – even some users calling for extended hours.

Observations, conclusions and recommendations.

Impact

26. The stated purpose of the HIC in Liberia is: "To support humanitarian coordination through the provision of information products and services, and

contributing to the creation of a common framework for information management within the humanitarian community.”¹

27. The principle objective toward which the same proposal aims is: “To improve the coordination of humanitarian assistance to Liberia”.

28. Whilst it is unfair to blame the coordination problems in Liberia on the HIC, coordination of humanitarian assistance is fragmented and poor. In this sense the HIC has not had significant impact on its principle objective.

29. In fact it is clear that strong humanitarian leadership and a well functioning UN Country Team are essential for the HIC to have maximum impact.

“We wanted to advocate for greater assistance in rural Liberia. We saw the HIC as an excellent tool through which this could be done – sharing information in transparent ways to the whole community” ICRC Liberia.

“We are about to become involved in significant IDP and refugee return. We have to have evidence to prioritise our assistance” Senior UN official, Liberia.

“We use the camp management spreadsheets to discuss service provision with IDP leaders in the camps. There can be up to 12 service providers in any one camp and having it all laid out on the spreadsheet helps us work out where the problems and bottlenecks are. We also use the maps of the sites themselves, which we post in the centre of the camp for IDPs to orient themselves.” NRC Liberia.

“I see the HIC products as tools to help me do my job better”. NGO head of mission, Liberia.

“Maps are useful for preparing proposals” NGO in Liberia.

“The ‘who does what where’ is no good because it has no detail. You need to get something back” NGO in Liberia.

“The ‘who does what where’ is no good because it has too much detail. People won’t fill in this many fields and often its not relevant” UN agency in Liberia

Relevance

30. The HIC has been of great use to the humanitarian community and has a great reputation as a result. The relevance of different products and projects has been a story of many successes and some failures. Orientation products (maps, the website), the Internet café, the IDP and security maps have all been much depended upon. Many people have used HIC as ‘a good place to start’.

31. The coordination products are also used, but quite a few respondents told us they were often out of date and this limited their relevance. The two projects have seen different results – the roads and bridges survey whilst executed superbly has not been widely used and is in danger of becoming redundant. There is a great deal of interest in the IDP data and this project seems more relevant to the perceived need.

“The HIC team is refreshing for the UN. We are willing to share information if we have the impression that they are doing something useful. We have also been encouraging others to use the HIC” ICRC Liberia.

“We’ve had so many forms to fill in you just give up in the end. WHO, UNHCR, JLC, HIC – everyone is asking you for the same information” MSF Liberia.

“The HIC team is very unusual for the UN. Unusual to have so many qualified and competent people in one place. Very service oriented – they have never said we can’t do this because of bureaucracy” UN agency in Liberia.”

Effectiveness

32. In general the services and products of the HIC have been well received. This has been in large part due to the centre’s proactive approach to customer service. It was stated more than once that the openness and technical competence of the HIC staff, and the promptness of their response to enquiries for information and advice on technical matters was an attractive feature and served to instil a sense of trust and cooperation in other humanitarian agencies. Indeed, Liberia is one of the few countries where the ICRC volunteered to give its information.

33. There is a need to raise awareness of the HIC with the wider community. Several respondents stated that awareness of the HIC products, services and capacity was less than it could be. There were still organizations in the humanitarian community without reliable access to the Internet. It was suggested that the HIC distribute some sort of regular

bulletin to update users on the activities of HIC and new products. It was also noted that there is no longer a dedicated 'liaison officer'. The idea of a resource centre where information found on the website could be made available in hard copy was also mentioned several times.

34. The 'customer interface' of the HIC could be improved. Whilst the staff were excellent and went out of their way to be helpful, the physical arrangement did not maximise the 'customers' access to the HIC. The waiting area displayed maps on the walls, but ideally would have had the full range of HIC products available in hard copy to browse. There could also have been more of an effort made to solicit information from Internet café customers.

35. The HIC technical staff has been involved in helping agencies to plan. This is a natural use of their skills and a natural fit with the potential of GIS, which is at best a sophisticated planning tool. The extension of such 'planning services' by the HIC whilst logical and often necessary is politically fraught at a UN inter-agency level – UN agencies have their own planners and resent the idea that OCHA might 'take over' their operations. These experiences should be captured and shared.

Coordination

36. The HC, OCHA and the HIC have not worked closely together to prioritise work throughout the lifetime of the HIC. At times the HIC has almost been left to its own devices, giving the sense that senior decision makers have not been fully aware of the potential of the HIC. As a result of this the HIC has often initiated work where it was most appreciated or could best use its technical expertise rather than where it might have been most strategically employed.

37. As a result, the HIC role in coordination has been variable. One of the reasons is that there is a proliferation of coordination mechanisms to the detriment of overall coordination. OCHA meetings are not conducted in the same building as the HIC. There was a separate Humanitarian Operations Centre (HOC) set up by JLC, UNMIL civil-military liaison and OCHA, again in a separate building. The weekly meeting chaired by the Humanitarian Coordinator is called the HAC (Humanitarian Assistance Committee). If the HIC, HAC & HOC had been harmonised and better integrated with OCHA (though not subsumed) coordination would be better served. From this point of view, the establishment of the HOC as a general coordination centre (rather than focusing on logistics) was unhelpful. The physical split between OCHA and HIC has also been unhelpful. If all coordination functions were co-located with meetings taking place in that same space, general coordination might be better served, and the HIC used to even better effect.

38. The danger of co-locating with OCHA is that the HIC exists only to service OCHA, not the whole community. An advisory board as suggested elsewhere in this document would mitigate that problem.

Operations, deployment and management

39. The evaluators did not have the time to review of all the products and services provided by the HIC, but a spot check suggested that the HIC should be more attentive to the way it collects and disseminates information. For example, the W3 section on the website asks "all agencies working in the health, agriculture, water/sanitation and education sectors to provide information about assessments undertaken and planned or currently implemented programs for inclusion in the W3 database". No instructions are given, however, as to how and when agencies are to contribute their information; no forms are provided, either for downloading or information about where to obtain them. In addition, the links to the sector reports were not active.

40. Given that coordination between the OCHA field office and the HIC is weak and the HIC has had to manage on its own without direction to interpret the needs of the relief community, there is a question as to whether HIC could have used its resources in a more effective and relevant way. This argues for some entity, such as a stakeholder group, to provide guidance and overview for the HIC in defining its strategic direction and the setting of priorities. It could, for example, be made up of representatives from OCHA, other key UN agencies, the NGO community and the local authorities.

41. The deployment of equipment and staff in Liberia was another example of the difficulties HICs have in rapidly deploying. For example, it took 15 weeks to order and deliver a map plotter. This was due to confusion with UNHCR at the outset and poor service from OCHA Geneva – possibly due to the politics between New York and Geneva. The stock being developed in the OCHA warehouse will alleviate this problem.

42. The deployment of two staff initially from Sierra Leone did allow for an HIC presence to be rapidly established. Their lack of equipment and lack of capacity to offer any initial services undermined this speedy deployment however. Whilst the idea of sending people from nearby operations is excellent, it seems only having the most experienced 'core staff' at the very beginning can make an operation successful quickly.

43. There were the usual frustrations with UNOG procedures. There was also a seeming inability to quickly find people with the appropriate qualifications to fill the key positions (although this was certainly compounded by events in Iraq). The roster is an excellent step forward in attempting to

alleviate these problems although it appears getting people with the appropriate blend of skills is crucial and this should not be under-estimated.

44. Suggestions were made that the initial software provided in the deployment stage should include an ArcGIS license from ESRI. This would avoid the problems switching from ArcView, which is currently part of the HIC kit, to the more advanced package.

45. One user survey was done in March 2004. It was distributed to users of the Internet Café and most of the questions dealt with the use of the café. It confirmed the fact that most of the users were from local NGOs or local staff from international organizations. They primarily advocated for more time to use the computers.

Transition issues, the recovery phase and sustainability

46. According to the 2003 UN Consolidated Appeal (CAP), the HIC will be part of a transition process with the National Transitional Government of Liberia to develop the capacity of government offices (particularly the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs). The last six months of 2004 should see the handover of various technical responsibilities from the HIC to the Government. The national recovery/transition plan is currently being formulated and consists of 9 thematic 'clusters' under a Results Focused Transition Framework (RFTF). The 10th 'cluster' will be a coordination committee (RIMCO).

47. Worryingly there is a sense that UNMIL does not see the value of the HIC. In Sierra Leone one of the key successes of the SLIS was in providing data for demonstrating progress on recovery. If HIC is not visible within UNMIL, and its potential unacknowledged, a valuable opportunity may be lost. One of the reasons for this 'disconnect' may be the unfortunate (seeming) marginalizing of relief, recovery, rehabilitation and humanitarian affairs within the mission. It is also clear however that those charged with establishing the recovery process are not actively embedding information collection and management within it at this stage. With OCHA due to withdraw from Liberia this split could have significant implications for the HIC.

48. The RFTF will undoubtedly have an effect on the future work of HIC. It will also have a profound effect on the workings of the Liberian government and in particular Ministries such as Planning. HIC and the Ministry of Planning should be integral to the planning of the RFTF, both organisations evolving as this process becomes more defined. Lessons should be learned from Sierra Leone in this respect.

Barriers to information sharing

49. Several agencies either did not share information with HIC or did so too late for it to be of any value.

There seemed to be three reasons for this – politics, power and fear. On the political front a battle between UNHCR and OCHA over 'turf' seemed to have curbed UNHCR's enthusiasm for posting their information. We were told in one UN agency of how managers liked to keep information to themselves because they saw it as power, and could always have something up their sleeve at the meetings. Lastly we were told several times that agencies (UN and NGOs) were wary about putting their information in the public domain as it would then be perceived as 'official' or 'definitive' and therefore they might be challenged on it.

"No one has reliable data here, it means they're more willing to share" UN agency Liberia.

"None of the UN agencies here want to share their information. Information is power, there is an obsession with having documents approved". UN agency Liberia.

Recommendations

50. The HIC must urgently seek to convince UNMIL of its relevance and role in the RFTF process. If OCHA withdraws, a natural home will be with UNMIL alongside the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs.

51. The transition plans as stated seem to be premature. A natural focus for the HIC in the medium term is the RFTF and in this regard it is worrying that its involvement is *ad hoc* – essentially based on the enthusiasm and work of its staff – rather than systematic based on a vision from the top. A sensible position for the HIC to occupy would be within RIMCO where they could help establish monitoring systems and data standards. The Sierra Leone experience should be properly taken into account, perhaps in the form of a workshop that includes HIC staff from both places and senior planner from both UNAMSIL and UNMIL.

52. There did not appear to be a clear strategy or vision for the HIC, or at least a strategy agreed by all the main stakeholders. The HIC should promote a stakeholders group and get them to approve a written strategy. Ideally this should contain a vision of the future role of the HIC as well as outline how best to prioritise its work in benefit of the wider humanitarian community.

53. The HIC should make more effort to produce information in hard copy for those who do not have reliable Internet access, especially for newly opening 'up-country' offices. In Sierra Leone field officers complained often about being out of the loop and the HIC would do well to put in place a strategy to avoid this centre/ periphery dynamic.

54. The HIC could make more of the customer interface, both in the physical space (resource centre, more soliciting of information from internet café clients) and externally. The staff are excellent advocates for HIC but could be backed up by more mechanical means of highlighting services and products. One popular method is e-mail distribution lists, a must in an information rich environment like Afghanistan where people no longer need to visit websites.

55. There should be a review of the procedures used to maintain and disseminate the core HIC products to insure that they are up-to-date and readily available to the humanitarian community.

NOTES

¹ UN OCHA Liberia Humanitarian Situation Update No. 36 – 25 August, 2003.

² ECHO proposal January 2004. This mirrors almost exactly the ‘statement of intent’ in the IASC endorsed terms of reference for HIC.

Iraq case study

Background

1. The build up to the Iraq conflict took place throughout 2002. By the last quarter of that year the probability that there would be a major conflict had become apparent to most in the aid community. The UN started contingency planning for a possible conflict semi-officially in October with the first 'Versoix' meeting. Due to the political constraints at the Security Council preparation had to be done in secrecy.

2. FIS started preparing for a possible Iraq HIC deployment in November. The blanket ban on talking about preparedness meant that it had to start the preparations in isolation. There was very little information available on Iraq. Up-to-date maps, population figures and settlement data did not exist. FIS compiled much of its data from Soviet era maps and de-classified US military information. At the end of the year a website was set up and made available to project planners and heads of agencies in the field.

3. At the beginning of 2004 FIS worked with the VVAF to deploy people into key nodes – Cairo (WFP – VAM), Tehran (UNICEF), Ankara (UNDP) and Jordan for liaison with NGOs. As OCHA could not release the resources, staff and funds were provided up front by VVAF for \$US 300,000, later repaid by OCHA.

4. The 'Versoix 2' planning meeting of January 9th officially endorsed the idea of deploying an HIC to the UN hub in Cyprus and requested the creation of the 'virtual' HIC. It also suggested the idea of establishing satellite offices in Jordan and elsewhere in the region.

5. In March HIC formally deployed to Larnarca, Cyprus to set up the 'HIC regional office' in the UN hub office there. They also made their website public. Initially they were hosted by JLC, who were already on the spot.

6. In late March the war started and the UN withdrew from Iraq. A large 'HIC' like project – the Joint Humanitarian Information Centre (JHIC) had been set up in the north under the Office of the Iraq Programme (OIP) before the war to monitor their projects. This now came under OCHA and was partially integrated into the HIC.

7. In April the HIC consolidated its presence in Larnaca by pulling in one VVAF staff from Cairo and with the secondment of 2 DFID staff. Their teams around the region (and especially in Jordan)

worked on a 'rapid assessment' process. This involved working with agencies to develop the assessment form, and training of those agencies interested in collecting data. The HIC also set up a public access website during this period and initially received 15,000 hits a week. Maps were the most popular products during this time – the FIS developed maps were a set of 32 at a scale of 1:250,000. They had printed 40,000 of these with P-codes on the back with OFDA funds.

8. On 9th May the HIC deployed into Basra in Iraq via Kuwait. Initially the deployment was one person as part of one of the first UN convoys. Two more HIC staff were in Kuwait, with one purchasing equipment for Basra. This person was DFID seconded and was responsible for logistics, administration and procurement. The Basra operational was well used from the start – perhaps even overwhelmed, but was not well supported by Larnaca.

9. The JHIC office in Erbil was also back up and running by this point although its previous function and new 'HIC' like functions were merged. Much of its initial energy was concentrated on producing an inventory of projects.

10. In late May a HIC team deployed to Baghdad, initially staffing the office with rotating pairs of people. The 'full' DFID module was deployed for the Baghdad office but was delayed by 9 weeks, arriving sometime in July. During this period the HIC's in all three places – Erbil, Basra and Baghdad consolidated their work and gradually built up the offices with staff and equipment. Also in May organisations were beginning to get access to other areas in Iraq and HIC was busy sharing this information and compiling the standard HIC products – contact lists, orientation maps, who does what where maps, and meeting schedules. Internet cafes were set up in shared space in Basra and Baghdad.

11. However, the rapid assessment process was not a success. The HIC were forced to take on the data collection for the RAP despite attempting an inter-agency approach; when it came to implementing the survey, no other agency was willing to allocate staff and resources to it.

12. In August the bombing of the UN Headquarters at the Canal Hotel in Baghdad tragically took the life the HIC manager Martha Tees and two nationals Leen Al-Qahdi and Ihssan Taha. Martha had been widely respected as a capable and effective manager and had done much to pull together the disparate strands of the HIC. The HIC was directly underneath

the SRSG's office – the main target – and other HIC staff were badly injured. With the pullout of the UN from Iraq the HIC was re-located to Amman where it continued to serve the Iraqi relief community by collating and systematizing data already collected.

13. By January 2004, the HIC began the process of phasing out, handing over activities, equipment and information to the UN and Iraqi national partners. In coordination with the UNDP, portions of the HIC's data sets, equipment and products were being transferred to the Iraqi Central Statistical Organization (CSO). The website has been taken over by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and it is to continue to serve the information needs of the relief community.

Information Products and Services

14. This section is intended to give a brief overview of the main areas of work of the HIC. Discussion of these areas of work takes place in the following section under conclusions and observations.

Coordination Tools

15. The HIC was responsible for maintaining a number of key coordination tools, including a Contact Database, Meeting Schedule, and the Who, What, Where database. Contact db was maintained by OCHA but distributed by the HIC. Contact information was one of the most popular products in Basra. (Baghdad) information took a long time to post eg., meeting schedules. It was suggested that contact lists should be distributed in hard copy as well.

Analytical and planning products

16. The Health Map for Basra.

Information Management Support

17. Data collection – the HIC collected data that not only was to serve a current purpose but also was to be passed on to the CSO. This included GIS data on political boundaries, baseline spatial data, assessment data, and databases on facilities, contacts, settlements and the WWW3.

18. Data Standards – the development, maintenance and promotion of P-Codes.

19. Technical assistance – including advice on survey design and implementation, helping organizations to collect data in a systematic and standardized way which facilitates future information sharing and collation; on GIS, database development and information management, assessment tools. Example, UNICEF – in Basra, a dataset was created of approximately 5,000 schools; gave the data to HIC who developed a database to manage the data. Based on the groundwork done by

HIC and its information advice, UNICEF continued to build up the dataset with the Ministry of Education.

20. Training – did some training of staff from other organizations in the use of GPS, assessment processes and GIS. The HIC targeted, successfully, all UN Agencies and NGOs with training in Amman prior to the war – this was particularly important given this was where all the NGOs based themselves.

Orientation/ Reference Information

21. Maps – the HIC produces printed and distributed a wide range of reference, thematic, interactive, satellite and custom made maps with users' data. These maps products were freely available via the website and at the HIC offices. Over the life span of the HIC, it produced approximately 500 maps. The maps were a popular product; in Basra, for example, the office received on average 10 requests a day for customized maps. The most widely distributed were those showing the locations of NGO offices and the security zones. In Baghdad, the street map with security zones was in heavy demand. Other popular maps specifically mentioned included those showing IDP locations and their movement.

22. Website – the website was a portal to a wide range of reference materials drawn from the entire humanitarian community. It provided access to the WWW3, Contacts and Meetings databases, UN Sitreps, Market reports, a Map Centre, the RAP assessment database and other assessments. The website was designed to be accessed by high- and low-band-width users. The design and format of the site became the template used by other HICs such as the one in Liberia. Some users reported, however, that it was sometimes difficult in Iraq to access and download material and that dissemination of information should also be done in hardcopy. Others suggested that an e-mail service or Listserv that kept the community informed of new developments and products on a regular basis would have been a worthwhile service. There was a wish to have an electronic library to bring documents together in one place.

Observations, conclusions and recommendations.

Impact

24. The HIC had at least two stated purposes, given at different times, that were quite different: "To streamline the provision of compatible data, sector and location standards as well as assessments across sectors and boundaries. The HIC would help ensure effective and cost efficient response as well as providing management to the flow of inter-agency information and acting as a resource to the wider humanitarian community." ¹

and: “to support the humanitarian intervention in Iraq, in particular operational and strategic decision-making for the coordination of humanitarian assistance.”²

“There is not a good global picture right now of what the needs are in Iraq... the mantra is ‘no crisis’, but where is the evidence? There’s a great deal of information floating around out there, the ability to pin it down is the problem” NGO in Iraq.

“I thought of them as a website, provider of maps and they did some training” NGO in Iraq

have used the HIC Iraq data standards for our repatriation and monitoring databases. If they hadn’t been there we would have found a solution, but it would have been more difficult” UNHCR in Iraq

“Better information doesn’t necessarily improve action. Right now there is a shortage of drugs in clinics in Iraq. WHO have sent the drugs but they’re not getting to the clinics. Information is one component, but someone needs to act on it” NGO in Iraq.

“The schools survey will be a very powerful planning tool. 18,000 schools were surveyed across Iraq and the tolls were developed with HIC. The Ministry will be able to prioritise work with this information and coordinate the work of all of the actors currently rehabilitating schools” UNICEF in Iraq

25. Measured against at any of the two purposes the HIC had limited impact. The assessment across sectors and boundaries (RAP) was not successful first time round and was interrupted by the bombing the second time. There is little evidence of support to decision-making, although again the tragedy of the bombing cut short the HIC potential here. The exception is the piece of work done later with UNICEF, which shows the power of the HIC tools. The p-codes are used by large data collection agencies like UNHCR, but not widely by NGOs.³

26. The HIC probably had the greatest impact on orientation. The website and the maps were widely used by people arriving in Iraq and getting their bearings. There may also have been some early impact on coordination, although the political environment and attempts by the military to impose coordination made the coordination environment complex.

Relevance

27. The HIC was highly relevant to the community in the short time it was operational. This was evidenced by the fact that they were almost overwhelmed on setting up in Basra and had high numbers of visits to website from the establishment in Larnaca onwards. The majority of respondents also told us this anecdotally. Many people used their products and there was great demand.

“Almost immediately HIC was able to put out Governorate maps. They also started maps of needs, in particular health. Really helpful – information sharing related to maps.” NGO in Iraq.

“Even now there is no system for collecting and compiling documents. HIC started to do this and it was very useful”. NGO in Iraq

“If you were on the HIC list you were ‘official’, especially for the donors. Its good to have a way of making your work ‘official’, to say “I’m here doing this”. NGO coordination mechanisms don’t have this power” NGO in Iraq.

“The HIC staffs were really good. You had the feeling that they knew what was happening and understood you. This was really useful, and not always what you expect from the UN” NGO in Iraq.

Effectiveness

28. The proactive, customer service ethic of the HIC staff was excellent and a key part of their effectiveness. All the respondents we talked to commented on this. Being perceived as a neutral platform helped the HIC to gain the trust and cooperation of organizations of the relief community.

Deployment / Operations

29. The HIC deployment to Iraq was ambitious in scale. Working across multiple centres with only a tiny management team challenged FIS (and OCHA) and it would have been extremely unlikely to get everything right. Despite such challenges, there was recognition that the HIC managed to produce an impressive body of work.

30. One of the areas where deployment was not well executed was in Basra. Despite being the first team into Iraq, they seemed to be out on a limb and not well supported by Larnaca. The ‘HIC in a box’ not being deployed to Basra meant they were short of

equipment and only deploying one person initially was a mistake. The usual initiative and hard work of all involved overcame many of these difficulties, but there are obvious lessons here.

31. The HIC deployment depended on the collaboration and partnership of several organisations. Principle amongst these was VVAF who both financed a lot of the initial work and seconded some excellent staff. DFID again sent excellent staff quickly and supported with essential flexible financing. The OFDA data was invaluable to having a product (perhaps most importantly) and the UNOPs involvement smoothed many of the UN bureaucratic hurdles. The mix of partners added to the richness of the HIC output, but the complexity made focus difficult at times.

“Information is at the heart of coordination. People won’t give it to you though, unless you give them something back” Senior UN official, Iraq.

Coordination

32. The operating environment was tremendously complex for sharing information from the outset and was contested. Many different bodies set themselves up as information providers (and capturers). At least half of these bodies – HOC and HAC – were associated with Coalition military forces and therefore viewed with suspicion by some actors within the humanitarian community. Later on the security environment made information sharing even more difficult as agencies became unwilling to share even the simplest data about project or office locations.

33. HIC deployed late to Kuwait, and left a vacuum that HOC willingly stepped into. Observations??

Assessments

34. The two statements of purpose (point 1 above) illustrate well one of the fundamental tensions at the heart of the HIC. One is about immediate support to relief efforts and the other about building a coherent data infrastructure. This has the potential to cause conflict in setting of priorities, as was demonstrated in the Rapid Assessment Project (RAP).

35. There was much debate about the purpose of the RAP. Was the assessment to be a quick and simple one to identify those currently in need, or should it be a more thorough one, collecting baseline data that could be used for long term planning? Difficulties arose in designing the survey instrument that was based on the successful one used in Kosovo.

It became a multi-sector exercise with input from all concerned UN agencies and as a consequence, the resultant form became overly long and time-consuming to apply properly. As a consequence, many assessors of the different agencies chose to ignore questions not pertinent to their organization’s interest. They did manage to cover most of the north of Iraq before the war began.

36. Unfortunately, some of the data collected by the assessment was found to be inaccurate and still needed to be “cleaned” indicating that initial data collection and input was not as rigorous as it should have been. The evaluators have come across other examples of questionable data received in other HICs, indicating a general need for greater attention to this aspect of data collection (e.g., Liberia Camp Management statistics). Several people pointed it out during the evaluation that expertise in survey methodology is as necessary, for example, as database management skills in obtaining and processing good data.

Transition

37. Most of the datasets compiled by the HIC have been turned over to the Iraqi government (CSO).

38. Some of the services of the HIC, principally the website and its information sharing functions, are being assumed by UNAMI. This is principally due to the efforts of the Deputy SRSG who admits that the integrated mission mechanism is still being worked out.

Recommendations

40. The inability of the UN to work inside Iraq, the reluctance of NGOs to share information because of security and the reality of large contracting companies carrying out the majority of reconstruction work leaves the continuing role of HIC in question. They should share their datasets with the most interested parties and then concentrate on supporting UNAMI until the environment substantially changes.

Notes

¹ Integrated Humanitarian Contingency Plan for Iraq and Neighbouring Countries, 7/1/03. By the time of the flash appeal in March, the stated purpose had changed to: “Act as a central location for data and information resources to reinforce coordination and humanitarian response activities.”

² The total project at that time was estimated to cost US\$2, 259,491.50.

³ The evaluation team was told this by the NGO coordination body NCCI, and in this respect this information is ‘anecdotal’.

Afghanistan Case Study



Background

1. The HIC was deployed to Afghanistan in September 2001 at the onset of the US led coalition action against the Taliban. It quickly absorbed a previous UN information management system that had been run by UNDP and FAO called ProMIS (Projects Management Information System). ProMIS had started life in the nineties as UNIDATA, and by 2001 had built up an extensive library of projects in support of the 'Strategic Framework' for coordination in Afghanistan.

2. ProMIS had a reservoir of GIS and Database expertise that formed the foundation of the newly created HIC. It also had datasets on roads and settlements, but had become moribund despite the valiant efforts of some within UNOCHA.

3. At the outset of the coalition attack on Afghanistan there was great concern about the hundreds of thousands of people who had been displaced by preceding years of drought, and the high level of vulnerability generally. In its initial stages the HIC was based in Islamabad and primarily concentrated on useful products to orient the expanded aid community. There was also a high level of expectation from its donors that it would provide information on humanitarian action inside Afghanistan.

4. The HIC established joint premises with the JLC in a former embassy building in Islamabad. During this phase they were widely used by the aid community. With the ProMIS staff there were 21 people employed in total by HIC. The output included maps (e.g., geography of Afghanistan, the security situation, location of land mines) and population data. As well, new information products were produced such as a Who-What-Where (W3) database and the ProMIS website was revamped.

5. The HIC had a number of institutional as well as practical hurdles in setting up in Afghanistan. FIS as a unit within OCHA was two people and they did not have either equipment on standby or administrative procedures for rapid deployment. The ProMIS system was run by UNDP and FAO and so fell beyond the direct influence of OCHA. The coordination environment surrounding

Afghanistan was complex (multiple location of actors, little accessibility to the field and a breakdown of communications). The expectations placed upon HIC were extremely high – as the world spotlight was centred on the humanitarian situation inside Afghanistan there was huge pressure to deliver information on what was happening. Nevertheless, there was also some good support, notably DFID secondments and logistical support early on.

6. After the Afghanistan experience, FIS started to develop the framework for its operations and the deployment of the HICs (e.g., development of the DFID module).

7. In 2002, after the fall of the Taliban, the HIC was moved with the OCHA office to Kabul and renamed itself AIMS (Afghanistan Information Management Service). It continued to function much as before but with a relatively larger number of potential clients and in a complex and changing coordination and political environment. In December 2001, the Bonn Agreement had established the Afghanistan Interim Authority (AIA). This had a large impact on coordination structures, with the establishment of the Afghanistan Assistance Coordination Authority (AACA) who AIMS subsequently came under. This coincided with the setting up of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

8. In September 2003, AIMS changed its main focus from serving the relief community to that of meeting the information management needs of the government ministries particularly with the provision of advice and training in GIS and database management. In 2003 AIMS became a Directly Executed (DEX) project of UNDP, administered and managed by UNDP and reporting to the Resident Representative.

Information Products and Services

9. The following are notes and some observations on the information products and services offered by AIMS before being totally taken over by UNDP. Very few of the interviewees had been in Afghanistan in the early years of AIMS.

10. This section is intended to give a brief overview of the main areas of work of the HIC. Discussion of these areas of work takes place in the following section under conclusions and observations.

Coordination Tools

11. Who, What, Where (W3) - one of the most popular HIC products in Islamabad was the W3. NGOs were geographically close thus making it easier to collect data from them. Once the HIC moved to Kabul and the aid community expanded dramatically and over a wider area, it became progressively more difficult to collect the data. AIMS performed the last update in mid-2003 and since then has stopped compiling the product after an unsuccessful attempt to do it with the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghanistan Relief (ACBAR).

12. Contact List - information was collected for a contact list in Islamabad but once the move was made to Kabul the list was soon discontinued. A number of NGOs commented on the usefulness of having such a list.

Analytical and planning products

13. Maps - many maps were produced for planning purposes such as those showing W3 data, food distribution infrastructure and security zones. An example might be the 'areas potentially blocked by snow' which was mentioned to us as useful to decision makers for determining where to prioritize assistance.

Information Management Support

14. Development and Promotion of Standards - AIMS was seen by many as the key agency for maintaining the P-Codes, village lists, and the administrative boundaries. Operational staff in other UN agencies found this service particularly useful for their information management work.

15. Database Development - AIMS developed customized databases for other agencies.

16. Technical Assistance - helped agencies to develop questionnaires / survey forms; provided training in GIS and database management to other UN agencies and NGOs. Operational staff in other UN agencies found this assistance most useful and felt that the switch of AIMS' focus to capacity building of the government at the expense of meeting the needs of the agencies was premature.

Orientation/ Reference Information

17. Website - AIMS used its website as the prime way of disseminating its information products. However, many organizations noted that it was difficult to access the website due to poor Internet connections in Afghanistan, even in Kabul, thus effectively limiting the website's utility.

18. Maps - have continuously been the main product of AIMS. By 2003, it had distributed over 20,000 maps; and has accumulated over 300 technical layer

files compiled from data collected by itself or by other organizations. Most users were principally interested in geographical maps for orientation and those dealing with IDPs.

Information Services

19. Meeting place - in Islamabad the HIC provided a conference room for the relief agencies to hold their coordination meetings. As well, the HIC provided a pigeonhole service that was heavily used.

"The HIC is a fraudulent concept. The sociological obstacles are insurmountable. It presented itself as a tool that could provide analysis but it can't do that. The HIC doesn't deliver - it just delivers maps." *Senior UN official in Afghanistan 1999-2001*

"We had the impression that they were for 'high end' users. They didn't reach into the NGO community - saw the UN as their target market. Very helpful but not proactive." *NGO, Afghanistan*

Observations, conclusions and recommendations

Impact

20. The stated purpose of the HIC in the 2001 UN donor alert was: "To enable all organizations involved in this crisis to improve their delivery of assistance. The system will enable relevant organizations to share data and information with each other on a more systematic basis. This in turn will lead to accurate information reaching decision-makers more quickly, improving the appropriateness and timeliness of the response."

21. DFID document later on describes the purpose as: "The Center acts as a central location for data and information resources, with the aim of reinforcing co-ordination and humanitarian response activities."

22. At a distance of almost three years it was almost impossible to judge whether HIC had an impact on information reaching decision makers and whether the 'response' was timely and appropriate as a result. Many of the constraints in Afghanistan were due to war and insecurity rather than a lack of knowledge.

23. Nevertheless it seems that there were some successes, although it never either lived up to its

potential or expectations. Two phases were probably best for 'HIC' in Afghanistan, at the onset in Islamabad when it was widely used for orientation, and later in Kabul when some of the work produced was genuinely analytical and used by decision makers to plan.

24. The evaluation team did not manage to visit the regional offices of HIC, and there was surprisingly little mention of them in Kabul. We were told by ACBAR and one other NGO representative that the Herat office had been useful.

"What was AIMS really for?
Perhaps get a map?" NGO, Afghanistan

"I use AIMS all the time, for the maps.
They're a mapping agency." AREU,
Afghanistan

"The village list is essential to the work
that UNHCR does, AIMS has been
excellent. We recently did a survey
across the country on rehabilitation
packages. Allowed us to prioritise our
assistance – information management
was essential in this process".

"You couldn't design forms for 'who does
what where' that would capture the
complexity sufficiently to analyse gaps,
at least not in the early days. Still the
geo-codes were useful. Useful to get
clarity on where places where in
remote Faryab, or show donors we
couldn't do Food for Work in a place
where there was 70% free food". NGO,
Afghanistan.

Relevance

25. Afghanistan was different to either Liberia or Iraq because the 'HIC' phase was brief, and the coordination/ information environment was both complex and well established. In fact there was a long-standing NGO coordination body – ACBAR – who were already producing many of HIC's 'core' products, and in particular a yearly book that combined a W3 and contact list. The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), an independent think-tank, now produce another widely used 'good place to start' product called the 'A-Z of Afghanistan'.

26. AREU provide an interesting example of a body concerned with information provision and dissemination to improve action. Their focus is not narrowly on technological solutions but includes a

library of studies and reports as well as commissioning research. Often the sociological, anthropological and local political environment has more influence on policy makers' decisions than physical infrastructure (mapping social infrastructure?). The AREU model has lessons for HIC generally - they could easily expand horizons in this respect and consider their role in facilitating assessments.

"Gathering data in an emergency is
difficult. We have gone from 300 NGOs to
over 2000. Everybody under-estimated
the challenges to collection." NGO,
Afghanistan.

"The problem with something like HIC is
if you put rubbish in, you get rubbish
out". Government statistician,
Afghanistan

Effectiveness

27. It was apparent from the interviews and from earlier reports on coordination at the time that AIMS never really succeeded in engaging the general relief community on going basis. For example, in the early days in Kabul, AIMS maintained the W3 database on the website but it was pointed out that the Internet connection in Kabul, let alone other Afghan cities was hard to access thus effectively neutralizing the database's value. As well, many interviewees pointed out the ongoing need for an up-to-date contact list – a basic product but critical to the day-to-day operations of relief organizations. As one interviewee put it, the HIC/AIMS should have concentrated more on such basic information products rather than on the more ambitious "high-end" technical services, particularly if it wanted to establish itself with the community. The reason that AIMS discontinued the contact list sometime after moving to Kabul was that it would have taken too much effort to collect the data when the telecommunication system was not functioning properly – an example of when the problem of processing data electronically takes precedence over meeting the actual needs of the community.

28. Many organizations thought of AIMS simply as a provider of maps and though they commended the AIMS staff for its openness and helpfulness, there was, nevertheless, a vagueness about AIMS's role and its services – that it was too "reactive" and not "proactive" enough. It thus appeared that there was not enough outreach to the relief community on AIM's part to learn about the community's information needs. No systematic user surveys or needs assessments were done.

Technology Driven

29. The evolution of AIMS, the products and services it offered, and its relationship with the relief community were influenced by a number of factors. Probably the strongest of these was the ongoing presence of a technically capable staff in GIS and database management. When the HIC was formed it inherited the ProMIS staff that from the beginning exerted a strong influence on the evolution of the HIC and the type of the information products and services that were provided. Being renamed AIMS reflected the true orientation of the Afghan HIC – it was no longer a HIC in the classic sense. Many of the AIMS products, such as the P-Codes and customized databases, improved areas of data management and were greatly appreciated by operational colleagues, particularly in the UN organizations, but these benefits were not necessarily evident to the wider relief community.

30. What came out of the interviews with NGOs and international organizations, was a sense that some information services that AIMS could have provided were still needed, specifically an ongoing contact list and a W3 database, as well as more involvement in data management projects. Other organizations such as AREU attempted to fill the gap by producing such products as the A-Z Guide to Afghanistan Assistance.

31. Of particular note was AIMS developing customized databases for individual organizations, for example a livelihood database for AREU and a wells database for the Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACARR). This activity crossed a fine line between giving advice or training on database development and the actual act of creating the database itself. This activity ties up technical resources for the benefit of a specific organization and could or might not have value for the rest of the community.

Strategic Direction, transition and sustainability

32. There was little support from OCHA in Afghanistan and no understanding of what the role of the HIC should be. The full potential of a HIC cannot be fulfilled without the support of the OCHA field office.

33. With the dissolution of UNOCHA and the integration of the humanitarian infrastructure into UNAMA, AIMS needed to find itself a new home. Unfortunately, during this time, AIMS had a rapid turnover of HIC managers undercutting any effective implementation of a consistent strategic vision. In fact, the last half of 2002, there was no HIC manager and operations remained in a caretaker status of a national, acting director. Under these conditions and with no strategic plan to guide it, AIMS was left to flounder.

34. The transition phase for HIC/ AIMS was badly planned and executed. It lacked funding, direction and vision for large parts of its lifetime and has suffered as a result. It was never well integrated into any of the ‘recovery’ mechanisms and has been marginal as a result. Its capacity building value is yet to be determined, although it does at least have direction with new leadership. Based on AIMS’ developed technical expertise in GIS and database management, it seemed to be the logical thing to do in aligning with the UNDP to pursue such a program. Though the relief community is not considered as a priority any longer, some of AIMS activities such as the maintenance of the “village lists” and the review of boundary changes continued to be of value to those involved in data management and GIS applications

Recommendations

35. There were no recommendations to make with regard to Afghanistan.

Sierra Leone note

The evaluation team was not formally asked to look at Sierra Leone as a case study. Due to ease of access (en-route to Liberia) however, and because it was spoken highly of by a number of people the evaluation team spent three days looking at the Sierra Leone Information Management System. This short note details some of the main points we drew from the visit, but is not a formal case study like the others in these annexes.

Background

Sierra Leone had a Humanitarian Information Centre that was started in 2000. It served as a place to get simple orientation information, a civil-military liaison interface for NGOs with UNAMSIL and a verification centre for organisations wishing to book UNAMSIL helicopters.

In 2001 a GIS specialist joined the OCHA team, but this function – normally a core part of the HIC mandate – was separated out into the newly formed Sierra Leone Information Management System (SLIS).

Role of the SLIS

The SLIS did not take off straight away but by 2003 occupied a unique role in the monitoring of the recovery process. In partnership with the UN Country Team the Government of Sierra Leone had evolved a National Recovery Strategy (NRS) in 2001. The NRS set itself a series of benchmarks by which progress could be measured, and the SLIS was commissioned to collect data to illustrate whether these benchmarks were being met.

Data was collected initially through a series of multi-agency assessments. Later this became the job of the District Recovery Committees – a combination of Government representatives in the districts (usually line ministries) and UN and non-governmental agencies. This data, together with data compiled from other sources – such as ‘who’s doing what where’ – was put into a series of ‘data packs’ compiled by district and by sector (the sectors being those identified in the NRS).

The data packs have been updated annually since 2001 and the data has improved year on year. They have been widely used by most agencies working in the recovery process.

Impact of the SLIS

One of the most interesting aspects of the SLIS has been its use by decision-makers. This happens in two ways – firstly the data has helped the National Recovery Committee (NRC), chaired by the vice-

president and consisting of senior Ministers and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), examine where aid is being prioritised and make adjustments accordingly. Secondly the data has helped the NRC demonstrate to those supporting the recovery process how progress is being made, or not.

Success factors

The SLIS has not been an unqualified success. There were the usual impediments to collecting data (access, unreliability, lack of resources etc.). The projects started late and only really showed potential in the latter stages of the NRS. Even now there are those who question the reliability of the data, and thus its pertinence to the recovery process.

The SLIS does demonstrate however, some of the key factors involved in making a success of IM projects. Firstly, the concept was well understood by those key decision-makers who sought to use it. The project had a specific role, with well-defined outputs that formed part of a decision-making process.

Secondly, there was a framework – the National Recovery Strategy – that defined the data that needed to be collected. This meant that whoever was gathering data, that data was easily combinable. Thirdly, there was a good structure for gathering the data – the district recovery committees – and an annual process whereby data was gathered. Fourth, there was a good combination of skills within the SLIS itself with a GIS officer who could manipulate data and define structure, and an OCHA officer who had a good understanding of the NRS process and had formerly been based in a district and so understood what was possible and what was necessary.

Next steps for the SLIS

The NRS formerly ended in 2004 and the ‘National Recovery Committee’ structure has now become the ‘Development Assistance Committee’, also chaired by the vice-president. The SLIS has made this transition also, moving into the Development Assistance Committee Office (DACO). The UNDP Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) are supporting it in this move, another interesting outcome of the success of the SLIS. In other situations development actors have not come forward to take on HICs in transition – in the Sierra Leone case its obvious role in monitoring against pre-defined indicators makes it sensible tool to use for implementing Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) or even Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Appendix 2 - Glossary of Terms

Assessment – an appraisal of an emergency situation prior to a humanitarian response. A needs assessment determines the impact of an emergency on the population, infrastructure, and/or environment in order to identify the resources and services necessary to save and sustain the lives of the affected population.

Baseline – the “starting point” of existing information about a geographic area or situation prior to an emergency. This data is used to compare conditions after the onset of an emergency and determine the impact of the emergency.

Data – a collection of facts from which conclusions may be drawn.

Data Processing - Organization of data for the purpose of producing desired information; involves recording, classifying, sorting, summarizing, calculating, disseminating and storing data.

Database - A collection of data arranged for ease and speed of search and retrieval

Evaluation – a systematic investigation and review of a humanitarian programme or service or an entire humanitarian operation or response.

Geographic Information System (GIS) – an organized collection of computer hardware, software and geographic data designed for capturing, storing, updating, manipulating, analysing and displaying all forms of geographically referenced information.

Geo-reference – to establish the relationship between page coordinates on a planar map and known real-world coordinates.

Information – a collection of facts and analysis that can be communicated, stored and retrieved.

Information Management – is the range of processes by which information is handled by individuals and organizations. These processes define, collect, analyse, present, distribute, record and incorporate information internal and external to the organisation.

ListServ – an automatic mailing list server. People sharing an interest may “subscribe” to a given discussion, and other subscribers’ contributions to the thread are distributed to

the entire subscriber base via e-mail. The result is similar to a newsgroup or forum, except that the messages are transmitted as e-mail and are therefore available only to individuals on the list.

Metadata – or “data about data” describes the content, quality, condition and other characteristics of data in order to facilitate efficient and effective searching of that

P-Code – P-code is an abbreviated term for ‘Place Code’. It is similar to a zip code or a postal code in that it identifies the geographic location of items. They are also used as unique reference codes to places (e.g., settlements) whenever the names are not unique. Any dataset that is linked to one location with a p-code can be linked and analysed with other datasets.

Sector – a category of data or information, such as agriculture, health, environment, infrastructure, about a specific geographic area following the onset of an emergency.

Situation Report – periodically produced report by a humanitarian organization on recent conditions following an emergency, providing up-to-date information on the general situation, specific geographic areas, specific humanitarian sectors, vulnerable groups, as well as the status of humanitarian activities.

Theme – a category of baseline pre-emergency data or information, such as agriculture, health, environment, infrastructure about a specific geographic area. In GIS, a theme refers to a layer of attribute data that is related to a geographic feature.

Web Portal - A portal is a kind of Web site. Technically speaking, a portal site includes a start page with rich navigation, a collection of loosely integrated features (some of which may be provided by partners or other third parties), and a large, diverse, target audience.

Website - A virtual location on the web. A URL that serves as the top-level address of a Web site will be said to point to that website’s home page. That page serves as a reference point, containing pointers to additional HTML pages or links to other Web site.

Who does What, Where (W3) - the Who does What Where is a database of information showing which organizations (WHO) are carrying out which activities (WHAT) in which locations (WHERE).

Appendix 3 - Bibliography

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Appendix 4

Brief history of HICs and timeline

1999 Establishment of the first HIC in Kosovo. The Humanitarian Community Information Centre (HCIC) was a central meeting place for the Humanitarian Community and provided information on the activities of the relief community. It was established under the auspices of the Humanitarian Coordinator with help from the Geographic Information Support Team (GIST) who had been looking for such an opportunity. The NGO community seconded a liaison officer.

Also in 2000, the Field Information Support Project (FIS) is established within OCHA to service and support the HICs. Initially this consists of two people.

2000 An HIC was established in Sierra Leone. This did not contain a GIS component initially and became primarily a civil-military liaison function with a role in booking helicopters. Later, SLIS was developed - the Sierra Leone Information Management Service - which now gathers data for recovery purposes. An HIC was established in Eritrea. This closed once the acute phase of that emergency had finished. An HIC is established in DPRK.

2001 The Afghanistan HIC was established in Islamabad following the resumption of war in that country. The Afghan HIC built on an existing system and subsequently became the Afghanistan Information Management System (AIMS).

Following the Afghanistan experience many new systems were developed to support rapid HIC deployment. An 'HIC in a box' was developed and a new staff member attached to the FIS in New York.

In 2001 the Data Exchange Platform for the Horn of Africa (DEPHA) was also established.

2002 The South African Humanitarian Information Management System (SAHIMS) is established. SAHIMS has a focus more towards the understanding of vulnerability in southern Africa. An HIC is established in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to monitor the building of the wall around the West Bank.

2003 An HIC is established in Larnaca as the regional hub for the Iraq crisis. This is subsequently expanded into Iraq. Tragically the HIC is destroyed in the bombing of the UN Headquarters in Baghdad. One staff member loses here life and several are badly injured. Later in 2003 an HIC is established in Liberia.

In 2003 three extra staff members were added to FIS bringing the total staff in FIS to 5.

Appendix 5 - List of Interviewees

London

1. John Adlam. Team Leader. Operations team. Conflict & Humanitarian Affairs Department, Department for International Development.
2. Nicole Allet. GIS officer, Sudan. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
3. Bill Bell. University of Georgia. USA.
4. Paul Currión. Independent. UK
5. Bernd Ekhardt. Independent. Germany.
6. Brendan Gormley. Chief Executive. Disasters Emergency Committee.
7. Rowshan Hannan. Programme Officer. Operations team. Conflict & Humanitarian Affairs Department, Department for International Development.
8. David Horobin. Team Director. Operations team. Conflict & Humanitarian Affairs Department, Department for International Development.
9. Ian Howard-Williams. Team Leader. Operations team. Conflict & Humanitarian Affairs Department, Department for International Development.
10. Vincent Hubin. Independent. Belgium.
11. Chris Kaye. Senior Programme Officer, Southern Africa. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
12. Randolph Kent, Senior Research Fellow. Kings College, London.
13. Richard Luff. Senior Humanitarian Coordinator. Oxfam GB.
14. Barney Mayhew. Independent. UK
15. Gareth Owen. Emergencies Advisor. Save the Children UK
16. Mike Penrose. Senior Programme Officer. Operations team. Conflict & Humanitarian Affairs Department, Department for International Development.
17. Antionne Pettibon. Independent, France.
18. Gaynor Whitley. Humanitarian Programme Officer. Conflict & Humanitarian Affairs Department, Department for International Development.

Washington

19. William Barron. Operations Director, Information Management and Mine Action Programs. Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation.
20. James K. Bishop. Director. Humanitarian Policy and Practice. InterAction.
21. Devon Grams. Senior Programme Associate. Humanitarian Policy and Practice Unit. InterAction.
22. Barry Burnett. Food for peace officer, emergency food aid programmes in Europe & Eurasia, Afghanistan, OPT. U.S. Agency for International Development.
23. Rhonda R. Davis. Geographic Information Coordinator. Office of U.S. foreign Disaster Assistance, U.S. Agency for International Development.
24. Diane DeBarnardo. Disaster Operations Specialist, Afghanistan. Office of U.S. foreign Disaster Assistance, U.S. Agency for International Development.
25. Joseph M. Donahue. Program Director. Information Management and Mine Action Programs. Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation.
26. Jeff Drumtra. Bureau for democracy, conflict & humanitarian assistance. U.S. Agency for International Development.
27. Tamra L. Halmrast-Sanchez. Deputy-Director. Office of U.S. foreign Disaster Assistance, U.S. Agency for International Development.
28. Mike Jones. Iraq reconstruction team. U.S. Agency for International Development.
29. Brian King. ICT Manager. InterAction.
30. David Lillie. Disaster Operations Specialist. Office of U.S. foreign Disaster Assistance, U.S. Agency for International Development.
31. Anita L. Menghetti. NGO/ IO/ Donor Coordinator. Office of U.S. foreign Disaster Assistance, U.S. Agency for International Development.
32. Shawn Messick. Technical Director. Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation.
33. Kathleen Miner. GIS Specialist. U.S. State Department.
34. Carrie Shaw. Training unit. Office of U.S. foreign Disaster Assistance, U.S. Agency for International Development.

35. Fiona Shenks. U.S. Agency for International Development.
36. Anne Speca. Information Officer. U.S. Agency for International Development.
37. Nate Smith. Geographic Information Unit. Office of U.S. foreign Disaster Assistance, U.S. Agency for International Development.
38. Craig Williams. Consultant. USA.

New York

39. Mark Bowden. Chief. Policy Development and Studies Branch.
40. Gregoire de Brancovan. Early Warning. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
41. John N. Clarke. Humanitarian Liaison Officer. Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, United Nations Development Programme.
42. Andrew Cox. Donor Relations Officer. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
43. Charles Downs. Chief. Division for Special Programmes Development. United Nations Office for Project Services.
44. Alta Haggerty. Chief, Information Analysis Section, Deputy Chief, AERIMB. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
45. Opia Mensah Kumah. Chief, Advocacy, External Relations and Information Management Branch. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
46. Tanya Power-Stevens. Operations Manager. Field Information Support Project. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
47. Giorgio Sartori. Technical Manager, Field Information Unit. Information Analysis Section. Advocacy, External Relations and Information Branch, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
48. Kaoruko Seki. Humanitarian Affairs Officer. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
49. Ed Tsui. Director. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
50. Robert Turner. Manager. Field Information Support Project. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
51. Sheldon Yett. Programme Officer, field Support & Inter-Agency Collaboration Section, Programme Division.

Afghanistan

52. Anja de Beer. Executive Coordinator. Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR).
53. Anna Borrel. GIS manager, Afghanistan. UNHCR.
54. Joesph Crowley. Country Coordinator AIMS.
55. Paul Ickx. Health & Management Information Systems Advisor. Management Sciences for Health.
56. Lisa Laumann. Field Office Director, Afghanistan. Save the Children USA.
57. Hamajoun Majidi. Data Coordinator. AIMS.
58. Nelke Manders. Head of Mission, Afghanistan. MSF Holland.
59. Richard Navarro. Senior Project Officer, Education. United Nations Children's Fund Afghanistan Country Office.
60. Paul O'Brien. Advocacy Director. CARE International.
61. Andrew Pinney. National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Advisor. Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Islamic Transitional Government of Afghanistan.
62. Naeem Salimee. Director General. Coordination of Afghan Relief (CoAR).
63. Trent Thompson. Programme Officer. U.S. Agency for International Development.
64. Pierre Wettach. Head of Delegation, Afghanistan. International Committee of the Red Cross.
65. Royce Wiles. Coordinator, Information Resources. Afghanistan Research Evaluation Unit.
66. Col John Ritchie (II). Liaison. Coalition Forces, Afghanistan.

Sierra Leone

67. Annette Rolfe. Programme Manager. Sierra Leone Information System.
68. Aasmund
69. Jessica Eliasson. Special Assistant to the DSRSG for governance and stabilisation. United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone.
70. Trond Husby. Reintegration Advisor, Sierra Leone. United Nations Development Programme.
71. Kawusu Kebbay. Senior Economist. Office of the Vice-President Development Assistance Coordination Office, Sierra Leone.
72. Bengt Ljunggren, Senior Programme Advisor, Sierra Leone. United Nations Development Programme.
73. Sarah Muscroft. Head of Office Sierra Leone. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
74. Rashid Sesay. Programme Officer. Office of the Vice-President Development Assistance Coordination Office, Sierra Leone.

Liberia

75. Shawn Boeser. GIS Officer. United Nations Humanitarian Information Centre Liberia
76. Paul Bonard. Head of Office Liberia. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance.
77. Paul Box. Data Coordinator. United Nations Humanitarian Information Centre Liberia
78. Edwin Brunner. Food Security Officer. United Nations World Food Programme.
79. Amalraj Chinnappan. Country Director Liberia. Jesuit Refugee Service.
80. Nigel Clarke. Country Director a.i. Save the Children UK.
81. Benoit Collin. Technical Assistant. European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) in Liberia.
82. Archie Delaney. Database officer. United Nations Humanitarian Information Centre Liberia.
83. Jo Hutton. Country Director Liberia. Oxfam.
84. Lynnette Larsen. Project Manager. United Nations Humanitarian Information Centre Liberia.
85. Hon. T. Edward Liberty. Deputy Minister for Statistics. Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs. Republic of Liberia.
86. Abou Moussa. Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General. United Nations Mission in Liberia.
87. Monique Nagelkerke. Head of Mission Liberia. MSF Holland
88. Nicky Smith. Country Director Liberia. International Rescue Committee.
89. Leif Softing. Country Director Liberia, Norwegian Refugee Committee.
90. Reto Stocker. Head of Delegation Liberia. International Committee of the Red Cross.
91. Nic Street. Country Director Liberia. Concern Worldwide.
92. Satya S. Tripathi. Chief, Programme Planning and Assessment. United Nations Mission in Liberia.
93. Joe Turay. Programme Accompanier. CAFOD.

Jordan

94. Andrew Alspach. Project Manager. Humanitarian Information Centre Iraq.
95. Merkur Beqiri. VRF/ Database coordinator, Iraq. UNHCR.
96. Wa'el Ibrahim. Country Programme Manager Iraq. Oxfam GB.
97. Ross Mountain. Special Representative of the Secretary General. United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq.
98. Giorgio Tarditi. Head of Mission, Iraq. Lifeline
99. Geeta Verma. Senior Project Officer, Education. UNICEF Iraq.
100. Ivana Vuco. Capacity building Specialist. Support to vulnerable communities project – Iraq. UNOPS
101. Steve Weaver. Country Manager Iraq. Mennonite Central Committee.

102. Wojtek Wilk. Humanitarian Affairs Officer. United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq.

Geneva

103. Guillermo Bettochi. Senior IDP Advisor. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
104. Jean-Yves Bourchardy. Head of Geographic Information and Mapping Unit. United Nations High Commission for Refugees.
105. Georg Charpentier. Deputy director. Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, United Nations Development Programme.
106. Carmen Van Heese. IDP Advisor. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
107. Jesper Holmer-Lund. Field Coordination Support section, Emergency services branch. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
108. Dr Alessandro Loretto. Coordinator. Health Intelligence and Capacity Building. Department for Health Action in Crisis. World Health Organisation.
109. Raouf Mazou. Senior Programme Officer, West Africa. United Nations High Commission for Refugees.
110. Jamie McGoldrick. Chief of Section. Middle East. Iraq, Afghanistan. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
111. Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop. Coordinator. International Council of Voluntary Agencies.
112. Tanja E. Sleuwenhoek. Inter-agency affairs. Department for Health Action in Crisis. World Health Organisation.

Rome

113. David B. Kaatrud. Deputy Director. Transport, Preparedness and Response Division. United Nations World Food Programme.
114. David Morton. Director. Transport, Preparedness and Response Division. United Nations World Food Programme..
115. Wolfgang Herbinger. Chief. Emergency needs assessment Unit. United Nations World Food Programme..
116. Nigel Snoad. United Nations Joint Logistics Centre.
117. Emma Quinn. Consultant ALITE. United Nations World Food Programme.
118. Carlo Scaramella. Chief. Emergency Preparedness and Early Warning. United Nations World Food Programme.

Appendix 6

Terms of Reference DFID/USAID Joint Evaluation of Humanitarian Information Centres

BACKGROUND

Accurate, timely information is critical to inform decision-making and ensure effective targeting of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian Information Centres (HICs) aim to facilitate this through the provision of information products and services to the humanitarian community.

Managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), HICs support co-ordination and information management through physical drop-in centres and virtual tools/web sites. Activities include: collation and dissemination of information; data co-ordination; technical support and training. In 2003, HICs were endorsed by the IASC as a common service. Other common services include the UN Joint Logistics Center (UNJLC), UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) and the United Nations Security Co-ordinator (UNSECOORD).

HICs were first developed during the Rwanda crisis in 1994. Since then they have supported international response efforts in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Liberia, Iraq and the occupied Palestinian territories. Initially developed to address a gap in field level co-ordination of humanitarian information, HICs were formalised by the IASC in 2003 and are now recognised alongside the UN Joint Logistics Center (UNJLC), UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) and the United Nations Security Co-ordinator (UNSECOORD) as a key common service of the UN. To date, HICs have supported international response efforts in Rwanda, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Liberia, Iraq and the occupied Palestinian territories.

USAID/OFDA and DFID have provided extensive funding and support to HIC operations since 1999. This includes: funding for HICs and OCHA's Field Information Support unit (FIS); strategic input through the Geographic Information Support team (GIST); provision of technical assistance, personnel and geographic data; support to develop HIC training tools and handbooks; design and purchase of deployable HIC units and other project costs.

PURPOSE

The main purpose of the evaluation is to ascertain the success of HICs in servicing the humanitarian community. HICs to be evaluated are Liberia, Iraq and the Afghanistan Information Management Service (AIMS). These represent key HICs which have been supported by DFID/OFDA from 2001- 2003.

Specifically the team will seek to examine:

- The relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability¹ of HICs on their intended target audiences.
- Ways in which OCHA can improve HIC's services and products
- Ways in which DFID/OFDA can most effectively support the HICs' objectives.

Success factors, constraints and recommendations should be examined in a number of areas (see Annex 1 for details)

- HIC inputs
- HIC outputs
- HIC policy issues
- HIC operational issues
- Technical issues

The main purpose of the joint evaluation is to ascertain the effectiveness of HICs in servicing the humanitarian community. HICs to be evaluated are Liberia, Iraq and the Afghanistan Information Management Service (AIMS). These represent key HICs established from 2001 – 2003.

Specifically, the team will seek to examine:

- The impact of HICs on their intended target audiences.
- The extent to which original expectations have been met.
- Ways in which OCHA can improve HICs' services and products.
- Ways in which DFID/ USAID can most effectively support HICs.

Approx. 50% of the evaluation should focus on customer satisfaction and stakeholders' involvement, and 50% on policy and operational issues and technical aspects. The evaluation will include a review of project documentation (TORS, MOUs, previous evaluations, strategic assessments, grant documents etc.) and meetings with key stakeholders in the field and at headquarters i.e. OCHA, UN agencies, Red Cross movement, NGOs, donors, national governments, military (where appropriate) and beneficiary populations.

See Annex 1 for some suggested areas for analysis.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation will include a review of project documentation (TORS, MOUs, previous evaluations, strategic assessments, grant documents etc.) and meetings with key stakeholders in the field and at headquarters i.e. OCHA, UN agencies, Red Cross movement, NGOs, donors, national governments, military (where appropriate) and beneficiary populations. The evaluators may use a variety of techniques including web-based surveys, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and workshops (to be outlined in the work plan).

Approx. 50% of the evaluation should focus on customer satisfaction and stakeholders' involvement, and 50% on policy and operational issues and technical aspects.

The evaluation should aim to clearly identify evidence based findings and judgements and contribute towards informed decision making through the dissemination of reliable, factual and credible information. It should seek to draw out common themes as well as focusing on country-specific issues.

A key part of the evaluation will be lesson learning for all stakeholders. This should take place throughout the evaluation, and should be outlined in a dissemination strategy (see outputs/ deliverables section).

MISSION COMPOSITION/ EVALUATION TEAM

The evaluation team will consist of two people.

- One humanitarian specialist with extensive experience of implementing humanitarian relief programmes in the field, who understands the practical information and co-ordination needs of stakeholders, including the UN, NGOs & Red Cross movement.
- One technical specialist, with a humanitarian background, well versed in technical issues relevant to HICs, and in working in a low-tech environment. Should have extensive experience in information and database management, including standards for the sharing of data and Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

Both team members should have experience carrying out two or more significant humanitarian evaluations for a major donor, NGO or international organisation.

OCHA will facilitate meetings, provide relevant documentation and dedicate personnel to provide information to evaluators. OFDA & DFID will also assist in facilitating meetings, procuring documents and initial in-country set-up of the team in the field.

OUTPUTS/ DELIVERABLES

The evaluation team will produce the following deliverables:

Work Plan: Prior to initial departure to Geneva, they will provide to OFDA and DFID a 2-3 page written strategy detailing how the evaluation will be completed. This will include indicators to be used, methodology and areas of analysis, a list of potential interviewees and their location and a dissemination strategy. This will include indicators to measure 'effectiveness', an itinerary, a list of potential interviewees & their location, areas of analysis, and methodology

Field Debrief: Upon completion of work in each of the HIC locations, the evaluation team will offer to provide a verbal debrief of preliminary findings to senior HIC staff, and OFDA/DFID staff and will request preliminary feedback which may be incorporated into the final report.

Written Report: The team shall write and present for review to DFID and OFDA a first draft of the evaluation report at least one week prior to the final official oral briefing in London. . The report will include an executive summary, brief overview of history and activities of humanitarian information centres, description of methodology, and detailed findings and recommendations.

All judgements should be backed up with evidence, quotes etc. The evaluation should seek to draw out common themes as well as focusing on country specific case studies.

Additional information including team itinerary, interviewee lists, questionnaires, and bibliography should be included in annexes. The final report should be no more than 40 pages, excluding annexes. The team may receive feedback concerning the preliminary draft of the evaluation report from DFID or OFDA, which it may incorporate into a final version.

Final debrief: The team should provide a final debrief to OCHA, OFDA and DFID, in their respective locations.

ACTIVITIES AND TIMING

The team should conduct the evaluation and complete the report in approximately 55 days, beginning in March 2004. An outline itinerary is below. However, the evaluation team should draw up their own itinerary, which may differ from this, following identification of interviewees.

- Draw up workplan (4 days) and identify interviewees.
- Interviews and document review in Washington, DC (34 days). The team will meet with staff from OFDA, international NGOs, and other knowledgeable parties. It may review strategic assessments, grant documents, and other relevant documents.
- Interviews in New York City, NY (4 days). The team will meet with staff from OCHA, UNICEF, UNDP, UNOPS, and other knowledgeable parties in preparation for field visits.
- Interviews and document review in London, UK (34 days). The team will meet with staff from DFID, international NGOs, including SCF-UK and Oxfam and other knowledgeable parties. It may

review strategic assessments, grant documents, and other relevant documents.

- Interviews in Geneva, Switzerland (4 days). The team will meet with staff from OCHA, UNHCR, WHO, IFRC, and other knowledgeable parties in preparation for field visits.
- Interviews in Rome, Italy (1 day). The team will meet with staff from WFP headquarters and other knowledgeable parties in preparation for field visits.
- HIC visit and interviews in Liberia (67 days). The team will meet with HIC staff, donor representatives, relevant authorities and other stakeholders, and will review output products.
- HIC visit and interviews in Afghanistan (67 days). The team will meet with HIC staff, donor representatives, relevant authorities and other stakeholders, and will review output products.
- HIC visit and interviews in Jordan (5 days). The team will meet with HIC staff, donor representatives, relevant authorities and other stakeholders, and will review output products.
- Writing report in London and briefing DFID staff (14 days). The team will return to London for final follow-on interviews with OFDA (via phone) and DFID, to produce a first report draft, , receive preliminary feedback from DFID and OFDA, and brief DFID managers and staff on findings.
-
- Washington briefing for OFDA staff (3 days). The team will return to Washington to brief OFDA managers and staff on findings
-
- New York briefing for OCHA (2 days). The team will return to New York to brief OCHA managers and staff on findings.

Note: All times include travel.

Annex 1: Some suggested areas for analysis

(i) Inputs to HICs: stakeholder involvement

- Involvement of stakeholders in providing data, information, personnel & resources to HICs - (UN, NGOs, donors, national government, international organisations, RX, military).
- Note: Need to look at all stages (i) pre-deployment – at HQ, IASC, in region and field; (ii) during response at HQ & field (accounting for changeover in personnel) and (iii) in transition phase and post-transition.

To consider:

- What was provided and by whom.
- Buy in & satisfaction levels, effectiveness & constraints.
- Extent to which HICs take advantage of development resources available pre-crisis.
- Critical success factors & recommendations.

(ii) Outputs/ Products from HICs: customer satisfaction

- Virtual HIC – products and services.
- Physical HIC - products and services e.g. Who does what where, survey of surveys, maps, GIS, data, internet, post boxes, IM services (database development, spatial analysis, assessment development etc.).
- Note: Need to look at all stages as in (i)

To consider:

- Appropriateness & usefulness of HIC products (virtual and physical) for customers' needs.
- Added value of HICs vs. other available facilities
- Levels of preparedness and speed of initial deployment.
- Profile of end users/ customers and satisfaction levels.
- Ability of HICs to adapt to customers' changing needs/ transition.
- Options for additional services, products and legal cost recovery.

(iii) HIC policy issues

- HICs' standing within OCHA.
- Relationship of HICs to other co-ordination activities, including common services (UNJLC, UNHAS, UNSECOORD etc.)
- Institutional adoption of 'lessons learnt'.
- Partnerships/ MOUs with UN common services: UNJLC, UNHAS etc. and other entities for information sharing.

To consider

- Levels of understanding about the role of HICs.
- Level of donor dependency for HIC funding.
- Recommendations

(iv) HIC operational issues

- Deployment mechanisms
- Equipment & technologies
- Financial mechanisms

- Procurement & Logistics
- Staffing, personnel roster
- Management support to field staff
- Real-time monitoring and success indicators
- Security & risk analysis
- Transfer of equipment, personnel etc. during transition phase.

To consider:

- Successes and constraints.
- Effectiveness & practical steps for improving operations.
- Role and impact of DFID & OFDA support.

(v) Technical issues

- Promotion of standards for data sharing
- Buy-in from stakeholders
- Data processing
- Appropriateness of technology for working environments.
- Appropriateness of mechanisms for data sharing.

To consider:

- Success and constraints
- Additional data requirements

Appendix 7

Proposed Terms Of Reference For A Humanitarian Information Centre

Statement of Intent:

Humanitarian Information Centers (HIC) support the co-ordination of humanitarian assistance through the provision of information products and services.

The HIC supports the decision-making process at headquarters and field level by contributing to the creation of a common framework for information management within the humanitarian community.

Background

Accurate and timely information is crucial to the effective provision of humanitarian assistance.

HICs aim to ensure that individuals and organizations at field and strategic level have access to the benefits of information management tools to assess, plan, implement and monitor humanitarian assistance.

HICs are an inter-organizational resource, reporting to the Humanitarian / Resident Coordinator, whose products and services are available to the entire humanitarian community.

HICs provide surge capacity to the humanitarian community, and particularly to the co-ordination function, usually (but not exclusively) in the context of complex emergencies.

Role of the HIC

- **A space** (physical or otherwise) **where the humanitarian community can access information resources** in order to make knowledgeable decisions about their work
- **A provider of information products and services** that enable the humanitarian community to deliver assistance more effectively, following principles of good practice in information management
- **A focal point for data collection, analysis and dissemination** in support of the provision of humanitarian assistance, developing and supporting data standards
- **A facilitator for initiatives and activities related to information management in the field**, particularly in collaboration between other humanitarian actors in support of existing co-ordination structures.

- **An advocate for a culture of information-sharing in the humanitarian community**, generating awareness of good practice and making it possible for agencies to develop common standards and practices in the field.

Characteristics of the HIC

- HICs are a **common resource of the humanitarian community** at large,
- HICs must be **an integral part of the co-ordination structure**, seeking to avoid duplicating existing initiatives and maximizing resources.
- HICs must **work in partnership with specialized agencies** to support, if required, sector-specific work.
- HICs must be **demand driven**. They must serve operational and strategic needs and seek feedback from users to ensure that products and services meet the needs of customers, and adapting those outputs accordingly.
- HICs must be **service oriented, open access projects**, that create a link between technical staff and non-technical users.
- HICs should **encourage participation** by local, national and international actors.
- HICs and its partners will **develop a phase out and transition strategy** from the onset of its operation to link with reconstruction, rehabilitation and development activities.

Activities of the HIC

The HIC's work may include, but will not be limited to, the following activities:

- **Provide orientation material** to humanitarian actors, either in written, graphic and/or verbal form.
- **Develop and promote data standards** to facilitate data and information sharing
- **Collect and maintain data on Who's doing What Where** in the humanitarian community
- **Collect, maintain and make available a range of data sets** from all sources, processing and disseminating this data as appropriate to support humanitarian operations,
- **Establish archive facilities** for the storage and retrieval of documentation relating to the emergency

- **Develop and deploy Geographic Information Systems** in key humanitarian sectors
- **Create a framework and strategy for information management** in the field, liaising with other organizations
- **Advise other organizations on information management issues**
- **Provide technical support** to improve of the information management capacity of the humanitarian community, including working with key partner organizations
- **Provide physical space** for the humanitarian community (include meeting space, mailboxes, notice-boards and connectivity for humanitarian actors)
- **Engage with local actors** to support and develop existing information infrastructures