

Global Symposium +5
Information for Humanitarian Action

Geneva, 22-26 October 2007

Final Statement
Version 0.8 – 30 November 2007

Introduction

Representatives of donor agencies, governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, Red Cross Movement, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), scientific and research institutes, academia, the media and private sector met at the Global Symposium +5 in Geneva on 22-26 October 2007.

The Symposium reaffirmed the outcomes of the 2002 Symposium on Best Practices in Humanitarian Information Management² and Exchange, in particular the *Statement on Best Practices in Humanitarian Information Management and Exchange*, as well as recalling the outcomes of the three Humanitarian Information Network (HIN) Workshops held in Bangkok (2003), Panama (2005), and Nairobi (2006).

By endorsing this Statement participants agreed to: 1) share this Statement and its accompanying Outcomes with their respective organizations; 2) raise the issues herein with international institutions and actors for broader discussion and implementation; 3) that OCHA, in consultation with the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the community of practice on humanitarian information, develop an action plan by March 2008 for the implementation of the Symposium Outcomes³, building upon already-agreed recommendations arising from IASC consultations in 2006/07 on information management in the context of the humanitarian reform process.

Overview

As the humanitarian landscape has changed, the role of information as central to effective humanitarian coordination and response has also assumed increasing significance. Information has always been a key element in humanitarian action but recent emergencies and disasters have demonstrated how vital its role is in providing a basis for effective and informed advocacy, decision-making and resource allocation for affected populations as well as humanitarian actors. Timely, relevant, reliable information that is

¹ United Nations Member States attended the plenary proceedings as observers of the gathering of the community of practice on humanitarian information.

² The term 'information management' covers 'the various stages of information processing from production to storage and retrieval to dissemination towards the better working of an organization; information can be from internal and external sources and in any format.' Association for Information Management 2005, <http://www.aslib.co.uk> [accessed 16 July 2007]

³ See attached Outcomes document

independent and verifiable is central to saving lives and strengthening recovery. The power of information is lost, however unless it is turned into action. This requires effective management, analysis and communication.

Symposium participants recognized the positive efforts by national governments, donor agencies and disaster management agencies, governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, Red Cross Movement, non-governmental organizations, scientific and research institutes, academia, the media and private sector, to improve humanitarian information management and exchange since the 2002 Symposium. Considerable progress has been made in the last five years in the development of more sophisticated information tools, products and analysis and the establishment of commonly agreed standards for their application in the field. New technologies and innovative approaches have provided increased opportunities for interaction and information-sharing among the humanitarian community, and between the humanitarian community and affected populations as never before. However, much remains to be done to ensure that the sharing of information leads to more effective humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery.

Symposium participants stressed that all entities within the humanitarian community, in particular the IASC, Cluster/Sector Leads, and OCHA, should accelerate ongoing efforts to integrate previously endorsed information management principles, practices, systems, capacities and standards into the broader humanitarian reform process.

Participants endorsed this Statement as a common vision of the central role of information in support of effective humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery. They also agreed on the need to strengthen the existing community of practice on humanitarian information, the Humanitarian Information Network (HIN)⁴, expanding its membership and building upon its work to date.

Principles of Humanitarian Information Management and Exchange

Symposium participants reviewed and amended the *Principles of Humanitarian Information Management and Exchange* that were endorsed by the 2002 Symposium to better reflect the humanitarian environment of today. In endorsing the revised principles, the Symposium reiterated the need to develop and encourage accountability in the application of the principles.

Accessibility. Humanitarian information and data should be made accessible to all humanitarian actors by applying easy-to-use formats and by translating information into common or local languages.

⁴ The Humanitarian Information Network (HIN) was established following the 2002 Symposium on Best Practices in Information Management and Exchange and developed further through regional workshops in Bangkok (2003), Panama (2005) and Nairobi (2006).

Information and data for humanitarian purposes should be made widely available through a variety of online and offline distribution channels including the media.

Inclusiveness. Information management and exchange should be based on collaboration, partnership and sharing with a high degree of participation and ownership by multiple stakeholders including national and local governments, and especially affected communities whose information needs should equally be taken into account.

Inter-operability. All sharable data and information should be made available in formats that can be easily retrieved, shared and used by humanitarian organizations.

Accountability. Information providers should be responsible to their partners and stakeholders for the content they publish and disseminate.

Verifiability. Information should be accurate, consistent and based on sound methodologies, validated by external sources, and analyzed within the proper contextual framework.

Relevance. Information should be practical, flexible, responsive, and driven by operational needs in support of decision-making throughout all phases of a crisis. Data that is not relevant should not be collected

Impartiality. Information managers should consult a variety of sources when collecting and analyzing information so as to provide varied and balanced perspectives for addressing problems and recommending solutions.

Humanity. Information should never be used to distort, to mislead or to cause harm to affected or at-risk populations and should respect the dignity of victims.

Timeliness. Humanitarian information should be collected, analyzed and disseminated efficiently, and must be kept current.

Sustainability. Humanitarian information and data should be preserved, cataloged and archived, so that it can be retrieved for future use, such as for preparedness, analysis, lessons learned and evaluation. The use of Open Source Software should be promoted to further enhance access to information by all stakeholders in a sustainable way. When possible, post emergency data should be transitioned to relevant recovery actors and host governments and training provided on its use.

NEW PRINCIPLE: Reliability. Users must be able to evaluate the reliability and credibility of data and information by knowing its source and method of collection. Collection methods should adhere to global standards where they exist to support and reinforce credibility. Reliability is a prerequisite for ensuring validity and verifiability.

NEW PRINCIPLE: Reciprocity. Information exchange should be a beneficial two-way process between the affected communities and the humanitarian community, including affected governments.

NEW PRINCIPLE: Confidentiality. The processing⁵ of any personal data⁶ shall not be done without the prior explicit description of its purpose and will only be done for that purpose, and after prior informed⁷ consent of the individual concerned. Sufficient safeguards must be put in place to protect personal data against loss, unauthorized processing and other misuse. If sensitive information is publicly disclosed, the sources of such information will not be released when there is a reasonable risk that doing so will affect the security or integrity of these sources.

⁵ Processing is among others collection, recording, organization, storage, alteration, consultation, use, disclosure, erasure

⁶ Personal data is information relating to an identified or identifiable person

⁷ Informed includes the source being aware that providing information will not ensure that they will be protected by the organisation.