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1.1 Introduction

Welcome to the Humanitarian Information Management Handbook (hereafter referred to as the Handbook). This Handbook provides an introduction to managing information in humanitarian emergencies, specifically in relation to the deployment of Humanitarian Information Centres (HICs).

The Field Information Support Unit of OCHA carried out a review of HICs in 2001, and the HIC concept was approved by the interagency Symposium on Humanitarian Information Exchange in February 2002. A Concept Paper was then prepared by OCHA in mid-2002, and OCHA and DfID began a joint project in November 2002 to develop rapid deployment procedures. As part of the project, this Handbook was developed for use by staff involved in the deployment of a HIC.

The Handbook is available in hard copy and in CD-ROM format from <insert sources>.

1.2 How to use this Handbook

The Handbook is a reference manual for personnel working on field-based information management projects. Although there are many references to HICs in the text, the content of this handbook can be applied to any information management project. Users are recommended not to apply the Handbook rigidly, as this will restrict the flexibility of their project. Instead use the Handbook as a starting point – the intention is that the Handbook should be referred to as necessary for guidance and resources.

The Handbook is divided into sections. First, this **Introduction** explains a little more about the Humanitarian Information Centre concept. **Key Concepts in Information Management** explains some of the basic concepts behind information management. The section on **Products and Services** gives more detail on the sort of work an information management project should be undertaking, based on previous HIC experiences. Finally, the section on **Management Guidelines** provides advice on how to set up and run a HIC in the field.

In addition to the above sections, the Handbook contains a number of Appendices and Resources. The **Appendices** collect together some of the products referenced in the Handbook, using examples taken directly from the experience of previous HICs. The **Resources** are useful documents produced by other organizations. Where these documents are referred to in the text, a hyperlink will take you to the actual document. There are also hyperlinks to relevant sites on the World Wide Web.

The Handbook should be seen as a work-in-progress, and we hope that you will find it useful for your work. Feedback on its structure and contents are welcome.

1.3 What are Humanitarian Information Centres?

In simple terms the Humanitarian Information Centre (or HIC) is a vehicle for delivering the benefits of improved information management to individuals and organisations working in the field. It can achieve this through a variety of means including data coordination, technical support, application development, dissemination, advocacy, training and partnership projects. Through the provision of information products and services to the humanitarian community, HICs support the coordination of humanitarian assistance. HICs also support decision-making process at headquarters and field level, contributing to the creation of a common framework for information management within the humanitarian community.

It must be emphasised here that a HIC is a resource for the entire humanitarian community, not the personal property of any single individual or agency – even the Humanitarian Coordinator. There are a number of core OCHA functions that a HIC may feel obligated to become involved with. It is strongly advised that HIC staff do not become involved in these tasks, as this will blur the line between the two functions.

Box 1. The Role of the HIC

- **A physical space where the humanitarian community can access information resources** to provide it with sufficient information to make informed 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.
- **A basis for the development of a common platform for information sharing initiatives in the field**.

This list is taken from the generic HIC TORs submitted to the IASC for approval in 2003. A copy of these TORs is included in the Appendices (APP017)

In the same way as "co-ordination" and "information management" are umbrella terms for a range of activities, a "Humanitarian Information Centre" is an umbrella for implementing those activities. A HIC is not an activity in itself. Many of the HICs (or related projects) that have been set up so far have been interagency in nature, and this seems to be one of the keys to success; a HIC is normally a convergence of many needs, not a single issue office. However a number of characteristics common to all HICs have been agreed:

- HICs must be **an integral part of the co-ordination structure**, seeking to avoid duplicating existing initiatives and maximizing resources, capacities and systems.
- HICs must **work in partnership with specialist agencies** to carry out sector-specific work, making formal agreements where necessary.
- HICs must be **demand driven**. They must serve operational needs and seek feedback from users to ensure that products and services are meeting the needs of customers, and adapting those outputs accordingly.
- HICs must be **service oriented, open access projects** that create an interface between technical staff and non-technical users.
- HICs should **encourage participation** by local, national and international actors.

Although their main successes have been in complex post-emergency environments with the presence of a large UN mission (such as Kosovo and Afghanistan), the utility of the HIC concept has been demonstrated in a range of different environments, including natural disasters (such as the Goma volcano in 2002) and ongoing emergencies (such as Sierra Leone). The concept is now being promoted as one of the most effective tools available to support the co-ordination process, and forms part of OCHA's core activities as outlined in the OCHA Orientation Guide (a copy of which is available in the Resource Documents section(RES003)).

1.4 Why do we need a Humanitarian Information Centre?

Humanitarian missions, carried out in chaotic and fast-changing environments by multiple actors, often lack even the most basic shared information systems - for example, surveys are frequently repeated and the results not shared or effectively used. Although there are a number of initiatives underway to address this globally (such as the SHARE project) there continues to be a split between headquarters and field offices.

Headquarters generally have excellent ICT infrastructure and are linked in to the loop of information that the humanitarian community generates – reports, analyses, tools, etc – while field offices frequently have extremely limited and erratic access to ICT. Headquarters staff can suffer from information overload while, conversely, field staff have either virtually no access to information that they may find useful, or difficulties filtering the information that does reach them.

The result is that humanitarian actors frequently view information as a burden rather than a resource. Due to resource constraints within humanitarian organisations (particularly NGOs, who continue to suffer from core cost shortfalls), the potential of new techniques and technologies to deal with these problems is not being utilized. This does not just refer to high-tech solutions, but also basic tools such as spreadsheets, archiving, and networking.

Although individual organisations bear the responsibility for dealing with this issue, there are certain common information needs – particularly in the area of coordination. The HIC is *not* a coordination mechanism in itself; the role of the HIC will be to support activities that contribute to more effective coordination, especially those established by the UN. Each humanitarian crisis will have different information needs, and selecting and implementing the correct approach requires both a good understanding of the context of the intervention and an approach that includes the full range of international actors, including intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental bodies. This can only really be achieved by creating field-based mechanism for responding to the needs of the humanitarian community.

A wider information-sharing culture needs to be generated amongst the humanitarian community, with information sharing becoming second nature. Despite issues such as security and funding, large parts of the information collected by NGOs and UN agencies should be public domain. It should be emphasised that value will be added through active sharing of this information. HICs can facilitate this sharing, but will initially need to offer something in return - support in planning, gathering, processing and disseminating information. The key is inclusiveness, building productive partnerships with other actors in the field; attempting to impose “systems” will alienate many actors, particularly NGOs.

Responsibility for managing information related to specific sectoral interests – such as health or refugee movements – lies with the agencies mandated to deal with those interests and the partner organizations working with them. A HIC should not duplicate

existing or planned information management exercises being managed by other organizations, but synchronise with other initiatives to support and guide them. The HIC should engage with these actors to help them to develop creative solutions to information problems, where such solutions will benefit the wider humanitarian community.

The final objective must be to create within the humanitarian system a culture that manages information effectively as a natural and obvious part of its work. However it is worth noting that all these activities are only means to an end, and the end is an improvement in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Effective information management can support and in some cases substantially improve coordination – but it cannot substitute for it. While improved information management should be an objective in itself for organizations as part of their development, the real measure of success is how that improvement benefits the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Box 2. Operational Principles

The Operational Principles for Humanitarian Information Management and Exchange agreed at the 2002 Symposium on Best Practices in Humanitarian Information Exchange should form the basis for all information management projects. They were based on the practical experience of the participants, and are straightforward and easy to implement. It is worth sharing these principles with other organizations when possible, incorporating them into strategic planning and product development for the project.

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 when necessary. 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 a system of collaboration, partnership and sharing, with a high degree of participation and ownership by multiple stakeholders, especially representatives of the affected population.

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

Accountability. Users must be able to evaluate the reliability and credibility of data and information by knowing its source. 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 analysed within the proper contextual framework.

Relevance. Information should be practical, flexible, responsive, and driven by operational and decision-making needs throughout all phases of a crisis.

Objectivity. Information managers should consult a variety of sources when collecting and analysing 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 cause harm to affected or at-risk populations and should respect the dignity of victims.

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

Sustainability. Humanitarian information and data should be preserved, catalogued and archived so that it can be retrieved for future use, such as for preparedness, analysis, lessons learned and evaluation.

2.1 What is Information Management?

Definition 1: "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. These processes aim to make the work of the organization more effective."

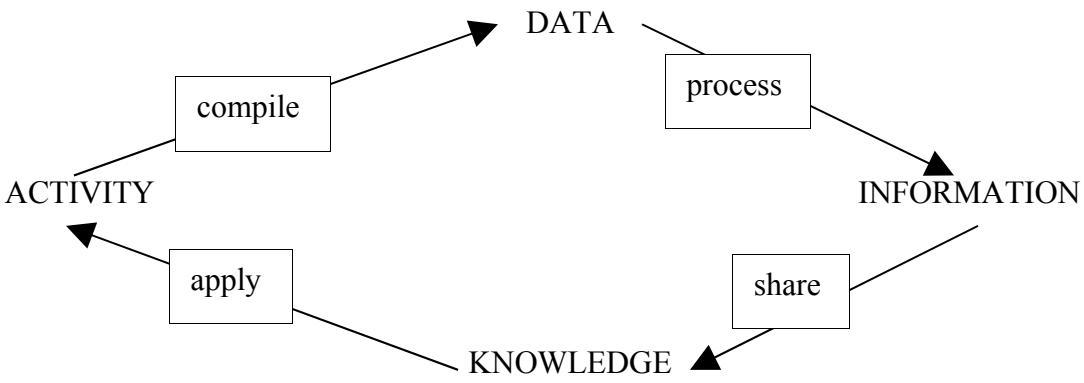
This definition emphasises the processes involved in managing information; and **process** is the key concept in managing information. However another perspective is provided by the following definition:

Definition 2: "The planning, budgeting, control and exploitation of the information resources in an organisation. The term encompasses both the information itself and the related aspects such as personnel, finance, marketing, organisation and technologies and systems."

This second definition gives more weight to the value of information to an organization, and implies that there will be costs as well as benefits to the implementation of information management. Here the emphasis is on information as an organisational **resource** that must be managed effectively. Information management is not inherently 'good' – it is worth investing in only if it will add value to the work of the organization.

Data is collected and inputted into a useable form, such as a database; the database is then made accessible and consulted by decision-makers; the results of these decisions are then disseminated and applied in the field; these actions affect the situation and so new data is needed to inform the decision-making process. Figure 1 shows how this cycle works in practice, with each step an essential part of a successful management system.

Box 3. The Virtuous Circle of Information Management[1]



The diagram shows that information management in the broadest sense covers a wide range of issues, including data collection and knowledge management, each of which is a

[1] Note that there is no 'correct' version of the Circle; the diagram shown is an 'action-oriented' version using neutral language. Some versions have 'wisdom' in place of action, and the processes can be labelled differently depending on the individual perspective.

specialized field in itself. However they are all linked through the management processes that make up the circle – or they should be in an effective information management system.

One of the things that the diagram above demonstrates is that information by itself is not useful, but must be applied in a variety of ways to generate useful knowledge for an organization. Because information management is a process and not an event, it takes time for the cycle to be completed and for actual results to be felt. Information requires investment. It requires a range of human, technical and financial inputs to implement the changes necessary to create the loop above.

2.2 Why is Information Management important?

In the last 10 years information management has become an area of increasing interest to the humanitarian community, as it has become increasingly clear that accurate and timely information is essential to decision-making at all stages of the project cycle.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has grown increasingly powerful and increasingly affordable, making it accessible to even the smallest organisation; however, at the same time, this information revolution (and particularly the rise of the internet) has seen an exponential increase in the amount of information produced by and available to humanitarian organisations. In addition, the number of organisations working in the humanitarian sector has increased (particularly in the NGO community), leading to greater problems in coordination. Many humanitarian organisations grew quickly during the 1990s, leading to increased internal complexity and a greater interest in new management tools.

These factors mean that the amount and variety of information that individuals and organizations have to deal with has increased, and has made it increasingly difficult for the humanitarian community to manage information about its work. All this has happened at the same time as the need to manage that information has become of the greatest importance: as the global media continually outpace humanitarian agencies in their reach and timeliness; as governments and private enterprise exploit the potential of new technologies in humanitarian crises; and as the humanitarian community itself seeks to become more accountable, through initiatives such as the SPHERE Project.

It is difficult enough to implement information management within a single organization, but in the humanitarian sector the situation is complicated in the humanitarian sector by the sheer range of organizations. UN agencies, international organizations, NGOs, donors, national governments and UN peacekeeping forces all have vastly different organizational cultures, methods and resource bases – yet they are frequently expected to work towards a common humanitarian goal.

The only way to achieve this is through effective coordination. Coordination involves a wide range of activities that bring together people or organisations to share ideas, identify and solve problems, and make decisions in order to improve the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Coordination is not any single activity, but the result of a series of such activities.[2] In this context "information management" is an umbrella term that includes a number of coordination activities – including strategic planning, information-sharing, and lesson learning – and it occupies a central role in the coordination process.

[2] A framework for field coordination published by the ODI is available in the Resource Documents section (RES018)

Better information management in a wider range of areas will enable individual organisations to improve their delivery of assistance. It will also enable them to share their information with other organisations on a more systematic basis. This in turn leads to accurate information reaching decision-makers more quickly, improving the appropriateness and timeliness of the response, and creates a shared frame of reference that enables those decision-makers to co-ordinate their activities, based on clear knowledge of needs in the field and clear understanding of each organisation's capacities.

2.3 Data, Information, Knowledge

Information management can be understood as a 'chain of increasing value'[3] (Powell,), a process that creates value out of relatively limited resources. The easiest way to illustrate this is with an example from the humanitarian sector.

- 1234 refugees is a piece of *data*. It is not inherently useful in itself.
- "There are 1234 refugees in this camp" is *information*. The data (1234 refugees) has been given a context that allows us to understand the situation more clearly.
- "To provide water and sanitation for the camp requires at least 62 toilets" is *knowledge*. The new information has been incorporated into individual understanding, where it is combined with other information (in this case, the SPHERE standards) to create a more valuable assertion.

Of course knowledge is useless unless it is applied. There will have been no point in gathering this data unless we put it into *action.*[4] The role of the HIC is to support the cycle of information management, helping to turn data into information and information into knowledge. However it is important to note that it is not the role of the HIC to take action. The HIC should provide support to the decision-making process and facilitate the actions of operational humanitarian organisations; to go any further than that is to enter a political minefield that the HIC will not survive.

Box 4. Data Infrastructure

Definition: "The relevant base collection of technologies, policies and institutional arrangements that facilitate the availability of and access to… data."

The word 'infrastructure' implies the concept of a reliable, supporting environment, equivalent to a road or telecommunications network. An infrastructure must provide a solid framework for future development and, as with any construction, the foundations must be solid to make sure the structure stays standing. The creation of a data infrastructure is essential to the creation of a shared understanding of given situation and a common platform from which to respond to that situation. A more detailed discussion of data infrastructure (specifically relating to spatial data) can be found in the Global Spatial Data Infrastructure Cookbook, a copy of which is available in the Resource Documents section (RES010).

[3] Powell, M., Information Management for Development Organisations, 1999, Oxfam GB
[4] In this case, our next step is to begin procuring the material necessary for latrine production!

2.4 Data Standards

The development and application of data standards is fundamental to managing information. Without data standards it is impossible to share data between organizations – indeed, it may even be impossible to share data within an organization. Data standards, if developed and implemented properly, save time and money, and ensure quality and completeness.

Although data standards are in use in many different sectors, most people are not aware of them – they are so obvious that people do not realise that they are there. As a result the need for data standards may not be immediately obvious, but the following examples demonstrate how essential data standards are in the modern world:

- international (international direct dialing codes),
- national (zip codes or postal codes),
- inter-organisational (safety regulations in construction), and
- intra-organizational (budget codes).

None of the standards listed above were invented for fun – all grew out of a concrete needs to manage large amounts of data effectively, to create a shared frame of reference for a group of actors, and to make possible activities that would otherwise be inconceivable. Imagine if there were no zip codes – the postal system in the US would simply cease to work!

The development of data standards normally requires a mixture of consensus from within the user community *and* strong leadership from an acknowledged authority. In order to be useful, data standards need to be agreed by the different stakeholders of the data in question, but there must at the same time be a single source and guardian for the standard.

The development of a data standard must achieve a balance in terms of the following characteristics:

- Formality vs Informality. Does the standard need to be approved by an official body – whether governmental or non-governmental – or can it work based solely on consensus? What effect will non-compliance with the standard have on its success as a tool for managing information?

- Simplicity vs Detail. What level of detail is necessary to make the standard useful? Are different levels of detail needed by different users? Is the standard scaleable – i.e. can new levels of detail be added to it at a later date?

- Clarity vs Flexibility. Any data standard must be clear to all users, but it must also be able to take into account new developments. Using international direct dialling as an example, the system must be able to take into account new countries being added to the list and changes in the telephone system within existing countries.

In countries or regions where there is no central authority, or where the capacity or legitimacy of central authority is questionable, a HIC may be required to act as custodian for the development of data standards. It is important to emphasise that in an inter-agency context, nobody 'owns' data standards – they should be a community resource 'owned' by every agency that implements them. However there does need to be an acknowledged authority, a single source of the coding that alone is authorised to generate and disseminate the codes. The alternative is chaos, as different agencies generate their own codes based on the same system, creating a situation in which data cannot be shared.

There are three specific standards that require more discussion:

1. **Sectoral coding** is currently not standardized between countries, agencies or projects for humanitarian work.[5] Essentially this means that there is no common reference point for sharing information about activities – for instance, through a Who's doing What Where database – as there is no consensus on what constitutes those activities. As an example, is a project that rebuilds schools an education project or an infrastructure project? It is therefore important to get agreement at local level on how to classify activities. The best way to begin this is normally on the basis of sectoral co-ordination groups that meet during the emergency.

2. Geographical coding (geocodes) is essential for the effective implementation of any Geographic Information System. Some countries do have geocoding based on census results and gazetteers (or lists of standardised place names) held by the official statistical institution of that country. In some cases the statistical institution may issue geocodes; in others, GIS practitioners may have collectively worked out a coding system that they can apply.

3. Development and application of metadata (data about data) is key to successful information management. A library of documents is useless unless you have a catalogue to help you find what you are looking for. An inter-agency approach to this issue has been developed in the form of SHARE (Structured Humanitarian Assistance REporting). SHARE has drawn on several existing initiatives to create a framework to enable georeferenced data to be structured, stored and shared between agencies. A summary paper and a discussion paper on SHARE are included in the Resource Documents section (RES008 and 009).

Investment in these fields will see a large return, not just for the project itself but also for the rest of the humanitarian community, since data standards enable data to be shared and

[5] Codes do exist for development work, notably in the form of the DAC codes generated by the OECD.

compared between organizations, making a larger body of baseline data available to a broader range of actors. However there is often resistance to the application of data standards by field actors based on a simple misunderstanding. Data standards do not tell organizations *what* information to collect and report, but offer them a partial solution to the problem of *how* to collect and report it. Advocacy and awareness-raising are necessary to resolve this misunderstanding, combined with a practical approach that facilitates agencies in the incorporation of data standards into their daily work.

Box 5. Metadata

Metadata is one of the most fundamental concepts in information management, but also one of the most confusing. Metadata is literally "data about data", but this definition is of limited use for explaining the concept to non-technical actors, and does not provide any guidance in applying metadata to concrete activities.

"While the first use of 'metadata' originated in contexts related to digital information (chiefly with regard to databases), the general understanding of the term has since broadened to include any kind of standardised descriptive information about resources, including non-digital ones."[6]

So what is this 'standardised descriptive information'? Imagine that you are given a photo album containing a series of photos that have no captions and do not appear to be in any order. You have no way of knowing whose photos they are, when or where they were taken, or who is shown in them. In order to know what you are looking at, it is necessary to have a front title that explains who took the pictures. To understand what the album is showing you, captions giving you a little more information about each of the photos would be useful. If you were a photographer yourself, it might be useful to have information about what type of camera and film were used to take each photo.

These three examples of metadata give us progressively more information about the contents of the photo album and help us to understand a little more clearly what we are looking at. Metadata provides information on what data is available, where it is, how current it is, what format it is in, and what constraints might apply on its use. Metadata is not an end in itself, but helps you use the more effectively, making it easier to

- store datasets in a logical and consistent method
- find a particular dataset in a range of datasets
- identify whether a particular dataset will be useful to you
- adapt the dataset for your own purposes
- share data between organisations

A UN standard for metadata has been developed and is available in the Appendices to the Handbook (APP028).

[6] Day, M., UK Office for Library and Information Networking, University of Bath, UK

2.5 Data Acquisition

Obviously information management cannot take place unless there is information to be managed. The first step in the cycle is therefore acquiring data, which can be done in two ways, the most obvious of which is to collect it yourself. However the costs of collecting data are too high for a HIC to become involved with the actual collection of data itself. Instead a HIC should facilitate the work of other humanitarian organisations in collecting data. There are a number of ways of making doing this, for example: by providing training or support to the staff of other organisations, in finding funds or other resources to support the project, and in ensuring that data collection exercises are not duplicated in the community.

Box 5. Survey Support

Most organisations will have their own expert staff to carry out assessments, surveys and evaluations. However a good assessment mission will always draw on resources that are available on the ground, such as the HIC. HIC staff should be able to offer informed advice to organisations designing and undertaking survey work, adding value to survey work by sharing data relating to the survey and passing on their broader knowledge of the situation.

If the HIC is able to provide support, this will enable them to build a productive relationship with the organisation and promote their work within that organisation. One key example of this is lobbying organisations to adopt data standards – such as geocodes – in their survey, making it easier to share and disseminate the results of that survey. In order to make sure data standards are incorporated an early intervention is essential. The most effective point to make an intervention is at the very beginning of the design of the survey, since mistakes that are designed into the survey will be harder to correct later on in the cycle. However it may be possible for the HIC to make useful interventions at different points during the survey process.

Outline Steps in Survey Work

1. Define the Goals and Objectives of the Survey
2. Design an appropriate methodology for data collection
3. Develop instruments to carry out data collection
4. Select samples and conduct a pilot Survey
5. Revise the survey instruments as necessary, based on the results of the pilot
6. Train researchers in the Survey methodology
7. Carry out the Survey
8. Analyse data and prepare report

The other way of acquiring data is to access the resources of other organisations. While a large amount of data is produced in the field through surveys and other data collection exercises, this data is frequently not stored, analysed or presented in a way that maximizes its value. In addition to the data collection carried out by agencies referred to above, humanitarian actors are increasingly approaching commercial and military sources to provide data (particularly in the field of remote sensing and similar high-cost exercises). Although there are information coordination mechanisms at headquarters level (for instance, the UN Geographic Information Working Group), field operations are frequently characterized by a lack of communication between agencies on their activities.

While information management should be a shared responsibility for the entire humanitarian community, as a community resource an information project such as an HIC occupies a unique position to act as an honest broker for data acquisition and storage. This is true particularly where other actors that might take on this role, such as government, academia, or the private sector, have limited capacity. In addition these projects can be a coordination tool to ensure that multiple agencies do not duplicate each other's work.

Data collection has a large resource implication that is often overlooked. It is therefore important to prioritise the collection of data. What are the criteria by which we should prioritise data in the humanitarian environment? One approach is to ask again, what are the basic elements of a humanitarian data infrastructure? However there may be sectoral priorities – for instance, with winter approaching, shelter may take priority over education.

Box 6. Minimum Essential Data

In the early stages of a humanitarian crisis there is frequently a lack of timely, accurate and relevant data. One of the absolute priorities identified by a number of studies of coordination carried out in the last few years is the acquisition of that data and its early incorporation into the planning needs of the humanitarian response. The need for baseline data is universally agreed – without such data it is impossible to plan or monitor the humanitarian intervention effectively – but despite this there is not yet any agreement within the community of what constitutes the minimum essential data necessary for effective decision-making.

Agencies working on preparedness issues have now begun to make efforts to identify what data is essential and gather it prior to the onset of the crisis period. While these efforts are to be supported, the reality is that there is some data that cannot be captured in advance and must be gathered on the ground in the midst of the emergency. One of the key activities for field-based information management projects is to support the local agreement on what the minimum essential data might be, what the possible sources for that data are, and the resources that will be necessary to acquire it.

The Survey of Surveys tool is one approach to this, but the most important step is to secure the agreement of the major agencies that they will actively participate in the necessary data collection exercises to ensure that the entire community has access to the information necessary to work effectively.

Core datasets might include land cover, land use, urban plans, cadastral divisions, demographic information, population movements, development indicators, etc. These datasets can be defined by their use as generic data that can be applied across a wide range of functions, not just a single sector.

Note that the minimum essential data has a utility beyond this initial response. The data itself will form a core part of the data infrastructure that the country in crisis requires for effective development and governance. In addition the process by which the data is gathered can be the starting point for the creation of an information management strategy for the humanitarian community.

2.6 Data Processing

Definition: "The input, verification, organisation, storage, retrieval, transformation, and extraction of information from data." (FOLDOC)

Although this definition appears to cover a wide range of activities, all of them are focused on delivering useable information from raw data. Breaking down the definition we can see that each of these activities represents an essential stage in this process.

Input and Verification

Input – or data entry – is the hands-on aspect of information management. There is no way to avoid the fact that data collected in the field must be transferred from the collection form (whether it is hard-copy or electronic) into the management information system. Even if this process is fully automated – for instance, data collected on handheld PCs can be transferred to a database system held on a server through a USB docking cradle – it still requires time to train users how to do this.

Data entry requires well-trained staff members, clear and rigorous procedures for checking accuracy, and careful management. Data entry staff need to be able to deal with repetitive tasks (for instance, logging errors in the data for future reference) but also to demonstrate initiative (for instance, following up organisations to correct errors). Even once the data is entered, a senior manager must check it through prior to being released publicly. The processes of input and verification necessarily go hand-in-hand.

Box 7. Best Practice in Data Quality Control

Guidelines on quality control were developed by the 2002 Symposium on Humanitarian Information Management and Exchange:

- **Follow generally accepted standards for information exchange**, such as the Structured Humanitarian Assistance Reporting (SHARE) standard, to promote data sourcing, dating and geo-referencing.
- **Define ambiguous terminology**. Clarify commonly misused terms such as "affected" or "refugee" to avoid misinterpretation by different users and audiences.
- **Coordinate methodologies for surveys and needs assessments**. These should be coordinated and designed to avoid bias, and should include training and documentation. Assessment methodologies and criteria should be explicitly stated.
- **Use metadata**. Develop metadata documentation for each new product. Create metadata dictionaries and handover procedures as part of a standard, transparent documentation process.

Organisation, Storage and Retrieval

Organisation, storage and retrieval are all aspects of the same function – if data is not organised in a clear and logical system, it cannot be stored effectively or retrieved easily. The actual order (i.e. the filing system) is not as important as the principle of keeping order (i.e. the fact that there is a filing system). Clear categorization for effective management of the documents becomes more important the more documents are on file. If possible store material by agreed sector coding, or use an existing system (such as the Dewey decimal system utilized by many public libraries around the world).

A HIC should aim to act as a central repository for the entire community – again, emphasizing its role as an honest broker for information. In practice this means ensuring that the HIC collects and stores all the incidental products of humanitarian activity – such as needs assessments, situation reports, project proposals, evaluations, etc – and makes them available to anybody that wishes to see them. Although most of this material will not be actively used during the emergency itself, it is valuable historical material that will support the learning process.

Build relationships with key agencies (particularly UN operational agencies, large NGOs and governmental bodies) to ensure that you have access to the material they produce. Emphasise that by providing the HIC with their publications, they will ensure a wider dissemination than they would otherwise achieve. As much material as possible should be gathered and stored in electronic format (this is increasingly becoming easier as more organizations switch to using PCs) – if you only receive a hardcopy, contact the organization directly to request an electronic version. If only hardcopies are available, try to scan and store them electronically.

A document management and retrieval system will be more useful if it is run from a database. It is fairly simple to develop a spreadsheet or relational database to track new arrivals. Associating keywords with documents will make it easier to search for and retrieve them, particularly if you make the database available over the web. Although the key is to make these documents available in-country, if electronic versions can be stored, it is simple to make them available over the web. This will mean wider dissemination and an increase in the value of the archive.

If a substantial archive has been built up, when the HIC finishes its operation the material may be handed over to a local institution – a government office responsible for coordination, a university – or to an international institution. In addition the HIC should ensure that any electronic versions of the archive are stored online for future access.

Box 8. Documenting the Crisis.

One of the areas of best practice identified by the 2002 Symposium on Humanitarian Information Management was the need to 'preserve institutional operational memory'. This implies investment in the creation of a **data repository** (dealing solely with datasets) and a **document archive** (storing the document outputs of relevant organisations). Both of these resources are extremely valuable for use by the project and should form part of the data infrastructure that supports humanitarian information management.

Both of these need to be fed by procedures that ensure that data and documentation is systematically gathered and added to the system. Metadata must be applied to both to ensure that retrieval of outputs is possible as necessary, and the contents of the system need to be organised in a coherent and consistent manner. As with any data entry, there needs to be careful monitoring of the inputs to make sure that they are appropriate and that they are placed in the correct place within the filing system.

In addition the contents of the system must be made available as widely as possible. As well as holding the data and documents within the HIC, there should be a back-up storage solution outside the crisis area. Web-based solutions using FTP to update have been shown to work effectively, and there are a number of sites that have supported HICs, including OCHA's ReliefWeb and the University of Georgia's ITOS department.

Possible core datasets are listed in the Box on Minimum Essential Data. Priority documents might include situation reports, political analysis, minutes from coordination meetings, security reports and working group documents.

These systems are a resource that supports the lesson-learning process for the entire humanitarian community. However the HIC is not responsible for individual organisations learning from their experiences – it can only facilitate the process. They should eventually be handed over to a more sustainable institution (such as an academic institution or a government department). Any exit strategy must take this into account; preserving the institutional memory of the humanitarian community for current and future stakeholders is vital for planning, evaluation and preparedness.

Transformation and Extraction

Transformation and extraction refer to the processes that actually turn the raw data into useable information. This can be done in a variety of ways, of which the most frequently used by HICs is Geographic Information Systems (GIS). A PowerPoint Presentation on Data and Decision-making is available in the Resource Documents section (RES020), which explains more about the use of data in decision-making processes.

GIS is an example of how a previously expensive specialist technology becomes more useable and more affordable over time. GIS is now a core part of the work of many national governments and commercial organizations (particularly in areas such as urban planning, resource management and defense), and is increasingly used by international organizations in the relief and development sector. A white paper on GIS and disaster management has been issued by ESRI and is available in the Resource Documents section (RES015). There is no doubt that GIS will become increasingly important in the near future and that its use in the humanitarian sector will become more visible.

For most people working in the field, their exposure will be limited to the final outputs of a GIS – a map product. Maps are extremely powerful and useful tools for orientation and planning, and as a result they are extremely popular and highly-valued by humanitarian workers, even when they are based on old data. These high-visibility products will be one of the main draws to an IM project, and should therefore be of high quality no matter how basic they are.

Much humanitarian data has a geographic component, and maps have traditionally been one of the most effective means of communicating a lot of data in a simple form. Maps complement other information very well - street plans of the capital can complement the contact list by showing office locations; topographic maps of the country supports the available background information; administrative boundary maps help people to understand the political and social set-up of a region.

A project with GIS functions can generate a range of maps from a very limited amount of data. However these map products should not be mistaken for the GIS itself. Maps bear the same relation to a GIS as a spreadsheet does to a relational database. The power of GIS is as a dynamic analytical tool that makes it possible to combine data from different sources and present it in a way that is easily comprehensible to people with a non-technical, non-statistical background.

There are limitations on the use of GIS that need to be taken into account, however. Where geographic data is unavailable or extremely poor, there may need to be an investment by a number of organisations in order to create the geocoding necessary for GIS. Remote sensing (such as satellite imaging or aerial photography) are highly specialised technical disciplines, and if the project is working in this area it must have staff with relevant experience.[7] Where time is a major factor, there will be a question over whether investment in the development of a GIS will yield results quickly enough (and what interim measures might be used while a GIS is being developed). Finally, some data may not be geographically bounded. It may be possible to incorporate geographic referencing (thus adding value to the data) but this has a large resource implication.

[7] A Manual on Remote Sensing is available in the Resource Documents section (RES016).

GIS in humanitarian activities is a relatively new development and as a result there is very little reference material on its use. The Mine Action sector is the most advanced in terms of GIS use, and it is now very rare to encounter a situation where GIS is not used as an integral part of planning, implementation and monitoring for mine clearance. Other sectors are less advanced in their use of GIS, but there is increasing interest in this technology and there is no reason why it cannot be applied to all humanitarian fields of interest.

3.1 Service Provision

The way in which you work is almost as important as the work itself. Nobody working in the field wants another layer of coordination; it is therefore important to support the work of others rather than trying to establish new coordination structures. Providing a high quality service is key to the success of information management projects. The development and implementation of information management projects should be driven by demand – even if you have to create that demand through marketing your work.

In this sense it is useful to think of the humanitarian community as

a. sources of information inputs,
b. consumers of information outputs, and
c. partners in developing the information systems that are required to manage both inputs and outputs.

Different organisations will play different roles depending on the situation. The relationships that you have with these organisations should be flexible enough to accommodate different ways of working. In all these roles it is important to bear in mind that each organisation is a potential client – without their cooperation you cannot provide a service, and unless you provide them with a service they will not cooperate with your project.

Sections on the humanitarian community as sources of information and partners are covered in other parts of this Handbook. In this section we are interested in humanitarian organisations as consumers of HIC products. In many cases, humanitarian organisations are not aware of their need for information management – although they are aware that they are lacking key management information, they are not always able to articulate what information they need or in what form they need it. Marketing is one way of leading humanitarian organisations to the products and services that they need.

While marketing might not appear to be a priority during a sudden onset emergency, it is an essential part of information management work. Information is useless unless people know it exists, where to get it and how to use it. Any information management project should develop a basic strategy for marketing, identifying the key markets and the most appropriate ways of presenting and disseminating its work. The first question to ask is, Who is the audience? The type of audience will define how you sell your work – you may be aiming for a range of different people, and so will need to develop different products (often from the same basic data) and use different techniques to disseminate them.

As with any aspect of information sharing, marketing is about building relationships with organisations as consumers, rather than providers of information. Initially this means bringing them into contact with the project, normally as consumers of basic orientation products. Free copies of key products, such as orientation maps, are useful in creating interest in your work. Circulate copies of your dissemination products to key offices – managers, security, logistics, etc – and let them know that you will be updating on a regular basis. Once the initial contact is made, follow up with personal visits and consultations to work out exactly what organisations are looking for.

Providing good service does not rely on technology – it is the HIC staff themselves that are the vital resource in this instance. However, even if they have experience working as receptionists or in similar positions, most local staff will not have experience of taking the service-oriented approach that is necessary. What this means in practice is responsiveness to the needs of the customers. People should feel that the HIC is a place where they will get a rapid and helpful response to their inquiries. This does not mean that you have to meet every single demand that a client has, or that you need to know everything about the situation (although obviously this is always helpful).

In terms of the Client Interface, this means the capacity to answer enquiries on a range of subjects, or to direct enquiries to those who can answer if the information centre cannot. You do not need to have all the information on the premises – but if you do not have the answer to a specific question, you should be able to direct the client to somebody that does have an answer. The range of appropriate responses to any enquiry is in fact very limited:

1. Here is the answer to your question.
2. We don't have the answer right now, but please leave your contact details with us and we will find out for you.
3. We don't have the answer, but we know who does and this is how you can contact them.
4. We don't have an answer because that falls outside the HICs terms of reference for reasons of security, agency mandate, etc. (This last response should be used very rarely and must be backed up by a clearly explained rationale that is based on an established policy decision.)

One of the most valued services established by previous HICs has been to provide briefings to humanitarian actors. Although the orientation products mentioned in the previous section are extremely valuable, individuals (particularly those newly-arrived in country) find it much easier to talk to staff rather than consult a spreadsheet. Particularly important are logistics information[8] – covering areas such as access routes, stock levels, pipeline information, road conditions – and security briefings that give more in-depth information than the normal written reports provided by security officers. This requires having staff within the HIC with a deeper understanding of key humanitarian issues and the ability to communicate those issues, which may require extra training. In these cases the HIC may wish to facilitate briefing meetings that can address the entire community rather than one-on-one meetings.

[8] A sample logistics update from Kosovo is included in the Appendices (APP032).

The HIC is likely to have a higher concentration of IT experience than other organizations working in the field, and part of the role of the project should be to provide support for those organizations in areas where it would benefit others. Although the HIC should not be the IT helpdesk for the humanitarian community, it never hurts to help other organizations with serious IT problems. This can deal with issues that will affect the entire community, such as virus protection, and creates goodwill. The HIC should establish as the first point-of-call in areas such as database development, web development and GIS. By placing itself at the center of a range of IM activities the HIC will become the focal point for the humanitarian community – the shared resource for all information producers and users. The range of issues on which the HIC can offer will vary depending on the skills of the staff working in the project.

Box 9. Best Practice in Appropriate Technology

Guidelines on appropriate use of technology were developed by the 2002 Symposium on Humanitarian Information Management and Exchange:

- **Use appropriate technology**. Ensure that field information systems reach the broadest possible audience. Create software systems that are flexible enough to respond to data providers and field requirements.
- **Be aware of the limitations of technology (both inherent and as related to availability)**. For example, keep in mind that the Internet, while powerful, is not a panacea and can be ineffective as a distribution channel to and from remote areas or within many developing nation capitals. Consider making data products, particularly databases, available via e-mail, CD-ROM and for local download. However use the Internet to capture data entry from the field.
- **Use open data formats and inter-operable technologies**. Use commercial, off-the-shelf technology and create all information products using open data formats and inter-operable technologies.
- **Promote awareness and training**. Conduct technology-training sessions for non-technical humanitarian staff, particularly national staff. Educate senior decision-makers in humanitarian organisations about the purpose, strengths and weaknesses of information management and exchange. Broaden participation in information projects among affected and at-risk populations. Recognize that local staff's ability to work with the technology is an important determinant of success.

It is important to remember that the HIC should add value to the work of an organization. For instance, UNHCR staff will usually be far more aware of issues around refugee registration than HIC staff – but HIC staff should have a clearer idea about survey design, the information systems necessary to support the registration process, and analysis of the

outputs. There will often be resistance to the HIC playing a greater part in the work of other humanitarian agencies, which will have legitimate concerns that their authority is being undermined. The only way to deal with this is to persuade these organizations that the HIC is there to support them, not to gain visibility at their expense – again, playing the role of the honest broker.

It is important to support any external efforts that are made to develop national capacities in information management. This may be specific to coordination efforts – for instance, as in the work of the ICC in Eritrea with the government body ERREC – or more general government institutions, such as the Afghanistan Geodesy and Cartography Head Office (AGCHO). This is increasingly true in the large-scale UN missions with a mandate to support reconstruction that have become more common in recent years, and in the long-term emergency environments such as Sierra Leone, where the long-term emergency is punctuated by specific crisis situations. However, where the HIC is planned as a short-term deployment, any such intervention must be very carefully judged in order not to raise expectations.

The HIC provides additional capacity for the humanitarian community, but it does not have a mandate to build the capacity of either international or local organisations. This is partly for practical reasons – this type of activity is very difficult to carry out successfully – and for political reasons, since capacity-building is almost always a developmental activity that has political implications. However it may be possible to avoid activities that explicitly have the label of 'capacity-building' by including elements of capacity-building in ongoing activities.

3.2 Information Needs Assessment

There is only one way to persuade humanitarian actors that information management is worth investing in – and that is by delivering products and services that are simple, useful and relevant. A Needs Assessment should form the basis of planning services and developing products. While there are a number of basic services and products that will be relevant in any situation, an Assessment will give you a clearer idea of how to build from those foundations and indicators against which you can measure progress. It can also act as an advocacy tool to help other organizations to understand their interaction with the rest of the community.

The Assessment looks at what information organizations and individuals need to make effective decisions, and how they receive (or do not receive) that information. The aim of the Assessment is to get a clearer picture of what is known as the Information Environment.

Box 7. The Information Environment

Definition: "The conditions in which a HIC operates, relating to the sources and markets for information, the flows that connect those sources and markets, and the institutions that mediate those flows".

This definition covers a range of different issues that any Assessment will need to take account of. The Assessment process does not have to be a long, time-consuming exercise. There is no standardized method – it might be based on a short meeting with agency heads, a simple survey form that is sent round to agencies, or a series of meetings with key informants. If the assessment process is too complicated or drawn-out, participants will not respond well to it, or to any outputs that may arise. The emphasis should therefore be on moving quickly to the production phase.

The basic questions that an Information Needs Assessment should answer are as follows:

1. What information is needed? Information needs cannot be decided in isolation from the rest of the intervention. Establish what activities the humanitarian community is planning and broadly identify what sort of information will be needed to support these plans. Although there is a large body of requisite core data that is the same in any emergency, there will be differences in emphasis that will affect the collection and dissemination processes. Establishing the information needs should be done in consultation with heads of agencies and any coordination bodies, in order to ensure that the entire humanitarian community feels some ownership of the process and the content.

2. Who is going to use this information, and for what? The target audience and planned use of the information are both factors that will affect what methods should be used to collect, process and present that information. Be aware that the needs of NGO staff implementing projects in the field are very different to the needs of heads of agencies.

3. What information sources already exist? Before embarking on a costly information-gathering exercise, make every effort to verify that this information does not already exist. Contact other organizations – both in the field and outside the country – that might have relevant information and ask if they are prepared to share it.

4. What resources exist for managing this information? Who is prepared to take on the costs of information management? If you can identify which organizations are going to be gathering information as a normal part of their activities, it is easier to support and improve their efforts. There are five broad stages in any given process: Collection, Processing, Analysis, Dissemination and Incorporation (the latter where the results are incorporated into the decision-making process).

5. What constraints are there on successful management? There will be many obstacles facing all of the above, not just in terms of resources. Security concerns can sometimes limit the collection of data - particularly where access to specific areas or groups is dangerous. Similarly, sharing information contained in a report might be politically sensitive. Competition for funding also jeopardises information-sharing when organisations feel that their information might be (mis)used by others, and these concerns must be addressed.

There are a number of outputs that a Needs Assessment can deliver. A narrative report may be the best way to present all findings (an example survey is given in the Appendices (APP012)), but it might not be the most useful presentation format for many people. Graphic formats are often more useful – for instance, a table identifying available information resources, showing where it is possible to obtain current data in a form that they can use for planning, proposal writing, etc.

Two further steps will add to the utility of this table. First, add in the information that people need but do not yet have – the core of the needs assessment. Then turn the table into a plan for creating those resources that are needed by the community, based on the planned activities of the community members themselves. Timelines can be set for when these resources will become available – for instance, when UNHCR will finish refugee registration, or when UNEP will have processed the satellite images it plans to acquire – and plans adjusted accordingly.

Another useful tool is a chart indicating the different actors within the community and the flow of information within and between projects and organizations. This analysis can then be used to decide where to focus service provision (to remove bottlenecks, or to support good practice), to identify which products should be prioritized for development, to clarify different levels and types of information needs and identify the most appropriate means of dissemination. A coordination chart from Afghanistan is given in the Appendices (APP034). This type of chart is useful to everybody, although it can be politically sensitive if it shows key weaknesses. However it forms the basis for a shared understanding of the situation in the same manner as any sectoral analysis should.

As well as generating products for planning, the Needs Assessment can also form the basis for developing an Information Strategy. This is a more advanced exercise that

should only be undertaken once the project is established and has increased awareness of information management as a useful tool.

3.3 Types of Clients

One of the keys to the success of an information project is understanding who your clients are. This is the first step to building relationships with individuals and organizations, based on their specific needs. The list of clients given below comprises most of the groups that will be encountered in the field – but it is up to the project staff to assign priorities in terms of dealing with different groups, as priorities will shift as the working environment changes

Individuals and organisations working in a humanitarian crisis should remember that the first priority is always those people in need of support. Relationships with the clients outlined below should be established and maintained with this in mind.

United Nations (UN)

- Mission (e.g. UNMIK, UNMEE)
- Operational Agencies (e.g. UNHCR, WFP)
- Non-operational (e.g. World Bank, UNAIDS)

International and Intergovernmental Organisations (IOs)

- Red Cross Movement
- IOM
- Other

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

- Local (e.g. Mother Teresa Society in Kosovo)
- International (e.g. CARE International, Medecins sans Frontieres)
- Networks (e.g. InterAction)

International Governmental presence

- Donor (e.g. DFID, USAID, ECHO)
- Diplomatic (e.g. embassies, representative offices)
- Home (e.g. asylum offices in other countries)

National Government

- Central (e.g. Ministries, Departments)
- Local (e.g. mayors, town councils)

Products and Services

Military

- International (e.g. peacekeeping forces, CIMIC)
- National army
- Other armed groups (e.g. militia, opposition groups)

Media

- Local
- International (e.g. Reuters, BBC)

Private Enterprise

- Local
- International (e.g. Brown & Root)

Academic

- International (e.g. research students)
- National (e.g. national university, schools)

General Public

- Individuals
- Civic Groups (e.g. women's groups)

3.4 Product Development

The skill of developing new products and services is not something that can be easily taught. The key to successful product development is the relationship with clients. It is only through constant feedback from clients that you will generate ideas for new work that will meet their needs more effectively. This might mean simply adapting existing products for new roles, or it might mean creating entirely new products for a new market.

It is important to remember that product development is not just a case of agreeing to every request that clients make. Remember that you are serving the entire community, not just single clients, and ask yourself if the product will serve a range of interests. Bear in mind that clients themselves are often unclear about what they actually want. As well as tracking customer requests, it is worth spending time talking to client organizations clarifying what their needs are and how they can be met.[9]

The importance of being demand-driven cannot be emphasized enough. The most basic criteria for product development is, what will be most broadly useful to the humanitarian community? Project staff must be able not just to assess information needs, but to prioritise those needs and respond to them creatively. Factors such as urgency, feasibility, relevance and political sensitivity must all be taken into account before embarking on what might be a costly and time-consuming development process.

A successful product will always meet two requirements. First, it must be well-presented, with a professional appearance (otherwise people will not be inclined to use it for the first time); second, it must be easy to use (otherwise they won't be inclined to use it again).

All products and services should be developed with one aim – to improve the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance going to those in need.

Box 8. Sources, Dates and Disclaimers

Sources, dates and disclaimers must be included on all products created by the HIC, particularly on high visibility outputs. They are the metadata that will enable users of the products to make informed judgements about the credibility and utility of the individual product. In the worst case, they also provide a defence against accusations of inaccuracy, bias or misrepresentation on the part of the HIC.

The source(s) of data being used are vital to establish the credibility and legitimacy of the product being generated. Users need to know who produced the data in order to make their own decision about how accurate they believe it to be. Showing sources also enable users to go to the original collector of the data to get more detail about how the data was collected and what other data may be available.

[9] Remember that what a client wants is not necessarily what a client *needs*, and there may need to be a process of 'educating' the client in order to ensure that the final product is actually useful – particularly if it is intended to support the entire humanitarian community.

Showing the date(s) when the data was collected is equally important, as it provides a timestamp that gives users the opportunity to judge the utility of the product. For example, a map showing land use from data collected two years previously is still useful; but a map showing refugee return data collected at the same time is probably not. Including the date of production of the product itself is also vital, as there may be a significant difference between the date of collection for the data and the date of production of the finished product.

Finally, disclaimers are essential. Disclaimers can cover a number of different issues, but the essence of a disclaimer is to inform the user what they can expect from the product and to limit the responsibility of the HIC. For example a disclaimer that is found on all UN maps reads "The boundaries and names on the maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations."

3.5 First Run Products

These are the mainstay of an HIC, particularly in the early stages before GIS products can be rolled out. The following products can be put together with a minimal amount of data collection – in fact, it is worth checking that they are not being produced already, particularly by OCHA or NGO coordination bodies. The most effective way to gather this information is to attend coordination meetings or obtain the minutes and attendance lists from those meetings – these can then be processed into more manageable formats as indicated below. This is also a good way to begin building relationships with sectoral working groups, and can also contribute to the information needs assessment.

The Contact List should contain basic information on the contacts, telecoms and street address for UN agencies, NGOs, national government, donors and other major actors (for instance, UN peacekeeping forces, etc). This sheet will later form the basis for the 'Who' section of a Who's doing What Where database.

The Meeting Schedule is a simple but incredibly useful coordination tool. An initial schedule requires very little effort to put together, but the sheet will need a lot of effort to maintain accurately, as meetings tend to change location and time without anybody realizing. However it is consistently one of the most highly requested products in any situation.

The Sectoral Matrix is the seed for the Who's doing What Where database – a simple spreadsheet with basic data that can be expanded as necessary. While the Contact List has more detail on individual organizations, the grid format of the Sectoral Matrix can be expanded to capture activities in a way that the Contact List cannot.

Good quality Map Products establish both the credibility of the producer and also demonstrate the usefulness of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to people that might not have been exposed to it before. There is a range of maps that will always be useful in any environment. A list of **basic Orientation Maps** might include

- Route Maps
- Administrative Divisions
- Topographic Maps
- City Plans

There are also a number of **basic Thematic Maps** that are frequently requested. However these types of maps require better baseline data that may not be available at the start of an emergency – it may take time to acquire them (for instance, land cover data must be acquired through remote sensing, processed and analysed before it becomes useful to a general audience), or they may not be available without considerable investment (in the case of demographic information, which would large-scale survey work, if not a full census).

- Demographics (population numbers and breakdowns)
- Land Cover
- Land Use
- Security Update

Map products are 'multiplier' products – that is, the provision of maps tends to create more demand for those maps, and for related products. High visibility products such as maps can be used to create demand for other, less-visible products and to leverage information from client organizations – there are very few individuals and organizations that won't want their activities shown on maps!

Box 9. The Orientation Pack

Orientation materials are essential for humanitarian aid workers, both before and during their mission. A standard orientation pack, collecting together key documents ready for presentation to clients, is one of the most valuable resources that an aid worker can have. However standard orientation packs are rarely produced in the field, and an information project can provide an immediate and valuable service to the community at very little cost to itself.

In addition, orientation packs create excellent publicity for the project, particularly if they are well-presented – word of mouth will bring people to the door of the project to collect packs. This opportunity can then be exploited to introduce clients to other products and services, and to begin building working relationships with them. The orientation pack is also a 'multiplier' product, creating more demand for itself.

Broadly speaking there are three types of orientation material:

- Country Background, i.e. Historical Documents, Demographic Data, Maps, etc
- Humanitarian Background, i.e. Situation Reports, Assessments, etc
- Coordination Issues, i.e. Security Updates, Meeting Schedule, Minutes, etc

These materials have to be sourced carefully, but should be part of the information-gathering efforts of the project in any case. It is important to produce and market an orientation pack very carefully to ensure that it is most useful. An example orientation pack from Iraq included:

1. Welcome note from the Area Coordinator
2. Map of Baghdad City
3. Map of Baghdad Area of Responsibility
4. Security map
5. Key points in Baghdad city
6. Meeting schedule
7. Baghdad Area Coordination Office flyer
8. Brief on our proposed activities
9. Contact list
10. Coalition Provisional Authority organigram
11. Sectoral focal points
12. One or two background papers (IDPs, Gender)

Make sure that the materials in the pack are

- Clearly dated and sourced
- Accurate to the best knowledge of the project staff
- Presented in an appropriate form (whether electronically or in hard-copy)
- Updated regularly to ensure that information is current
- Added to as new documents become available

3.6 Core Products

The products above are key coordination and orientation tools, but they are only the starting point for building more analytical products for the humanitarian community. The three major exercises outlined below – the Who's doing What Where (W3), Survey of Surveys (S2) and Vulnerability Mapping – are all essential to improve coordination of assistance.

Although they are not as immediate as the basic outputs described above, they are of more practical use for coordination purposes. However they require significantly more investment since they are not just basic information sheets, but rely on solid information systems to support them. All three require a longer-term approach and work should begin on them as soon as the project starts.

Who's doing What Where (W3)

This is the one product that is universally agreed to be the most important priority for any coordination activity. Knowing which organizations (WHO) are carrying out which activities (WHAT) in which locations (WHERE) is essential if those organizations and activities are to be coordinated in a way that ensures that humanitarian needs are met. Although this sounds relatively simple, it is in fact difficult to implement, for a number of reasons.

WHO. Who is the humanitarian community? Who are the important actors, and how can they be contacted? The best starting point for Who data are the attendance sheets for general and sectoral coordination meetings. They will have names and basic details for the major agencies, NGOs and others working in the field – particularly in the early days before attendance drops off – and this is the start of your list. Organisations can then be contacted to confirm their details and fill in any gaps. Attend the same meetings the following week, but this time bring your contact list and distribute it. If the attendance sheet only has 'Name, Organisation, E-mail' on it, distribute your contact list with blank spaces for addresses and phone numbers.

The important thing is to start circulating the Contact List as soon as possible so that people get used to updating it. The List should be started on an Excel spreadsheet. This can later be easily turned into a database as long as the fields are consistent. This database can then link to the W3 database using organization ID codes as the bridge.

Other sources for Who data are donor and UN agency contracts with implementing partners, membership from NGO coordination bodies, etc.

WHAT. The actual activities that are being undertaken on the ground are the substance of the coordination effort. Although there may be a huge amount of activity being carried out, there are normally a limited range of actual discrete activities, and a finite number of Sectors in which those activities can be grouped.

The Sectoral Matrix provides the basis for the What data. Although there are generic sectors that everybody recognizes (such as Health, Shelter, and Water and Sanitation), each situation is different and it may not be easy to fit all organizations into categories. Once again, sectoral coordination meetings are the key to identifying which sectors are in use and which organizations are working in those sectors.

One particular complication that arises with What data is when the project in question is multi-sectoral. For instance, an NGO tasked with managing an IDP camp may be involved in watsan, health, food and non-food distributions, and education. This is not a problem for a simple Sectoral Matrix sheet as there are no relations shown between different activities, but it has proven problematic to capture projects that capture a range of activities in a way that is useful for coordination.

WHERE. As activities are identified they are normally associated with a specific location, and this is where geographical coding becomes essential. If geocodes are agreed

and applied, then the task of identifying where specific activities are being carried out (or are planned) significantly easier.

The main difficulty with collecting Where data is agreeing what level of detail is necessary. This is the result of different needs at different levels in the coordination process. A district level government official needs much more detail at their fingertips than the Humanitarian Coordinator, yet they will both expect a W3 database to meet their needs. The ideal is to have access to the most detail that it is feasible to collect and to manage - data at this level can then be aggregated upwards to build a broader picture. However this will not always be possible, and in this case it is generally better to settle for a lower level of detail that will produce quicker results.

A further level of complexity is added by two further needs for information. The first of these is a fourth W – When. It is useful to have a clear idea of how long a specific project has been going and how long it is planned to last. It is also very important to have advance warning of what activities are planned for the future. Although the W3 should start with current activities, it should be expanded if possible to include planned activities, as this information can make it possible for managers to address coordination issues before they arise.

The second need for information regards project funding – which donors are funding which activities, and how much they are funding them for. The role of field-based information projects in financial tracking is unclear. The OCHA Financial Tracking System (FTS) in Geneva is responsible for tracking global aid flows through the Consolidated Appeal Process, but relies on reporting by donors and cannot capture private donations unless the agency or NGO declares them. Once the transition to a development phase has begun, responsibility for financial tracking lies with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and other international bodies.

However this sort of data is very difficult to capture, and requires a large amount of groundwork to both collect and clarify the funding situation with individual donors and agencies. Field-based information systems may be able to go some way to filling service gaps in tracking financial inputs, but will never be able to completely capture this information. In broad terms it is not advisable for field information projects to become involved in this area, particularly when the only reason for the request is to fill a service gap in another part of the system. There are many pitfalls in financial tracking and it is likely to interfere with the project's ability to deliver field-based products and services.

Survey of Surveys (S2)

During (and after) a humanitarian emergency, a large number of assessments and surveys are carried out, mainly to support project design and fundraising. These activities are as diverse as IDP registration, nutrition assessments, demining surveys, etc.

In the past there has been no way of identifying what surveys are being carried out, which organizations are carrying them out, what data they will product – the results of all these efforts are rarely shared widely and even more rarely stored for future reference by other organizations.

The S2 is a way of doing this by simply conducting a survey amongst key actors to identify the survey work that they themselves are doing. To get the best results, the S2 must be targeted, first gathering information from the big agencies and NGOs doing large-scale survey work. Once the data begins to arrive, the S2 produces a variety of outputs that support co-ordination.

a. It creates a shared understanding of the situation regarding data collection in the field
b. It identifies assessments or surveys that might feed into each other, and organisations that may find it useful to collaborate
c. It identifies potential duplications or gaps in survey work that may need to be addressed
d. It identifies which organizations should be supported to ensure that the data collected is useful and shareable
e. It provides an initial overview of which organizations are working or are planning to work in specific areas or specific sectors
f. It creates a database of what survey work has been done as a guide for planning survey work in the future
g. It gives an indication of what reports and/or datasets will be produced by the humanitarian community in the near future.

As with the Who's doing What Where – and most of the products described below – the S2 is an ongoing process, not a one-off exercise. The usefulness of the S2 grows as more records are added to it. Over time it can form the basis of a metadatabase for new data, and begin the process of building a comprehensive data repository for the humanitarian community.

Support to Humanitarian Needs Assessment

Although the W3 database is important to identify the work being done in a humanitarian crisis, it is not the analytical tool that is needed unless we also have an idea of what the humanitarian needs are. Perhaps surprisingly, in many humanitarian crises the picture of humanitarian needs is not as clear as we might expect, for a number of reasons, but particularly because of practical constraints on gathering information. HICs have helped the humanitarian community to deal with this issue in a number of ways.

One way has been to facilitate the presentation of the results of data collection exercises, particularly in map form. There has been a range of these types of exercise, from the Rapid Village Assessment (RVA) in Kosovo to the Annual Needs Assessment in Eritrea to the UNAMA District Vulnerability Mapping Exercise in Afghanistan. Humanitarian needs assessments should be developed in response to the specific situation, in particular taking into account the resources available for the acquisition of data. There are two ways in which a HIC can support data acquisition in this context.

The first way is through collection of new data. Where the resources are available this is obviously the best way of building a clear picture of the situation. For instance, the Kosovo RVA was made possible through the cooperation of KFOR, the UN peacekeeping force, who had a large presence on the ground and spare capacity. A large amount of the survey work was carried out by these troops, the remaining work being done by a small group of NGOs with a long-term presence in Kosovo. In situations such as this, the HIC should provide multi-sectoral, inter-organisational support to the agencies carrying out new survey on the ground. Where it is not possible to collect new data – whether for logistical or security reasons –the next best approach is to compile, collate and present existing data. . In many cases this data may not have been widely circulated, or have been presented as part of a report or in a way too complex to be understood by non-sectoral experts.

In both of these cases, collection and analysis of data is the responsibility of operational agencies. The role of the HIC is to clean, simplify and present existing data and, if requested, to assist agencies in their analysis. Using GIS it will then be possible to map this data and present it in a form that can be easily used by coordinators and managers. Analysis can be carried out by agencies on the basis of needs by organization, by sector, by geographical area, or more broadly by oversupplies and shortfalls compared to identified needs. Once the data is mapped it is possible to begin to assign priorities for humanitarian interventions. In addition this type of exercise will often indicate locations and sectors where insufficient data exists to make an adequate analysis of the situation; resources can then be directed to gathering that data to improve the planning process.

Although these exercises should provide a clear indication of where the data shows needs to be greatest, it is not the role of a HIC to coordinate or implement those activities. The responsibility for coordination should be passed up to the authorities responsible for coordination (whether UN, NGO or governmental) and implemented by the operational agencies.

3.7 Dissemination

Dissemination remains one of the most difficult problems in humanitarian information management, particularly for workers in the deep field, who may not have good telephone connections, limited e-mail access and long travel times to an HIC office or sub-office.

Many organizations currently rely on receiving e-mail through a satellite telephone, with long and expensive download times. Although this is slowly changing, dissemination methods must take account of these issues. **E-mails** should be sent as text-only where possible (no HTML and no attachments). If documents are available then inform users in text, possibly with a hyperlink to an URL, and they can request the full document as an attachment or as a hardcopy.

Word of mouth remains the most effective way to raise awareness of your services and products in the field, and the best way to get good word-of-mouth is to make sure that service is good. Ensure that your reception area is tidy, efficient, friendly and up-to-date with its materials – this will guarantee that people come back, and that they will tell their colleagues. It is also worth attending as many coordination meetings as possible, preferably taking along products to distribute. This will get your project known to your customers and will enable you to get an overview of where the best opportunities lie for focusing your work. At the very least HIC representatives should attend the general coordination meeting and make themselves available to take orders and answer questions.

Although most people do not like to receive unsolicited printed material – particularly when their desk is already swamped with reports and faxes – there is a role for well-produced, well-targeted output. Once the HIC has established a basic range of products, it needs to make the target clients aware that the products exist and make them accessible. There are a number of ways of doing this.

The first and easiest product is a Catalogue showing exactly what the HIC has to offer the community. This can be a text-only sheet that describes the products, or it can mix text and pictures – particularly useful when you want to show people what maps are currently available. A Catalogue will mainly include items produced by the HIC itself (although it can cover items received from other organizations) and should be updated as new items become available.

While a Catalogue can easily show products, it is harder to explain to people what services are on offer. One way of doing this is to circulate Information Sheets that describe what people can expect from the HIC. As services will not change much, once these are finalized they can be used over a long period with little or no need for revision. Make sure that contact information for the HIC is included on each Sheet. A template for a HIC Flyer is included in the Appendices.

Data and documents collected from other organisations are also of interest to the humanitarian community. The best way of telling clients what is available is through an Information Holdings List. This is a simple text list that identifies the item and includes

some metadata so that clients can see exactly what is available. They can then visit the HIC (or the HIC website) to pick up a copy or send an e-mail request for the full document to be sent to them.

All of the above are easy to produce and versatile - they can be given out in hardcopy, circulated by e-mail and placed on a website. The weakness of these products is that they are passive, simply presenting lists of information and relying on the client to make a decision about what they find useful. Once the HIC is operational and more time is available to staff, a Newsletter can be issued on a regular basis to maintain the profile of the service and outline new developments. The Newsletter is slightly different to the Catalogue and Information Sheets, in that it aims to actively engage the client. The Newsletter can focus on different areas of the HICs work, providing a thematic focus that makes for more interesting reading.

Box 10. Managing the Product Line

Over time, the HIC will build up a line of products for use by humanitarian organisations. Some products will go out-of-date, be superceded by newer versions, or simply become less popular with the community. Do not be afraid to 'retire' these products, but ensure that an archive of all previous products is maintained electronically for future reference.

A catalogue should be created for the product line. This will enable HIC staff and HIC clients to see at a glance what products have already been developed. Unique catalogue IDs should be established, the ID shown clearly on each product, and the products listed by these IDs in the catalogue and on any order forms that are used by clients. The product line can then be synchronised with any tracking system being used by the project.

Products that are continually updated (such as a security map, or a situation report) need to be subject to version control. This means that each new version of the product has an identifier that differentiates it from other versions on the product itself. For instance, a security map that was updated every week might have a catalogue ID of SEC001 and keep this listing in the catalogue. However the first issue of the map might have in the legend ID SEC001-1, the second issue SEC001-2, the third issue SEC001-3.

The HIC will not be the only body project collecting, analysing and producing information. However it will be the only one that can devote a significant proportion of its time to the dissemination of information – not just its own information, but that produced by other organizations – through the products outlined above. This is another useful service that the HIC can offer to the humanitarian community.

Agencies frequently issue bulletins, reports, etc, but do not often have the time or experience to disseminate these effectively. Frequently, different organizations – or even different individuals within organizations – run their own mailing lists. These sometimes

overlap and sometimes have gaps between them, which can obstruct coordination and sometimes create security risks. The HIC can take a lead in developing a **consolidated e-mail list** (synchronised with the contact database) for dissemination purposes, making these lists available to lead agencies for sector coordination. This can be a single list with split subscriptions – for general and sector-specific issues, security, etc – that can be made available to any humanitarian actor that needs to use them. Having a central resource such as this cuts labour costs for other organizations, avoids duplication of e-mail bulletins and ensures that clients receive vital information more consistently and are not plagued by irrelevant e-mail messages that distract rather than inform.

The **HIC website** should have a professional appearance and be regularly updated to make services and products available. Although access to the internet in the field is the exception rather than the norm, the web is the best way to reach organizations and individuals working outside the area of operations. This can provide added value for organizations and individuals about to enter the country, to policy and desk officers following the emergency, and for interested members of the public. Some previous HIC websites can be found at the following addresses:

- Afghanistan
- Horn of Africa
- Kosovo
- Occupied Palestinian Territories
- Sierra Leone

3.8 Information Management Strategy

The next level of information management is the development of a Strategy – a framework in which these information needs can be worked towards, avoiding duplication and ensuring partnership in achieving key goals. A Strategy should

a. Be a set of Guiding Principles and Practices that the various actors involved voluntarily choose to incorporate into their work
b. Be related to the overall strategic direction of the humanitarian intervention. This provides it with the framework for implementation, as information management involves financial, human, IT resources, etc
c. Have clear and realistic objectives that relate very clearly to the needs that have been identified by the sectoral working group
d. Have the support of senior management
e. Identify clearly different types of information and the different purposes that this information is used for (security updates, baseline data collection, sitreps, etc)
f. Recognize that different types of information have different uses for different actors and seek to maximize information that is multi-purpose

A Strategy does not have to be a written Document, although such a document will be useful as a reference point. A Strategy Document might include the elements listed below, bearing in mind that each of these elements are only reflections of processes. A guide sheet for coordination groups is given in the Appendices.

Introduction. An introduction to the strategy paper, including the rationale behind developing a strategy in the first place and the aim it hopes to fulfill.

Background. A brief explanation of the context in which the strategy is being implemented, including an outline of opportunities and problems.

Information Needs. How will needs identified in the Needs Assessment be incorporated into the Strategy? Not all information needs to be included and there should be discussion of what is and is not within the scope of the strategy.

Roles and Responsibilities. This identifies that international organizations, local actors, Interim Administration and other actors that are directly responsible for creating, analyzing, disseminating or using information. These roles must be clearly described and accepted by the actors.

Implementation. This includes a prioritization of actual activities that need to be undertaken to implement the strategy, the identification of a team responsible for ensuring that those activities are taking place and clear management plans for individual projects.

Review Process. The strategy must be monitored and regularly reviewed in order to ensure that it is working effectively.

4.1 Management

HICs require good management arrangements to ensure that different actors working within and without the HIC deliver timely and relevant products and services for the humanitarian community. Identifying management roles and other skills within the project is important to make sure that the most appropriate set of personnel resources. From a management perspective there are six key roles that must be filled to ensure the success of an HIC.

These are roles, not individuals positions, and more than one role can be held by one person – using the examples below, the Strategic and Office management roles might be combined successfully. However this depends on the size of the project – the larger the project, the greater the need for specialized staff to undertake key tasks. Loading roles onto individual staff is a false economy – all that will result is that neither role is properly filled. Although each role is distinct, they need to work together to create success.

Strategic management covers the higher decision-making functions for the project. Responsibility for strategic management involves developing the overall framework within which the project operates and determining the direction in which the project develops. It also includes taking the lead in senior level liaison activities, briefings, proposal-writing, budgeting and financial control.

Technical management covers two areas. The first is purely technical – setting up and maintaining an office computer network, directing and training local staff in key technical competencies such as database development, incorporating new technologies, etc. The second is product development, which deals with originating and developing new outputs to serve the needs of the community. Product development does not rest on technical capacity, but on more intangible skills such as useability awareness, service orientation and design. Advanced technical skills do not equate to a corresponding ability in product development.

Liaison activities cover the essential networking that is necessary to build an information system. To create and sustain the necessary relationships it is important to negotiate political and practical difficulties. It can be a full-time job to simply attend meetings, yet this sort of work is the foundation of marketing the work of a project. It is also essential to have a role that acts as the interface for customers, a point of contact for their enquiries.

Office management covers the support functions to the project, including procurement, day-to-day finance matters, security, etc. This skill set is often de-emphasised in project management, with the assumption that the overall manager will also be the office manager. While this might be the case it is important to recognize that the two sets are very different and that the role of office management generally requires a much more active approach.

In addition the following technical skills are generally required for an HIC:

- Database development and management
- GIS development and analysis
- Web design and maintenance

There are also a number of support functions that may be required by an HIC, depending on the scale and type of operation:

- Administration/Finance
- Procurement/Logistics
- Human Resources
- Receptionist
- Data Entry (normally short-term positions)

A useful rule of thumb to remember is that an increase in the size of a project is normally accompanied by an increase in the complexity of the project. The result of an increase in complexity is that the activities within the project become increasingly specialized, with two impacts on management. First, the manager must ensure that the staff working in the project have or can acquire the necessary skills for the task. Second, the manager will need to invest more resources in building teams from these specialized functions, otherwise communications between the components of the project will deteriorate and they will stop working together so effectively.

4.2 Governance Structure

It is important to ensure that the HIC is responsive to the needs of the humanitarian community, and not just to one actor within the community. Further to this, it is also important to ensure that the project receives guidance on difficult issues and is accountable to its users. To some extent this can be built in to the management of the project, but establishing an inter-agency governance structure to support the project management can be extremely beneficial.

The decision on whether to establish a governance structure will depend on many factors, for instance the length of the project lifecycle – it may not be possible or desirable to convene a user group if the Centre will only be around for a few weeks – or the intensity of the emergency – where potential members of the group simply do not have the time to give to their duties. The decision to establish such a governance structure should be made as early as possible by the Humanitarian Coordinator and the Project Manager on a case-by-case basis, with inputs from heads of agencies and NGOs.

In this section, 'Steering Committee' is used for convenience. In certain circumstances the Humanitarian Coordinator may wish to convene an Advisory Board or an Executive Committee. The differences between these three concepts can be understood as follows:

Advisory Board	**Steering Committee**	**Executive Board**
No executive powers	Limited executive powers under the HC	Full executive powers
Provides feedback on strategic issues	Provides direct guidance to management	Provides direct management

Broadly speaking, a Steering Committee is preferable for a number of reasons. An Advisory Board will not create a sense of ownership and will not always provide a clear indication of what the clients want. Executive Boards composed of representatives that do not have an actual stake in the project (financial or otherwise) are not workable, as members of the board feel free to take decisions that may reflect their own interests rather than the best interests of the project. A sample Steering Committee TORs is available in the Appendices.

However the Humanitarian Coordinator and the Project Manager, based on their own assessment of the situation, should make the decision as to which type of governance structure is appropriate. It may be the case that a governance structure would not be appropriate at all – for instance, where the project will last for a very short period of time.

This decision should be made as quickly as possible after the project begins, and any governance structure should be set up as quickly as possible after that. Membership of the governance structure should ideally number no more than 10 members, drawn from all sections of the humanitarian community:

- Donor
- UN system
- NGOs
- Local government
- Where possible, an Independent body that can provide non-partisan input

The governance structure should be made up of stakeholders with a demonstrated interest in supporting the project and/or a commitment to promoting information. It should not be made up of individuals or organizations with no interest in or understanding of information management.

The Humanitarian Coordinator should convene the governance structure, with the support of the Project Manager. Quorum should be 1 member from each section of the community as per the list above. Meetings should be regular, although frequency depends on the nature and duration of the project. The governance structure should be dismantled at the same time as the project finishes; it may be closed earlier if it is felt that it is obstructing rather than supporting the project. At no point should the governance structure hold up work on the core products of the Centre (as outlined in the Products and Services section).

The governance structure acts in three main ways:

1. To provide immediate feedback to the HIC management on what areas the community would like the HIC to focus on.
2. To agree what products and services the HIC should develop and provide oversight on the process of development.
3. To ensure that data is provided from their own and other organizations as requested by the HIC.
4. To act as advocates in the wider community on issues promoted by the HIC such as data standards.
5. To provide strategic direction to the project

4.3 Institutional Arrangements

Each of the institutional arrangements outlined below carry their own advantages and disadvantages, and should be judged on a case-by-case basis. Any such arrangement should be agreed in a Memorandum of Understanding between the parties involved at the most appropriate senior level.

Host Agencies

In some cases an HIC will be hosted by another agency, probably one of the operational UN agencies. In many ways this arrangement is preferable as it takes the burden of dealing with day-to-day problems with the premises away from HIC staff. However the HIC should maintain a separate budget for maintenance of and improvements to the premises, or establish an arrangement to transfer funds to the host agency. Management should also be aware of potential problems created by this type of arrangement, particularly concerning issues around ownership of the project – hosting does not necessarily give the host agency the right to set the agenda for the entire project.

Co-location with other Projects

In other cases an HIC will co-locate with one or more other projects with shared interests, for example the UN Joint Logistics Cell. This type of arrangement can work very well both practically – with costs shared – and operationally, as it creates the possibility for mutual support and synthesis. This can work particularly well if the other party is not a UN project, as it increases the sense that the HIC is not simply a UN body. Co-location and resource sharing with other interagency projects and tools should be actively sought where it is possible.

Co-location with National Governments

In a few cases, co-location with the national government may be considered as an option. However this is generally considered undesirable for a number of reasons. In certain circumstances it may compromise humanitarian principles – for instance, where the government is one party in an ongoing conflict. In terms of access, certain organizations or individuals may find it difficult to get into project offices if they are located on government property. In all situations you will find that governments have a tendency to hoard information, particularly they feel it relates to their own security. This will prevent the effective functioning of the HIC, eroding the policy of open access.

4.4 Office Accommodation

Information Centres should differ depending on the particular characteristics of the humanitarian community that they are required to service and the operational environment in which they are established. The essence of an HIC is not the physical structure it occupies but the products and services that it provides – and in particular the people that work there, who will always be the critical factor in the success of an HIC. Given this important qualification, the physical offices of an HIC are an extremely important element of the operation. There are a number of qualities that are desirable for office space, listed below in descending order of importance.

Box 11. HIC Premises Checklist

☐ Structure. Walls and roofs are structurally sound; doors and windows are well-fitted.

☐ Climate. Temperature and humidity on the premises should be within the right range to ensure that equipment and staff function properly, with adequate ventilation to prevent overheating. If possible, proper insulation and climate control should be introduced, with air conditioners if local conditions require it. Lighting should be bright and constant.

☐ Secure. Security procedures should be clearly visible throughout the premises. Access should be able to becontrolled as necessary with varying levels of access in response to changes in security situation. Fire-fighting equipment should be clearly indicated and in good working order – smoke alarms should be fitted if possible.

☐ Utilities. Plumbing should be sound and a regular water supply is desirable if possible. Electrical system is safe and reliable; power supply is consistent and sufficient. Toilet facilities should be available on the premises. They should be in good working order and kept clean at all times.

☐ Size. Total floor space is adequate to house all staff and equipment without crowding. Storage space should be sufficient to keep all necessary stock on the premises – otherwise alternative arrangements should be made.

☐ Location. The offices should be as close as possible to the center of humanitarian coordination activity. In practice this generally means closest to UN mission headquarters, OCHA offices, lead agency offices, NGO co-ordination bodies or government co-ordination bodies.

☐ Access. Offices are accessible to general users. Preferably on the ground floor, open to the street if appropriate. Parking should be available.

☐ Layout. The total number of rooms is sufficient to provide separate working space for different staff. At a minimum, the premises should preferably contain the following areas: 1 reception area, 1 private office (for private meetings), 1 secure office (for servers, switches, storage, etc), conference room (for general meetings).

4.5 Setting up a Technical Backbone

The Backbone is the hardware and software necessary for the HIC to work effectively. Without this infrastructure the HIC will not be able to achieve anything except the most basic functions, and establishing it is an absolute priority. In addition to the following steps – necessary for the HIC itself to become fully functional – the staff of the HIC (not just the technical staff) should be exploring the IT set-ups of other organisations working in the field (particularly to identify potential problems with compatibility and inter-operability), ensuring that communications are working effectively, creating supply lines for technical equipment, and exploring possibilities for partnerships with other organisations in all these areas.

Outline steps for establishing the Backbone are

1. Develop an office plan showing which functions will use which room(s), and the distribution of workstations and cabling that follows from this allocation of space. The plan should also indicate the best networking solution for the space.
2. Set up PCs and peripherals in the correct locations, including the server. Link up PCs and peripherals as necessary and test. Staff should be able to use workstations as soon as possible, even if the network itself is not fully functional.
3. Network the entire office and test. Server printers and other peripherals should be tested thoroughly.
4. Set up the most appropriate communications system(s) for the HIC location, and route through the server. Basic internet connectivity for the office should be established and tested through a single terminal.
5. Configure the network as necessary to provide the entire office with connectivity.

4.6 Creating a Client Interface

The Client Interface refers to the parts of the HIC that clients have first contact with, most likely in a reception area. This is as important to the success of the HIC as the technical backbone, and the two should be set up simultaneously. Most of the components of an effective Client Interface are not based on a high-tech solution. The single most important resource is the HIC staff, particularly those charged with 'front of house' duties.

However it is an absolute priority to establish an accessible storefront as quickly as possible. This makes it easier for clients to get the information that they want, and also creates a good impression that generates return business. It is essential that this area be kept clean and tidy, with everything laid out to make it easy for the client to find their way around. The reception desk should have somebody on it at all times, preferably somebody in a specific receptionist role, who has been fully briefed on the all HIC activities.

The Client Interface should include

a. Mailboxes (sometimes known as 'Pigeonholes')
b. Reception Desk (with helpful staff)
c. Map catalogue (including planned products)
d. Reports archive
e. Magazine rack for new arrivals
f. Electronic document filing system (backing up c,d and e)
g. HIC flyers / HIC TORs available to clients
h. Order forms for products
i. Noticeboards
j. Electronic client tracking system (fed by h)

4.7 Safety and Security Issues

The safety of the staff of an HIC is the most important aspect of the operation. All other safety concerns should be addressed with this in mind. In addition HICs will usually be heavy with valuable equipment and security of the premises should be a primary concern.

There will normally be a UN Security Officer in charge of all security issues for the mission. It is important to maintain good relations with any civilian security staff and, where appropriate, military security (for instance, if a UN peacekeeping force is present). Do not, however, assume that following their instructions will ensure the security of your staff and premises – the Project Manager has the final responsibility for ensuring this.

Staff Security

Establish a contact list for all staff working for the project. The contact list should have name, street address, landline and/or mobile telephone number, and e-mail address as a minimum.[10] The staff contact list should be updated regularly and shared with all staff.

The staff contact list should then be made available to anybody with responsibility for security of civilians in the mission. In practice this means sharing the list with the following offices, in order of priority:

- The local Security Officer or warden (usually UNSECOORD, in some cases UN agency staff)
- The head office of the UN Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD)
- The Humanitarian Coordinator's office
- Any UN-sanctioned peacekeeping forces present

Security guidelines or procedures should be requested from each of these offices. Particularly important are UN Security Phases and accompanying evacuation procedures (an explanation of the UN Security Phases is included in the Resource Documents section). All project staff should be briefed on these, preferably by security staff.

Threat of attack

In some cases the HIC may be operating in an insecure environment where threats from military, terrorist or criminal action occur. There is a limit to how much you can do to protect against these activities, particularly if your project has a policy of open access to the public. A balance will need to be struck between the need to maintain accessibility and the need to ensure the security of staff and clients.

The key is to remain aware of the situation and respond appropriately. It is important to give all project staff guidance on security awareness, particularly locally hired staff, who

[10] The Project Manager may also wish to keep a separate list with details of next-of-kin for all staff.

frequently have a higher tolerance for risk. Brief them on acceptable and unacceptable behaviour on their part, what signs to look out for that indicate increased risk, appropriate responses to increased risk, and make sure that they aware of the security information mentioned above.

Basic preventive measures that can be taken include

- If necessary, secure exterior doors and windows with grilles.
- Exterior windows should be bombproofed with clear adhesive bombproofing material.
- Ensure that there are security guards working the premises at all times. Where possible go under the umbrella of another UN agency's security arrangements.
- If appropriate the office may be within a compound, providing an extra layer of security. The compound should have strong perimeter walls at least X metres high (CHECK) and topped with deterrent material (such as razor wire).
- External doors or gates should be extra strength with additional locks.
- External areas should be well-lit with nothing obstructing line of sight along the perimeter.
- Ensuring good lines of communications with all relevant security personnel.

However advice should be sought from the UN Security Coordinator on how to best ensure security in the local context, and also from the person responsible for security in any external agency that has agreed to host the HIC.

Fire Safety

Fire safety is paramount in offices where electrical wiring may not have been installed to adequate safety standards and where there is a large amount of electrical equipment. If possible have a qualified electrical engineer assess the existing systems and be prepared to invest in improving the system on their advice. If possible have copies of the electrical system and ducting for reference. Always invest in fire prevention procedures and equipment – and make sure staff are fully trained in them. Basic Fire Orders are included in the Appendices.

Key Control

Always ensure that that there is adequate key control. The project leader or head of administration should keep a master list. While individuals connected to the project should have access to all the areas that they need for their work, no single person should have a complete set of keys unless absolutely necessary. There should be a minimum of two full sets: one should be kept on the premises at all times and one should be located in a safe place away from the premises.

Network Security

In any project that relies heavily on IT for its functioning, ensuring the security of your computers, servers and other network components is essential. Network security works on two levels; hardware security (controlling physical access to the server, etc) and server security (controlling electronic access to files on the computers and servers themselves).

The UN has issued a Paper on Information Security, which is included in the Resource Documents section. A clear policy on security should be set down at the beginning of the project, outlining criteria for the types of data that a HIC will work with. Issues of security and confidentiality must be addressed, with different levels of access given to different individuals if necessary. In the past HICs have avoided this issue by only working with data that is public, but data or documents that contain sensitive information will often come into the hands of HIC staff, and it will help if there are clear guidelines to help them deal with these situations.

Box 12. Data Back-Up

The single most important aspect of data security is data back-up. Although back-up solutions in the field are sometimes difficult to implement properly – due to problems with supply lines, or for security reasons – every effort should be made to build a rigorous back-up system that all HIC staff are aware of and contribute to. There is no ideal back-up solution, but there are some basic principles that should be followed:

- Appropriate hardware/software
- Must be carried out systematically and regularly – daily if possible
- Must be carried out by staff with clear responsibility, practice and allocated time
- Must be supported by a structured filing system that staff understand and adhere to
- Access to essential data should be restricted, within reason. Desktop computers are more vulnerable than a central server
- Back-up data should be stored in at least two locations, one of which is off-site. Back-up locations should be as secure as possible, particularly with regards to viruses
- Data storage solutions must be checked regularly for integrity

4.8 Financial Management

Financial management procedures will differ from project to project, depending on the administrative structure to which the HIC is attached. For example, UNHCR or UNDP may provide the administrative support to the HIC – processing payroll, dispensing petty cash, providing transport, etc – and the staff will need to familiarize themselves with the specific procedures of that organization.

For basic functions of the office, such as procurement, it is useful to develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). These establish checklist-style instructions on how to implement specific activities, creating clear accountability for tasks and making it easier to transfer responsibilities between staff. However remember that SOPs are not written in stone – they should be regularly reviewed and altered if they do not work effectively.

Adequate financial controls are essential for the project to operate successfully and to ensure accountability to donors and clients. This does not mean setting up complicated mechanisms but ensuring that checks and balances are set up, particularly for tasks with financial implications, such as payroll, procurement and logistics, and maintenance.

The basic principle behind such checks is that no staff member should have sole responsibility for making such decisions – this is unfair on the staff member and potentially dangerous for the project. It must be made clear to staff that they are all responsible for their own actions, but the burden on management is to clearly designate these responsibilities and identify the level of authority necessary to carry out those responsibilities. Where possible, responsibilities should be separated – for instance, requesting, approving and paying for services should be done by different staff members.

Final responsibility for financial decisions always rests with the Project Manager. However in some instances an external agent (such as UNDP) carries out administration there may be a further level of financial control.

Keeping clear, comprehensive and consistent records is essential for financial management. All communications need to be recorded, and agreements made verbally should always be confirmed in writing. All transactions must be recorded in a standard format, supported by documentary evidence (receipts, invoices, etc) where possible. If an external agent is carrying out administration, make yourself aware of their rules and regulations, and follow them as closely as possible. It cannot be emphasized enough that keeping records is absolutely essential for reasons of both efficiency and accountability.

Remember, administrative procedures are not intended to slow down the operation of the project, but to facilitate it. If a procedure is preventing the project from working flexibly and responsively then it should be revised as necessary. Make sure that administrative procedures and any subsequent revisions are consistent with the broader administrative framework provided by OCHA and/or any host agency.

Box 13. Cost Recovery

The work done by IM projects in the field would cost a large amount of money if a private contractor carried it out. In the case of HICs the cost of these activities is borne by the donors, bringing down the operating costs considerably. However it is good practice to implement cost recovery as part of the project, for a number of reasons:

Creating sustainability. It is important to move away from donor dependency as quickly and as carefully as possible - cost recovery is the best method for achieving this.

Realising value. Although the products and services of HICs are provided for free, client organizations should recognize that they do in fact have a cost attached to them. This will stop them from becoming dependent on free products, realize that they will need to invest in their own information management capacity, and make the transition to a normal market situation smoother.

Reducing demand. The HIC will have a finite capacity to produce outputs. While these outputs remain free of charge, the tendency amongst customers is simply to take one copy of every map that is produced. Instituting cost recovery will reduce the level of demand by forcing customers to specify exactly what products they are interested in.

Generating interest. In general people do not value things in which they have not invested. By making clients pay for individual maps, they will start to use those maps more, rather than simply using them for decoration. This will lead to the maps being used more appropriately for planning purposes.

Payment should be taken in cash. This must be accounted for in the same way as petty cash is dealt with normally, abiding by the same administrative rules governing the project. Income should also be checked against the amount of resources being used.

Cost recovery can be introduced easily for physical products, such as maps and CD-ROMs. In order to make the scheme fair and accountable, a price structure should be worked out on the basis of the amount of consumables required for each product, establishing a nominal dollar cost for each product. This cost is then rounded up to the nearest convenient amount, converted to another denomination as appropriate and adjusted to take into account ease of printing (ie supply lines, etc).

If cost recovery is to be effective, a business-plan style scheme should be devised that provides a clear indication of the level of income and expenditure expected. The aim of such a scheme is not to make a profit but to cover for any production costs. Once production costs are covered, further income from the scheme can be used for maintenance or improvements to the project equipment.

If a cost recovery plan is successful (i.e. if a consistent level of income can be attained), the core costs of the project can be stabilized and further moves towards sustainability can be introduced over the long-term. However it should not be assumed that this will always be the case, particularly if specific products are unable to make a profit over their production costs.

4.9 Human Resources

Initial recruitment and deployment of staff for the project will be carried out by OCHA FIS under the Roster mechanism. However there will be the need to recruit local staff, and possibly international staff if the project life is extended. As a result it is important to ensure that recruitment is guided by simple and transparent procedures that are consistent with the framework provided by OCHA and/or the agency providing administrative support in the field.

The first step in effective human resource management is to identify the tasks that need to be carried out by the project. Once tasks have been identified, they can be grouped together to create broad descriptions of the roles that will be required to carry them out. These roles can be formalized into job descriptions (and may need to be in order to advertise the positions) and an Organisation Chart can be prepared to show the relations between the different roles.

Recruitment time varies depending on the organization carrying out the contracting and the urgency of the recruitment itself – the optimal time must be decided by the Project Manager. The steps in the recruitment process are as follows:

1. Check the recruitment procedures that govern the administrative office that you are using, particularly if that office is not OCHA. Every agency has different procedures and you must make sure that you follow them carefully in order to avoid future problems.
2. Generate a job description. Where possible, job descriptions should be developed with staff members to ensure that they are clear, relevant and understood by the staff. This may not be possible when time is short.
3. For international positions, first refer to the Roster maintained by OCHA FIS. There is a good chance that the Roster will have individuals that have the necessary skills, although it may still be necessary to go through a full recruitment process to bring them in to the project.
4. Advertise the position, using an abbreviated version of the job description as the basis for the advert to make sure that the advert reflects the job properly.
    - For international positions, use ReliefWeb as your main forum for advertising, but it is also worth using Alertnet. All applications for international positions should be submitted or copied to the OCHA Administrative Office.
    - Local positions require more creativity. There will normally be noticeboards outside some agencies where advertisements can be posted. Circulate job descriptions to other UN agencies and NGOs for interest. It may be possible to advertise in local newspapers, but this should be done through your administration rather than directly.
5. Once a sufficient number of applications have been received or the advertising period has expired, shortlist the most suitable candidates. Shortlisting should measure the suitability of the candidate's application against the requirements of the position as shown in the advertisement.

6. Interviews should be carried out according to the guidelines applied by the organization that will be issuing the contract. Once interviews have been carried, the most suitable candidate(s) should be recommended to the contracting organization.

One way of filling key positions is to negotiate secondments. A secondment is where another organization or project agrees to provide a fully-paid staff member to work on the project. The project receiving the secondment normally bears no costs except the incidentals incurred by any staff member – office space and supplies, transport, etc.

In the past UNHCR has been particularly co-operative in participating in these arrangements, and NGO co-ordination bodies have also contributed to the work of Information Centres. Secondments can benefit both parties, creating opportunities for greater interagency cooperation and support – the HIC will benefit from having a sectoral specialist working on specific issues, the seconding agency sets up a direct line of communication to the HIC – and should be encouraged wherever possible.

One of the most important issues in human resources management is ensuring continuity between successive individuals in the same position. If there is no opportunity to handover between individuals, there is huge potential for external relationships to deteriorate, for institutional knowledge to be lost and for the project to lose momentum. Although it can be difficult given the organisational constraints that operate in the humanitarian community, it is worth investing extra time and resources in this area to ensure that the project continues to be effective.

Remember, the staff of the HIC are the most important part of the project, and proper investment should be made in their development. The People in Aid Code of Best Practice is included in the Resource Documents section.

4.10 Inventory and Stock Control

An inventory is simply a record of the property on the premises, but is essential for the management of the project. Inventories must be taken of all the material assets in the HIC, belonging to the project or otherwise. A distinction is frequently made between expendable and non-expendable items. Expendable items are temporary and consumable – for instance, paper or ink supplies – and should be dealt with as stock. Non-expendable items are capital investments such as IT or communications equipment that are expected to last for the lifetime of the project.

Stock control is a matter of knowing how much stock you have and how much stock you need, tracking the consumption of stock and ensuring that you always have enough. Inventory of stock needs to be regular and frequent, and linked to your procurement procedures; as soon as stock diminishes to a certain level, replacement should begin automatically.

For non-expendable items, inventory can be less frequent. Once the initial cataloguing of items has been carried out, it is simply a matter of updating it as the situation changes – for instance, recording items that are lost, sold or damaged, or recording new purchases or donations.

The important thing is that the inventory should reflect the situation within the project accurately. As soon as a new piece of equipment is acquired it should be coded and entered into the inventory. Any change in the status of the object should be detailed in the inventory – for instance, items that are lost or damaged by staff members should be reported as soon as possible.

Inventory should cover all items used by the project, although you may wish to make a distinction between those owned by the project itself, those owned by other organizations but on loan, and those items that are the property of individual staff members. For those items owned by the project, an ID code should be recorded in the inventory and clearly and permanently marked on the item itself. A sample inventory sheet is included in the Appendices.

Items can be disposed of in the following ways;

1. transfer to another office (internal)
2. donation to another office (external)
3. sale (where worthwhile)
4. junked.

If the project is administered by OCHA, inventory is the responsibility of the OCHA Field Office. Disposal should be recommended by the Project Manager, approved by the OCHA desk officer, then submitted to the local UNDP Property Survey Board.

4.11 Monitoring and Evaluation

It becomes possible to measure progress as soon as a HIC begins. However to measure effectively requires a systematic approach that

a. uses a range of tools
b. is clearly understood and adopted by *all* staff
c. has the support of management.

From a service-oriented point of view, there are two ways of approaching the need to monitor the success or failure of the services being provided.

Quantitative analysis is the easiest way to begin. Two measures that can be easily tracked are the number of visitors to the project, and the numbers of products sold. The simplest approach is to measure the number of customers visiting the project on a walk-in basis – i.e. counting the number of people who walk in through the front door. A visitor tracking form can be established very easily and all staff briefed on how to fill it in; likewise, a simple log of products distributed can be kept. A simple tracking form is included in the Appendices.

These simple forms can be expanded with some planning, to include the organizations that individual visitors work for, the enquiries they make, the services they require, the needs that they have that you are not able to meet, and so forth. This begins to create a clearer picture of your client base. This information can be used to create or adapt your activities to better meet needs, or to change your focus if you feel you are not reaching the right type of client.

The data gathered in this way can also support other project activities. For instance if the visitor tracking sheet shows contact details for client organizations, this can be synchronized with the contact database. Logs showing the numbers of maps and other products distributed can be used as a basis for planning procurement of consumable supplies. The number of clients dropping in to the HIC may necessitate more staff being recruited to work in the Client Interface.

However quantitative measures do not create a particularly deep understanding of client needs. In particular they cannot identify strengths or weaknesses in the activities that the HIC is carrying out, or be used as a basis for strategic planning. Qualitative analysis needs to be carried out to establish a deeper understanding of the client base.

The first step is to introduce client feedback tools. Although the gross number of clients using the project provides a general idea of the success of the project (on the assumption that greater client numbers indicate that the project is heading in the right direction), only more detailed discussion with clients can provide more specific feedback. An example of this would be a response sheet with a small number of questions asking clients about the quality of service, existing products that they value, new products that they would like to see in future, etc.

After you have been operational for some time, it is worth carrying out a full user survey to get more depth. Questionnaires should be developed that capture the type of data you want to get about your customers and what they want from you. Keep the questionnaire simple – this should not be a difficult or burdensome exercise. You can begin by giving the questionnaires to walk-in customers and sending questionnaires to other regular customers (using the data you have built from the client tracking). However you should also try to get the questionnaire to those individuals and organizations that do not use your services, particularly if you feel that you are missing your target audience.

Monitoring customer satisfaction is only the beginning of measuring the success of the project, however. As with any humanitarian intervention, it is good practice to evaluate the impact that the project has had. Information projects are no exception, but at the time of writing there had been no evaluation of any of the extant HICs. No substantial work has been done to develop a theoretical framework in which to evaluate information management work, although a suggested approach to evaluating a HIC was drafted for Kosovo and is included in the Appendices.

However it is clear that the success of an information management project must be evaluated on a number of different levels, including information needs in the community, quality of service provided to customers, resource management, range of products and services, coordination with other organizations, marketing of the work of the project, market penetration, etc.

An evaluation will also need to take into account the particular operational environment – for instance, the levels of support received from senior management, the political issues affecting information sharing, etc. This range of concerns highlights the fact that, while the HCIC is a coherent entity, its work can only be judged in the context of how well it serves the needs of other organizations – and, finally, how well it serves the needs of the beneficiaries.

In addition, an evaluation is of no use if the lessons it draws are not incorporated into the organization, and the process of organizational learning is an integral part of information management. The HIC itself will need to initiate this process – generating discussion perhaps through presentation of preliminary findings to agency heads, or requests for feedback from establish partners. Any information management project should concentrate on capturing and institutionalizing staff experience to generate the basis for future projects, and also be a learning project that other organizations can draw on in their own work.

4.12 Exit Strategies

Strategic planning for your exit should be part of your thinking from your point of arrival. In practice this means considering how all your activities will contribute to the future life of the project – whether that future is a rapid exit, a sustainable transition to another organization, or a continuation of the project.

In many ways the end of a project is as important as the beginning, particularly if the intention is to create a sustainable institution with local credibility. Any decisions relating to the duration of the project should be made as early as possible to enable strategic planning for continuity.

Any exit strategy should be based on existing needs in the field, although it is understood that political and financial concerns will always play a part in information management work. The Humanitarian Coordinator and the Project Manager (supported by any governance structures that have been established) are responsible for deciding when and how the project should finish.

This section explores three broad options available to an information management project.

Closure

The most straightforward option is to close the project. If the emergency can be said to be over and the project has successfully fulfilled its function, there is a strong case for simply closing the office and withdrawing.

This would be most easily achieved in the context of a natural disaster such as those dealt with by UNDAC teams. Here there is a clear "emergency", an event that has an immediate and identifiable impact and is unlikely to be repeated. Once the initial response is over and reconstruction and capacity-building work begins, the project can legitimately close its offices.

However in complex emergencies it will frequently be more difficult to identify clearly whether the emergency is 'over', and therefore whether there is an ongoing need for information management support for humanitarian work. The HIC will need to continue discussions with both the Humanitarian Coordinator and the local OCHA office to make sure that the transition process synchronises with their activities.

Although there is a tendency to believe that closure of a project equals failure, this is not the case. All projects have a natural life cycle; key skills in project management include being able to identify how long that life cycle is, and take the necessary actions to ensure that the end of the project is a coherent and well-managed process.

This process needs to ensure that administrative and operational responsibilities are either closed down or handed over to responsible counterparts. A few things to remember regarding administration of the project are that;

- Material assets must be disposed of. This might involve returning items to donor organizations, sale or donation to other organizations, or full disposal if they are no longer useable. Be cautious and always check relevant UN or donor regulations on disposal of property.
- Procurement and logistics issues must be closed. If orders need to be cancelled, cancel. If it is too late to cancel, identify a recipient organization that can take on the order. Again, check relevant regulations on procurement.
- All financial matters must be dealt with, accounts closed and full records should be made available to the relevant administration offices in the field and at headquarters.
- Personnel issues must be dealt with responsibly. Any local staff hires should be notified well in advance of closure of the project, particularly if they are being given notice of termination.
- Office premises must be returned to owners in good order and any outstanding rent or maintenance costs paid.

At the same time, operational responsibilities must also be dealt with;

- Information assets must be 'disposed of' in the same way as material assets. In practice this means handing archive material over to another UN agency, NGO coordination body, or other body that will remain in the field and be able to make those resources available to the community. In addition an institution should be identified outside the emergency area where back-ups can be made available globally. At present the data repository provided by the Information Technology Outreach Service (ITOS) of the University of Georgia has been identified by the GIST as an appropriate and secure location for such storage.
- Key activities must be handed over to other organizations prepared to take on long-term commitments. This should be made easier if the project has followed a policy of actively pursuing partnership projects and helping partners to develop their own capacity.
- Project clients should be notified well in advance of the end date of the project. All outstanding orders for products should be met before the project closes – this may entail stopping orders some time in advance of actually closing the project.

Continuation

In a protracted emergency situation, particularly one with a regional dimension, a decision may be made to continue the project for a definite or indefinite period. A longer lifecycle creates the opportunity to develop more effective information systems, including an information strategy that provides a framework for future development.

Extending the project, however, can lead to a loss of momentum. As more is expected of the project from a wider range of actors, the workload increases and becomes less focused. If an IM project continues it becomes especially important to put in place a proper governance structure, clearly define and disseminate the mandate of the project, and build more durable working relationships with different actors, particularly national government and civil society.

Frequently the initial relief response gives way to a more long-term reconstruction and development effort. In these situations the structure of the UN mission will often be altered in order to deal with the changes, and institutionally this will require a review of where the project is located and how it operates. One point that needs attention is the "H" for "humanitarian", which may no longer be appropriate. The project will have to change its emphasis to reflect new concerns. The type of information required is often the same, but needs to be applied in a different way and for a different audience – for instance, to take into account a new government, or changing priorities through the year.

The experience of previous projects has been that there is frequently a perceived need for information management work in the field, but that this is not necessarily based on actual needs. Part of the work of an IM project is to help organizations to manage their own information more effectively, precisely in order to remove the need for a separate IM body, such as an HIC.

Transition

In most cases however there will continue to be a need for information services even after the initial stages of an emergency is over. Even as humanitarian concerns fade, reconstruction and development issues come to the fore.

Given this there may be a need for the project to continue in this new environment, bringing new opportunities and challenges. A number of possibilities might be considered:

- remaining in the UN system, usually under the management of the Resident Coordinator as head of UNDP
- creation of a local NGO
- creation of a private company
- handover to national government or other local institution

Each of these options brings its own advantages and disadvantages. As always, the decision about the final status of the project should be rooted in the situation and not simply a preconception about what an HIC 'should' be. The aim is to continue to provide useful products and services to the assistance community, building on what has gone before to create a framework for information management.