Managing Information in the Inter-Agency Context[1]

OVERARCHING PRINCIPLE: interagency comes before YOUR agency

STAFFING REQUIRED FOR COORDINATION IN INFORMATION MANAGEMENT:

- **One dedicated IM officer coordination:**

  o Coordination

  o Positive attitude towards partners and other organizations (interagency comes before the agency – i.e. OCHA, UNHCR)

  o Openness to data sharing and collective effort

  o Understanding of IM functions and experience in operations

  o Experience in coordinated assessments

- **One dedicated IM officer for each sector/cluster (preferably with GIS skills):**

  o IM Background

  o Preferably GIS and expert in the sector

  o Focused 100% on the sector

  o Data visualization/data management skills

- **GIS officer/s:**

  o Preferably national staff that knows the country and has previous experience in country as GIS, and preferably relationship with Government and companies working in GeoSpatialAnalysis

  o Good data management skills and data visualization skills

  o Check previous products before recruitment

- **Data analyst for cross-sector analysis:**

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[1] UNHCR Lebanon's IM team for coordination of the Syria Response contributed this section to the *Coordination Toolkit* along with significant materials on information management and needs assessments.

- o Data management/analysis genius

- o Good writing skills for reporting

- **One data manager/developer**

  - o Experience in open-source applications/databases

  - o Coder/developer

  - o Any code developed SHOULD be open-sourced!

ATTITUDES AND RELATIONS WITH OTHERS OF IM IN COORDINATION

Positive attitude towards partners and other organizations (interagency comes before the agency –i.e. OCHA, UNHCR)

Relationship with government: have good relationship with Government staff, in particular engage with statistics offices and other offices in charge of geographical data and other data management resources. Try to support the government with your work and seek approval of new products

Interagency branding: move away from each agency flagship rising through the establishment of interagency branding and SOPs for their use. This facilitates also the staff self-identification with the interagency coordination system, therefore cutting on potential flag conflicts between agencies.

Focus on persons of concern/beneficiaries: IM focus is and needs to be the beneficiaries. IM is likely to be pulled from different sides for support (i.e. external relations, donors, public information). IM is in support of the coordination to improve the response and should not focus on other tasks not related to this.

Knowledge sharing: each staff has specific knowledge that needs to be shared with others, through training and awareness sessions (this includes both other IM staff and non IM staff). By increasing awareness among staff outside IM, we reduce the dependency of external units to IM support for easy tasks. IM will have more time to focus on more important exercises. (training examples: excel, data cleaning, ODK builder, data visualization, assessments, other tools easily accessible)

Set targets and goals but without a rigid work plan to facilitate innovation and keep the interest of members in innovation

Social Activities: Facilitate out of office meetings and gatherings to improve personal relationship

Keep things simple: be aware of turnover of staff, technical capacity of other IMs, operational trends in staffing capacity when you decide to use a new tool. Keep things as easy as possible. (i.e. Sometimes excel is still the best tool)

Dedicated office space: for IM staff from other agencies to work in the same location (at least once per week) to ensure team building and sharing of new initiatives.

"Good Enough" is better than "nothing": If your solution solves 90% of the problems do not delay it to solve the rest 10%.Listen to individual comments and consider them, but do not stop what the majority agrees on because of one negative point.

ACTIVITIES:

IMWG: Establish an IMWG in co-leadership with a strong member of information management

Strategy: ensure that a strategy is in place early on and followed by all members of the IM group.

Standard Geographical Datasets: create and maintain CODs and FODs and ensure everybody is using them.

One activity reporting tool (3/5W): one tool to be used for reporting for all sectors. This facilitates the work of partners which generally report for more than one sector but are often forced to learn different systems (one example is Activity Info).

Data standards: data are produced and released regularly according to highest standards possible. Data needs to be easily accessible and ready for analysis ("clean").

Data and tools availability: make your tools and data available to others. The IM lead needs to be proactive in sharing access rights, passwords any other useful tool to IM core team. For example, ARCGIS online and CartoDB accounts are accessible by OCHA, UNDP, UNICEF but paid by UNHCR IM unit. This ensures the use of one tool by all members, and leadership is maintained.

Open-sourcing data and tools: if you create a new tool, make sure that codes and support packages are available for others to replicate or enhance!

Standard products: Dashboards, maps, reports – prepare common templates, share with everybody and ensure that procedures are in place for clearance and publication.

IM Roadshow: often IM units produce a lot but external units and other agencies sometimes are not aware of what is being done. Ensure that time is dedicated to roadshows that explain what IM does, what tools are available, what information is regularly produced,

where it is stored and how it is accessible. Ensure that the roadshow is not only propaganda of information management but a place where new issues are raised and problems are taken on by the IM team.

Field focus: Listen to the field and embrace initiatives. Work with field offices to work on solutions to problems. Do not approach the field from top-bottom but solutions should come bottom-top.

Training: train staff, train staff and train staff on everything you can! The more people can manage data and tools alone, the more time will be available for information management work.

Contact list: maintain an up to date contact list that is shared regularly. Make sure that there is a procedure in place for contact sharing (you don't want to publish an open document with contact details of everybody, but you may want to have a password protected one).

Dissemination of information: establish and maintain an "information sharing portal" –on data.unhcr.org (refugee crisis) or humanitarianresponse.info (IDP crisis) – this portal should contain everything related to information: contact list, data, products, meeting calendar.

IM involved in the planning process: often during planning processes the IM is involved towards the end. This creates issues related to the quality of indicators which IM will have to monitor and sometimes are not defined in a measurable way (SMART). IM needs to be involved and active since the first steps of planning processes.

TOOLS

Information sharing portal: data.unhcr.org (refugee crisis) or humanitarianresponse.info (IDP crisis)

Lebanon Information Hub – a one stop shop for information
The go-to place for coordination of information. This webpage includes the most up-to-date inter-agency systems, user guides, data sets and contact lists
http://data.unhcr.org/lebanon/

Contact list: Maintaining up-to-date contact lists of working group members is a big challenge in large operations. The IM team in Lebanon developed an online form so that humanitarian aid workers can subscribe and unsubscribe from mailing lists.
http://mailchimp.com/

Data collection in the field - ODK: mobile data collection technology for assessments and other type of questionnaires - https://ona.io/ - http://kobo.humanitarianresponse.info/

Common reporting platform: Activity Info for planning, reporting and tracking of contingency stocks: ActivityInfo: http://about.activityinfo.org/
Reporting: Starting January 2014, Activity Info was rolled out in Lebanon as the common reporting tool used by all partners to report on achievements in addressing the humanitarian needs. Partners input data against indicators and target figures that were agreed upon by each sector. Over 70 organizations/1,000 users have been trained and are using Activity Info on a monthly basis.

Planning: Activity Info was also used for planning both the RRP6 mid-year review and the 3RP. Appeals by partners all fed into a centralized database and sector leads were able to track submissions in real time. Submissions for the 3RP were done at activity level which will allow monitoring progress at activity level in 2015.

Tracking of contingency stocks: Agencies are using Activity Info as a common platform to share the location, type and quantity of their contingency stocks.

RAIS – Refugee Assistance Information System:
A complementary tool to ProGres is an online web-based database called Refugee Assistance Information System (RAIS), which synchronizes with ProGres on a daily basis. RAIS enables partners to search for cases and individuals registered with UNHCR. Partners, having signed the UNHCR data sharing agreement, can receive access in order to be able to view basic bio data of registered persons of concern, their address and documents, in addition to data on eligibility and assistance delivered by other implementing partners. This enables them to manage their resources more efficiently and report more accurately in Activity Info. https://www.unhcrmenadagdata.org/RaisLebanon/Login.aspx

CartoDB: interactive maps can be produced with very limited effort using CartoDB, all you need is clean data with GPS coordinates. http://cartodb.com/

ARCGIS Online and ARCGIS Collector (paid): UNHCR and partners are using mobile technology to continually map and classify over 1,500 informal settlements in Lebanon. This enables partners on the ground to easily identify communities who need aid and gaps in intervention.

Google Earth Pro: extremely useful to provide staff in the field with geographical information directly through KML or KMZ files that can be opened on their mobiles. Google earth Pro can be downloaded for free:
https://www.google.com/earth/explore/products/desktop.html

KML Generator: tool designed in Lebanon for the creation of KML files through excel. This can be done also with CartoDB now. https://github.com/JadGhosn/Google-Earth-KML-Generator

RawDensity: cool data visualization tool to produce graphs that are different from the usual ones. Just past data in the browser and play around with it!: http://raw.densitydesign.org/

Online dashboards: many open-source free tools/libraries are available online to produce nice and useful visualizations. Examples used in Jordan and Lebanon are: - DC.js http://dc-js.github.io/dc.js/ - D3.js http://d3js.org/ and https://github.com/mbostock/d3

Spongebase:
A joint project by UNHCR/UNICEF Innovation leads in Lebanon. Spongebase automatically collates information from different data sources and aggregates them onto a web map. Under development

PRISM: Tools to Centralize data collection, reporting, and visualization of protection related information, Survey Utilities, User & Role Management, Reports & File Sharing, Data Mapping - prismunhcr.org