TERMS OF REFERENCE
HUMANITARIAN INFORMATION CENTRES (HICs)

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A. PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this document is to establish the overarching IASC guidance for the operation of the Humanitarian Information Centres (HIC).

B. TARGET AUDIENCE

2. The primary audiences for this document are the Emergency Relief Coordinator, who has been designated as the steward of the Humanitarian Information Centre, and OCHA, as the entity tasked with the functional management of the HIC.

3. The secondary audiences for this document are:

   a. Global Cluster/Sector leads;

   b. Resident Coordinators/Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HC) in affected countries;

   c. Cluster/Sector leads in affected countries;

   d. UN agencies, NGOs and other humanitarian actors in the field; and

   e. Managers of HICs.

C. RATIONALE

4. Responses to major sudden onset disasters or new complex emergencies invariably involve a large and sudden influx of a diverse range of response actors (including UN Agencies, international organizations, local and international NGOs, Government, donors, military, media) with differing mandates and capacities,

many of whom arrive with little or no prior in-country experience or capacity. At the same time as the influx of new actors is taking place, the humanitarian situation is rapidly changing, with accurate and up-to-date information often scarce and difficult to locate. Humanitarian actors, undertaking activities in a chaotic fast-changing environment, often lack even the most basic shared information, often leading to duplication of effort and non-optimal use of resources.

5. This coordination challenge can be mitigated through the provision of predictable information management products and services to humanitarian actors in the field by a HIC. Based on previous evaluations and reviews, there is evidence that a HIC can have a positive impact on the humanitarian response, particularly if deployed at the beginning of large, multi-actor responses to complex emergencies. The HIC has been uniquely positioned in the response to contribute to partnerships among these diverse actors and encourage proactive information exchange. Notwithstanding the above, the effectiveness of the HIC has not always been fully realized. This is due, in part, to the absence of predictable and accountable guidance for sectors and OCHA in information management in emergencies.

6. Recognizing the positive impact of humanitarian reform and the establishment of the cluster approach in improving information management in emergencies, the IASC has determined that it was appropriate to update the previously endorsed IASC HIC Concept Note, which was approved in November 2004. This is necessary to ensure the HIC applies lessons identified in previous HIC deployments and better reflects the cluster approach. Therefore this revised guidance will also build on the endorsed *Operational Guidance on Responsibilities of Cluster/Sector Leads & OCHA in Information Management,* which was approved by the IASC Task Team on the Cluster Approach in October 2007.

7. By strategically and operationally integrating a HIC into the humanitarian response, information management (IM) within and between cluster/sectors will be enhanced. While the ultimate responsibility for ensuring appropriate information management within a cluster/sector is the cluster/sector lead, with OCHA having the responsibility for inter-cluster/sector information exchange, the HIC provides a clear added value as an emergency response tool through the provision of information products and services in a large-scale emergency.

8. This revised Terms of Reference acknowledges and builds upon the established strengths of the existing HIC model which are highlighted below.

    a. HICs have a positive impact on the humanitarian response, particularly if deployed at the beginning of large, multi-actor responses to complex emergencies.

    b. The IASC 2004 endorsement of the HIC as a common service enhanced the credibility and institutional mandate of the HIC as a service common to all humanitarian responders.

    c. HICs are dynamic and service oriented in nature allowing outreach and establishment of strong ties with host governments, NGO's, and other humanitarian responders.

d. HIC' services provide technical guidance and support to clients' IM initiatives through cooperative technical partnerships, supporting coordination and allowing for improved information exchange.

e. The provision of a physical and virtual space by the HIC has supported coordination and information exchange.

f. Through the building of local capacity and partnerships, the HIC has supported early recovery.

g. HICs have defined and promoted common information standards for use by the wider humanitarian community, thereby improving inter-operability of data.

h. The HIC has remained flexible and adaptable to the operational environment, recognizing that each emergency presents unique challenges, while maintaining standards on products and services.

i. HIC's client-oriented approach fosters cross-cluster/sector standardised information flows, which support information management within clusters/sectors.

D. GUIDELINES

Mission

9. The mission of the HIC is to support the humanitarian community in the systematic and standardized collection, processing and dissemination of information with the aim of improving coordination, situational understanding and decision making. In undertaking this mission, the HIC will complement the information management capabilities of the national authorities, as well as in-country development and humanitarian actors, in order to optimize the response and meet the needs of the affected population. The HIC will only be deployed in new complex emergencies or disasters where IM demands exceed the capacity of the Member State(s) and the IASC. In fulfilling its mission, the HIC will be guided by the principles of humanitarian information management and exchange in emergencies: accessibility, inclusiveness, inter-operability, accountability, verifiability, relevance objectivity, humanity, timeliness and sustainability.[1]

Mobilization

10. The HIC is a tool for, and is mobilized on the request of, the UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC). It may also be mobilized by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) when she/he considers it necessary.

11. Mobilization of a HIC will commence on the occurrence, or early warning, of a sudden-onset disaster or complex emergency in which early information indicates that a HIC might be needed. It is the responsibility of OCHA to advise the RC/HC

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[1] OCHA, *Best Practices in Humanitarian IM and Exchange*, Symposium on Best Practices in Humanitarian Information Exchange, Palais des Nations Geneva, Switzerland, 5 – 8 February 2002, Note: principles were abridged and adapted from the original 2002 version available at *www.reliefweb.int/symposium/2002_symposium/final_statement.doc*

on the appropriateness of dispatching a HIC in response to a particular emergency.

12. The presence of the following indicators may make a HIC mobilization appropriate:

    a. GDACS Red Alert indicating that a disaster has potentially a high humanitarian impact and the affected region has high vulnerability to natural disasters[2];

    b. a rapidly changing humanitarian operational environment in an ongoing or new complex emergency;

    c. a large number of new humanitarian actors entering the operational area; and/or

    d. a poor or degraded information management and communications environment.

Dispatch

13. OCHA, in light of the development of the situation in-country, is responsible for making the decision to dispatch a HIC. It is the responsibility of OCHA to develop appropriate procedures to support the mobilization and dispatch of a HIC, including its alignment with other OCHA emergency response tools and IASC common services, such as the Joint Logistics Centre.

Stand-down

14. OCHA, in light of the development of the situation within a country, can make the decision to stand-down the HIC before it is dispatched. This decision is to be made in consultation with the RC/HC.

Termination of mission

15. Once dispatched, a decision to terminate the HIC's mission can be taken by OCHA, in consultation with the RC/HC and the HIC Manager. This decision may be taken in the event that the evolving situation in the affected area of concern indicates that the continuation of a HIC is no longer warranted.[3]

Transition

16. The HIC should consider a variety of transition strategies, including handing-over to one or a combination of the following organizations: OCHA, UNDP, National Government Institutions, or private sector,, whilst ensuring the data is preserved for re-use by humanitarian, recovery and development actors. The selection of the appropriate organization for transition should be made by the RC/HC, in close consultation with OCHA as the entity responsible for administering the HIC, as well as Cluster/Sector Leads.

17. Triggers for transition should ideally be defined pre-deployment, but at the very least, within the first month of deployment. The HIC should closely monitor the stage of the disaster and evolve accordingly. Triggers are essentially the reverse

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[2] The Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System (GDACS) (http://www.gdacs.org/)
[3] Although a HIC may not be required, OCHA and Cluster/Sector leads may be able to provide the RC/HC with adequate information management capacity

as for deployment with the addition of adequate capacity on the ground within clusters/sectors for managing information and the adequate availability of IM resources (see- *Operational Guidance on the Responsibilities of Sector/Cluster Leads and OCHA in Information Management*).

Products and Services

18. As a client oriented entity, the HIC provides a range of information products and services for the humanitarian community with the aim of improving coordination, situational understanding and decision making. These products and services should be appropriate to the phase and needs of an emergency. In providing such products and services, the HIC is to ensure that they meet a clearly defined need and are user focused. In addition, all products and services are to be prioritised based on the information needs of decision makers.

19. **Products.** The major role of a HIC is to facilitate access to information products (i.e. act as a 'knowledge broker'). Whilst in some cases, such as thematic map production, the HIC is the sole creator of a product; the HIC will usually facilitate access to products produced by other organizations, or compile information into a single product based on inputs from multiple organizations. In order to provide access to such products, the HIC will make them available in electronic and printed media tailored to specific field conditions, with particular consideration given to humanitarian communities' access to the internet. The following specific products are produced or made available by a HIC:

   a. Who Does What Where (3W) /Contact Directory Information;

   b. meeting schedules, inter-cluster situation monitoring matrices and similar coordination products provided by OCHA and collaborative partners;

   c. ad hoc products that support work within clusters/sectors and across clusters/sectors such as: gap location and trend reports, survey of surveys, situation reports, media reports, and service/product catalogs based on stakeholder information needs;

   d. baseline standards such as p-codes, naming conventions and forms are maintained and proactively promoted to insure sharing and collation of information within and between cluster/sectors;[4]

   e. mapping products such as; general orientation maps and atlases, thematic maps, satellite image maps, and custom cartographic products;

   f. Geographic Information System (GIS) data and spatial data derived from satellite imagery and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) (as provided by partners); and

   g. Website to support dissemination of partner and HIC products.

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[4] Standards are derived from the International Organization for Standardization (ISO)[4], Sphere[4] and nationally relevant coding and standards when available.

20. **Services.** The HIC will provide both a physical and virtual space for the exchange of information and interaction among humanitarian responders. Specific services that will be undertaken by a HIC are highlighted below.

    a. Facilitation of the interoperability of information between and within cluster/sectors through the adoption, maintenance and promotion of standards for "Minimum Common Operational Datasets" and the use of metadata for sharing information, while proactively liaising with multi-cluster/sector organizations.

    b. Distribution, maintenance and promotion of OCHA's "Minimum Common Operational Datasets"[5]. These datasets are not intended to be the only datasets needed or used in a response; rather they are common datasets which will be found in a HIC by humanitarian partners if such data is available. [6]

    c. Maintenance of a data repository for the humanitarian response, with the responsibility of organizing and disseminating information and raw data if provided by partners.

    d. Provision of technical information management advice on survey design for needs assessments and surveys if requested by a cluster/sector.

    e. Provision of custom advice and solutions for cluster/sector-specific systems.

    f. Provision of technical information management training as requested by humanitarian partners, including national authorities.

    g. Provision of limited large format printing to support group coordination and planning.

    h. Provision of electronic dissemination means, such as ListServs (email groups) and Web portal/collaborative spaces, where clusters can post, modify and delete their own data.[7]

    i. In consultation with the ETC, if required and where appropriately feasible, provide internet access to the humanitarian community. This service, if provided, should do no-harm to local internet service providers.

Products and Services Disclaimer

21. The HIC does not verify primary data collection, analysis or methodologies utilized by humanitarian responders; rather, it clearly cites each source of the information and facilitates contact with the source organization.

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[5] OCHA document-Country Level OCHA and HIC Minimum Common Operational Datasets
[6] As outlined in OCHA's " Minimum Common Operational Datasets", datasets will be made available for all countries listed as IASC Early Warning and Early Action countries (propriety data may be require to be purchased from vendor). FIX FOOTNOTES
[7] Additionally, websites such as ReliefWeb, UNOSAT and the GIST are utilized as product resources and collaborative partners in emergencies.

22. A HIC will *facilitate* analysis and dialogue for organizations to derive information products but will not analyze, interpret or otherwise alter information from source organizations. Value added collation of multi-cluster/sector data will never alter source data.

23. With very few exceptions, all information and data provided to the HIC will be made available publicly; thus, confidential or personally identifiable data will not be accepted by the HIC.

24. The HIC is an information exchange platform, providing a transparent, neutral service for the collation, processing and dissemination of data. The HIC will not normally be involved in primary data collection.

Relationships with Stakeholders
25. Clarification of roles and responsibilities between the HIC and stakeholders is essential for a collaborative environment, as well as the overall effectiveness of the HIC. Performance of a HIC and the provision of services can be negatively impacted if fundamental roles and responsibilities between collaborative institutions are either not in place or adhered to. The HIC is a resource for the entire humanitarian community and is not to service the needs of any single individual, agency, or other entity. To this end, all data and information products provided to the HIC are the collective property of the humanitarian community, not the property of the HIC. Thus, the relationships between the HIC and key stakeholders are outlined in the following sections.

26. Local Government. In working with the government of the affected area, the HIC will:

    a. not duplicate national efforts in data collection or exchange;

    b. establish close working relationships with government ministries and when appropriate, through seconded staff, support capacity building in national systems;

    c. prioritize relevant national statistics, baseline data, standards and indicators for dissemination when available;

    d. support government efforts to collect, process and utilize data within its operational capacity in the emergency; and

    e. recognize the government as an information consumer, and will facilitate their role in ensuring that information is made accessible to the affected population.

27. RC/HC. In directly supporting the RC/HC, the HIC will:

    a. support the RC/HC to advocate for adequate IM capacity within clusters/sectors with cluster leads and global cluster/sector focal points; and

b. support the RC/HC, in consultation with cluster/sector leads, to confirm priorities of HIC support when arbitrating over competing demands and/or insufficient HIC capacity to satisfy all information needs concurrently.

28. <u>Cluster/Sector Leads</u>. Consistent with established Cluster/Sector Lead responsibilities in IM, in supporting the HIC, the Cluster/Sector Lead will:

   a. allocate the necessary human and financial resources for IM, including assigning an IM focal point charged with managing information within their respective cluster/sector and for coordination between clusters/sectors;

   b. contribute to inter-cluster IM coordination and support efforts to ensure coherence and coordination between *intra* and *inter* cluster information management initiatives, including storing, collating and analyzing data in compliance with relevant norms, policies and standards;

   c. generate up-to-date cluster/sector specific information, in a compatible format for cross-cluster/sector data sharing;

   d. advocate for the dissemination of information and product development within the cluster; and

   e. conduct data sharing via established protocols with HIC and other cluster IM focal points, in order to identify any inconsistencies, common gaps and to confirm consistency of formats; terminology, metrics and standards.

29. <u>NGOs:</u> Consistent with the "*Principles of Partnership - A Statement of Commitment*",[8] which was endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform, 12 July 2007, in supporting the HIC, NGOs will:

   a. be responsible for providing relevant, accurate and timely information to the HIC in accordance with prevailing standards;

   b. present their data in a format that is consistent with the categories and definitions employed by a HIC and OCHA, with the understanding that a HIC and OCHA will consult with NGOs at the beginning of an emergency to ensure that the categories and definitions are mutually relevant;

   c. commit to information exchange in a transparent manner sharing information that could be useful to the rest of the humanitarian community or affected populations; and

   d. help local communities to communicate their need and viewpoint to HIC and OCHA.

30. <u>OCHA</u>. In line with the *Operational Guidance on the Responsibilities of Sector/Cluster Leads and OCHA in Information Management,* the role of OCHA in supporting the HIC will be to:

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[8] Global Humanitarian Platform, *Principles of Partnership - A Statement of Commitment, July 2007* http://www.icva.ch/pop.html

a. establish a robust coordination mechanism to support effective information exchange;

b. facilitate and promote inter-sector analysis;

c. advocate for the application of the principles of humanitarian information management and exchange;

d. integrate the HIC response into OCHA's emergency response system to ensure that it is compatible with and complements other OCHA-led response mechanisms;

e. actively pursue the secondment of HIC staff and support from other organizations, (within and external to the UN system) with a special focus on transition partners in order to engender ownership of a HIC; and

f. develop sufficient internal IM capacity within the field office to take over the HIC functions if required.

E. GOVERNANCE

31. The HIC's added value in a humanitarian emergency is its rapid deployment, as a response tool, at the beginning of large, multi-actor responses to complex emergencies or major disasters. If this is coupled with effective management oversight, it can make a positive contribution to improved information management among humanitarian responders. Accordingly, as the designated steward of the HIC, OCHA's senior management assumes responsibility for the implementation of this Terms of Reference, including establishing procedures for the rapid mobilization of a HIC deployment.

32. To this end, OCHA is to establish a *Stakeholder Steering Committee* at the global level, representative of the international humanitarian community who can provide governance of the HIC to ensure that it is incompliance with the common service orientation of this Terms of Reference. The *Stakeholder Steering Committee* is requested to periodically report to the IASC WG on a biannual basis, a status report on the implementation of this Terms of Reference.

33. OCHA is also requested to assign a single point-of-accountability for the Humanitarian Information Centres, which is to be regularly communicated to the IASC membership.

F. TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

The following definitions shall apply for the purposes of this document:

a) **Collection:** refers to technical and non-technical activities that lead to the establishment of a body of data or information.

b) **Common Service**: A support function to facilitate efforts of IASC organizations and the larger humanitarian community administered by one or more organization(s) and authorized by an established inter-agency process.

c) **Dissemination**: puts information products into the hands of decision-makers and planners at various levels. Dissemination may be to a general audience or a targeted group of key decision-makers, in a variety of formats and through a range of mechanisms.

d) **Geospatial data**: any data or information pertaining to a geographical location, regardless of its form or medium, which is or has been electronically generated by, transmitted via, received by, processed by, or represented in a GIS resource.

e) **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)**: a system of hardware, software and procedures to facilitate the management, manipulation, analysis, modelling, representation and display of geo-referenced data to solve complex problems regarding planning and management of resources.[9]

f) **Information management**: covers the various stages of information processing from production to storage and retrieval to dissemination towards the better working of an organization; information can be from internal and external sources and in any format.[10]

g) **Metadata:** Metadata is a summary document providing content, quality, type, creation, and spatial information about a data set.

h) **Processing** consists of primarily technical processes that transform raw data (i.e. numbers) into a format that can be easily manipulated or combined with other data in preparation for further analysis. This includes activities such as 'cleaning', compiling from various sources, and using established storage and archiving structures.

G. REFERENCES

Normative or superior references

A/RES/46/182 Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations

Related guidance

IASC, *Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response,* dated 24 November 2006

IASC, *Operational Guidance on Responsibilities of Cluster/Sector Leads & OCHA in Information Management,* dated 17 October 2007

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[9] National Center for Geographic Information & Analysis (NCGIA) 1990
[10] Association for Information Management 2005 (See http://www.aslib.co.uk)

IASC, *Exit Strategy for Humanitarian Actors in the Context of Complex Emergencies,* March 2003

IASC, *Terms of Reference for the Humanitarian Coordinator*, 2003

H. DATES

20 May 2008

I.   CONTACT

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SIGNED:
DATE:

TIMELINE OF HIC PRODUCTS & SERVICES

Timing	HIC Products and Services[11]

Phase 1:
Week 0 – 3
	Products[12]:
	▪ HIC Website/electronic dissemination/list serve established
	▪ Schedule of coordination meetings
	▪ Who does What Where database (3W)
	▪ Contact Directory (W3)
	▪ Geo-codes / Place-codes lists
	▪ Pre-disaster population numbers
	▪ Affected population estimates (IDPs, Refugees, affected)
	▪ Assessments' cover sheets
	▪ Toposheet-style maps
	▪ Thematic maps:
	   - Pre-disaster population,
	   - Affected population/IDPs,
	   - Who does What Where (3W)
	Services:
	▪ Advocacy for and promotion of IM best practices.
	▪ Assistance to clusters requiring guidance on custom data collection projects.

Phase 2: Week 3 – 8	Products: The development and refinement of the products produced in Phase 1 continues in Phase 2. Other products developed in Phase 2 include: ▪ Assessment repository established (survey of surveys) ▪ Consolidated briefing pack(s) available with core HIC products and additional information provided by OCHA and Cluster Lead agencies ▪ Thematic maps, including those supporting gap analysis ▪ Support of minimum operational common datasets ▪ Common geospatial data repository Services: ▪ HIC Kiosk established providing Internet Café in collaboration with TSF and dissemination channel for HIC products ▪ Assistance to clusters requiring guidance on custom data collection projects ▪ Training in IM-related subjects

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[11]. This table is intended to serve as a guide only. Because response priorities will differ per emergency, it is likely that an assessment of priorities would take place upon HIC deployment in consultation with primary clients.
[12] Note that HIC products in Phase 1 are a best effort, work in progress.