

IMS and Humanitarian Information

“...Information is very directly about saving lives. If we take the wrong decisions, make the wrong choices about where we put our money and our effort because our knowledge is poor, we are condemning some of the most deserving to death or destruction.” (John Holmes - UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs. Quote from Global Symposium, Geneva October 2007)

International Media Support (IMS) is working on humanitarian information interventions to ensure that affected populations can get access to information and news relevant to their survival and well-being. The initiative builds upon IMS' yearlong support and corporation with local media in conflict afflicted areas.

IMS is part of the international working group Communication with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC), additionally comprising Save the Children (UK), Red Cross (UK), BBC World Service Trust, Thomson Reuters, and Internews and UN OCHA. CDAC works for an establishment of internationally recognised policies and best practices for humanitarian information in humanitarian interventions. The work of CDAC is based on a rights-based approach, adhering to the right of affected populations to information and the right to make informed decisions.

Humanitarian information activities serve as communication vehicles, through which the relief community can interact with the affected populations, as the people of concern can express its reactions to the crisis. Too often information and communication has been directed at the international community, leaving the local target population and their urgent needs in the dark.

IMS works for the provision of timely, journalistic viable and relevant information and news for local media directing news and information to affected population under humanitarian crisis and disasters. Reporting on humanitarian issues is essential to the coordination and reviews of interventions.

It is cardinal for IMS to work hand-in-hand with local media, as well as to coordinate with humanitarian organisations, in creating a level of professional information management to ensure rapid, comprehensive and accessible information produced with reliable and transparent tools and methodologies.

Besides avoiding parallel structures amongst international actors as well as between international actors and local actors, IMS works on the grounds that humanitarian information and communication shall continuously benefit local media communities, enable a positive post-emergency environment and democratic media approaches, and that it shall provide support for the long-term goals of freedom of expression and development of independent media and media organisations.

IMS approach is a holistic concept that can be adapted to provide the best and most flexible solutions to whatever complex emergency or crisis.

Humanitarian Information Support in Zimbabwe

IMS is running a pilot program in Zimbabwe. The Humanitarian Information Facility Centre (HIFC) is established to enhance the flow of concise and consolidated information on the humanitarian crisis. The HIFC works with local organisations to manage the information produced on humanitarian issues for greater coordination and impact. Simultaneously, the HIFC trains and supervise journalists in order to broaden the spectre and standards on reporting on humanitarian issues. A media monitoring component is added to the HIFC.

IMS and Nokia in Kenya

In May 2009 IMS participated in a Nokia Research Africa lead research project on rural Kenyan self-help group, the so-called Merry-Go-Rounds. In this research project IMS investigated the possibilities of including rural groupings as Merry-Go-Rounds in the planning of humanitarian intervention.

IMS and other humanitarian players experience a number of difficulties, when working in politically difficult areas, in sharing and disseminating information with populations outside the mainstream media coverage. Furthermore, too often the needs and interests of the recipient population are left undiscovered, and consequently too often interventions executed by national and international organisations do not live up to their potential. Therefore, it is crucial to IMS to gain insights and explore new ways of communicating with such populations. It is assumed that impact is more likely to be achieved when knowing the communication and information sharing patterns of the recipient population.

Categories of humanitarian information and service modules

IMS provides a variety of service modules that can function both as add-ons to predefined projects or as projects in their own right. IMS can, thus, provide humanitarian organisations with media- and information management expertise in humanitarian interventions, where resources may be limited.

Humanitarian interventions can be vastly improved when all stakeholders are able to focus on their core competences. Thus, IMS service provider modules comprise following elements to foster a synergetic relationships between stakeholders:

Humanitarian information activities are divided into the two sub-categories:

1. Activities deployed in sudden onset contexts
2. Support designed to address complex emergencies.

However, the mandate and structures of the two sub-categories are rooted in the same base: To improve the flow of concise and verified information through efficient media enabling people in conflict or disaster to take informed decisions.

Regarding the sudden onset context, IMS aims at developing software and structures and expertise to crack some of the difficulties in the area. In this aspect, information management is crucial to disaster response due to the lack of verified information available, and, at the same time, the need to take informed decisions in a limited timeframe.

IMS wants to start, continue and further cultivate the essential dialogue with relevant disaster managing entities like the Danish Emergency Management Agency (DEMA)/Beredskabsstyrelsen (BRS), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC), European Commission (EC) DG Environment and private humanitarian organisations with a track record in disaster response.

Complex emergencies cover a range of more diligent problems due to the different nature of conflicts it may address. IMS works as an implementer of tools that can be interrelated to existing media programmes, as IMS can develop strategies to coordinate partnerships and strategies as additions to already existing programmes.