SITUATION REPORTS AND INFORMATION SHARING IN THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMAN AFFAIRS (UN OCHA)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the coordination of large-scale humanitarian relief efforts, the dissemination of information from relief workers in the field is critical. A situation report, or sitrep, is a type of document commonly used by UN agencies, humanitarian NGOs, and other organizations involved in emergency response. It often constitutes the principal vehicle for information sharing between staff in the field, those in the agency's home office, and, sometimes, the wider public. Our project aims to investigate the challenges and opportunities for situation reporting in disaster response, with a particular focus on publicly available sitreps issued by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Our research was centered on (1) understanding current OCHA sitreps and how they are perceived by both creators and users, (2) what data collection, analysis, and distribution processes are involved in producing and consuming OCHA sitreps, and (3) what modifications to the process and document format might allow sitreps to better fulfill their role within OCHA's mission.

We conducted extensive interviews and roundtable discussions with OCHA staff in New York and in the field, with NGO workers, and with donors; subsequently, we integrated these data with several iterations of document analysis over a varied body of OCHA situation reports. Our findings demonstrate that sitreps are often a source of significant confusion, written without clear guidelines and clear goals for unspecified audiences whose needs are not fully understood. Combining the findings from interviews and document analysis, we will discuss the situation reporting process, the structure of the documents, and possible reasons behind the shortcomings of both. We conclude with a set of tactical and strategic decisions that OCHA could make in order to clarify the scope of sitreps for both its own staff and external stakeholders, and discuss the possible role that technology could play in addressing some of the issues we highlight in our report.

PART 1 – BACKGROUND

Introduction and Research Questions

The accuracy and availability of information plays a critical role in humanitarian response to emergencies. Situation reports, or "sitreps," are a type of document used by UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other actors involved in emergency response to share information about the situation on the ground. Though widely used, sitreps have been recognized as a problematic, often unwieldy tool with little or no standardization across agencies.

Our project aims to investigate the challenges and opportunities for situation reporting in disaster response, with a particular focus on publicly available sitreps issued by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). OCHA acts as a central point of collection and aggregation for information from a wide variety of NGOs and UN agencies during emergencies, and its sitreps aim at giving a general snapshot of the events. When we began our collaboration, OCHA had just completed an internal Information Management Review which identified sitreps as one of its key products for coordination and advocacy, which however needed a complete rethinking. In collaborating with OCHA we focused our research on (1) understanding current OCHA sitreps and how they are perceived by both creators and users, (2) what data collection, analysis, and distribution processes are involved in producing and consuming OCHA sitreps, and (3) what modifications could allow sitreps to better fulfill their role within OCHA's mission.

This report concludes the first phase of our project, which was dedicated to an in-depth assessment of situation reports and of the needs of their users. The second phase, which will take place during the summer and in the next academic year, will possibly be dedicated to the design and implementation of a sitrep data model. Although only two names appear in this report, the sitrep project is the work of four graduate students, all at the School of Information: Nick Rabinowitz, first year Master's student and instigator of the project; Megan Finn, PhD student; Elisa Oreglia; and John Ward.

This report is mostly focused on OCHA, but it also draws from interviews with NGO staff about their internal situation reporting processes. It is organized in three parts:

1. Background: literature review, participants, methods and limitations

2. Findings: findings about the current sitrep document and process within OCHA

3. Toward a shared sitrep model: recommendations for OCHA to move toward a more standardized sitrep model

Literature Review

"Several different types of assessment reports, often called 'situation reports,' may be used to broadcast the analyzed information to users…. Reports are generally presented in a numbered, sectioned format that describes specific response tasks within separate sections. This format makes it easy for responders to find and use the information that pertains specifically to their needs, and all subsequent interim reports will display information related to those response functions in the same numbered category."[1]

"We don't think about what we want to achieve with situation reports. Twenty-five page reports are a waste of paper, time and effort… For me, they should be very short and focused, as a piece of journalism: the key central message, two or three points that are essential for us to get across. But we don't do that now." P31, OCHA

"Without feet on the ground, situation reports are one of our main sources [of emergency information]. It is never easy to get information that is reliable and clear, that clearly states what is unverified, what the sources are, what is fact." Donor Roundtable 2

Situation reports, or "sitreps," are at the crux of this complex issue of information sharing in the work of NGOs and UN agencies in humanitarian intervention. Sitreps are loosely structured documents, usually in Word format, sometimes converted to PdF, that aim to give a concise snapshot of the current situation on the ground. Generally written by field staff on a regular basis for the duration of an emergency response, sitreps are intended primarily as a tool for sharing information within the responding organization, especially with key managers and executive staff who rely on this information in their decision-making. They may contain both qualitative and quantitative assessments of the situation, and may cover a broad range of topics, including security issues, analyses of the humanitarian situation and political context, reports of damage, program planning and progress information, advocacy and media issues, and more. Though most NGO sitreps are

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1 Damon P. Coppola. "Introduction to International Disaster Management." Elsevier: Oxford, UK, 2007, p. 260

confidential documents meant for internal use, sitreps from organizations such as OCHA and the Red Cross are also meant for a public audience. These sitreps collect information from different sources in the field, and have a dual purpose: to inform the wider public, often abroad, about developments in the field, and to help all the parties involved in the humanitarian emergency to be aware of what each of them is working on, as well as of all existing needs, and potential gaps in intervention.

Sitreps represent to their readers – often geographically distant - the main source of information regarding what happens in the field. The quality of the information they contain depends heavily on data collected through assessments in the field, but currently there are very few procedures and standards in place to assure a systematic and cohesive process of data collection.[2] Moreover, field office staff and headquarters often have diverging goals and priorities. Staff in the field spends considerable time gathering data and writing the reports, often fulfilling requests that they consider unreasonable,[3] and see little benefit for their own work in the process.[4] From the perspective of headquarters, sitreps frequently do not contain enough or suitable data to compile reports for donors or for the press, important stakeholders for any organization, which can be overlooked by staff in the field.[5] OCHA sitreps, in particular, are trying to provide information to a variety of audiences, from actors in the field to the local and international press, to donors, and each of them requires different details. Moreover, they have to gather and collate information from all of the parties involved in the emergency intervention, which presents a set of challenges that we will explore more in detail later.

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2 Paul Currion, a consultant in the field of humanitarian ICT who has been writing extensively about information sharing in emergencies, writes that "Data is rarely collected in a systematic way across the humanitarian sector…data continue to be collected on an ad hoc, organizational basis. The result is that it is almost impossible to build an accurate picture of needs on the ground, the activities that are being carried out to meet those needs, or the impact of those activities." Currion, Paul. "Assessment Report: Pakistan Earthquake Response". Emergency Capacity Building Project, November-December 2005, p.18.
3 "Requests that seem reasonable and realistic at headquarters may not be so reasonable from a field perspective. The question of how many beneficiaries we are serving seems a simple proposition – until you consider that we might be working on a household rather than an individual basis, in a political situation in which statistics are a sensitive issue, with multiple groups of overlapping beneficiaries across different projects, or simply in a situation where numbers are unclear." Ib, p.27
4 "It is…unclear to field staff what purpose the situation report serves at the headquarters level. There is little or no feedback on sitreps except in the most general terms, and the connection between the information they provide and any decisions that are taken are not apparent." Ib, p.22
5 "(for headquarters, sitreps) contain insufficient information for needs such as donor reporting, fundraising and advocacy. This often leads to multiple queries from headquarters to field for additional information, with corresponding duplication of effort." Ib.

Public sitreps like OCHA's depend heavily on the information they can collect from other humanitarian actors in the field. However, the way OCHA and NGOs look at information is very different. NGOs tend to focus most on information flows from the field office up to headquarters, and information generally moves up a vertical chain, from field teams to field offices to country office, and then on to the regional and/or global headquarters. They devote far less attention to horizontal information flows, and to exchanges of information between organizations and even between members of a single organization at the local level.[6] Most significant communication in the field is verbal: within an organization, staff members share information in general meetings, and, between organizations, staff share information during coordination meetings or informally.[7] One result is that individuals often hold key pieces of valuable information, and organizations seldom have a systematic way to collect and aggregate this information. While this verbal-based communications system does provide value, it does not scale across large organizations with multiple offices around the world.[8] More generally, many organizations lack formalized and systematic processes for information management.[9] High turn-over of staff and lack of appropriate training in information gathering and management further complicate the process.

Collaboration requires time, which many NGO staff members do not have,[10] and can be a drain on resources and get in the way of actual humanitarian intervention.[11] The work of coordinating bodies like OCHA can also be perceived as an attempt to direct the work of NGOs, and as a threat to their independence,[12] as the literature shows, and as many of our NGOs

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6 Ib, p.19
7 Ib.
8 Ib, p.20
9 "In most agencies this flow of information is institutionalised (that is, it is considered part of the organisation's policy and practice), but not necessarily systematic (i.e. formats and systems to support it are not applied across the organisation). Even where reporting is a clear part of staff job descriptions (which is not always the case), there are frequent problems in ensuring that staff do report, because these systems have not been formalised." Ib, p.19
10 Mashni, Ayman, Sheila Reed, Virza Sasmitawidjaja, Danai Sundagul, and Tim Wright.
"Multi-Agency Evaluation of Tsunami Response: Thailand and Indonesia Undertaken for CARE International and World Vision International". May to July 2005
http://ecbproject.org/publications/ECB2/Tsunami%20Multi-Agency%20Evaluations%20-
%20Thailand,%20Indonesia.zip ((Last accessed on February 5, 2008), p.56
11 Ib.
12 Marcus Dolder, deputy head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which is an important supporter of information sharing to reduce redundancy and to increase saturation of provisions, stated that "in order to preserve our independence, we cannot be coordinated by others." Kemp, Randall B. "Information Communication and Coordination Immediately After the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004 by the Sumatra Humanitarian Information Center". June 28, 2006
http://depts.washington.edu/mlcenter/assets/docs/casestudies/hiccase.pdf ((Last accessed on February 5, 2008), p.8

interviewees have mentioned; moreover, it has very limited powers in enforcing compliance to coordination guidelines.[13] Another considerable obstacle to information sharing is that actors in the field are often in competition for funding, publicity, and resources. Information is a valuable commodity that enables organizations to gain a competitive edge, and donors tend to reward program expansion, [14] which is not always compatible with inter-agency collaboration. This situation is exacerbated by the increase in the number of NGOs intervening in humanitarian emergencies, a phenomenon that has become particularly visible in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami. An evaluation report of the tsunami intervention noted that "NGOs, even with available standardized templates for recording and sharing information, opted to keep information from other agencies. In Aceh, there was so much competition between agencies over beneficiaries that they even concealed information from each other… Coordination is easily undermined by competition, and has been one of the most challenging and least successful aspects of the tsunami reponse."[15]

Inter-agency coordination

Despite the drawbacks and difficulties highlighted above, most organizations are increasingly aware of the usefulness of sharing information and coordinating relief programs to improve the quality of emergency intervention and the efficiency of resource allocation.

In the early 1990s, The United Nations took the lead in coordinating emergency response between its agencies and non-UN humanitarian partners, in particular with the General Assembly Resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991.16 This Resolution created the position of Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), in charge of overseeing complex emergencies as

13 Report of the Translating Standards Into Practice Conference: NGO Accountability and Impact Measurement in Emergencies Conference, p.33.
14 Tsunami Multi-Agency Evaluations - Thailand, Indonesia, p.12
15 Kemp, Randall B. "Information Communication and Coordination Immediately After the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004 by the Sumatra Humanitarian Information Center". June 28, 2006
http://depts.washington.edu/mlcenter/assets/docs/casestudies/hiccase.pdf ((Last accessed on February 5, 2008), p.8
16 "The leadership role of the Secretary-General is critical and must be strengthened to ensure better preparation for, as well as rapid and coherent response to, natural disasters and other emergencies. This should be achieved through coordinated support for prevention and preparedness measures and the
optimal utilization of, inter alia, an inter-agency standing committee, consolidated appeals, a central emergency revolving fund and a register of stand- by capacities." From the UN General Assembly   78th plenary meeting, 19 December 1991, A/RES/46/182. Online at
http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/46/a46r182.htm (Last accessed on March 2, 2008).

well as natural disasters, and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC),[17] to coordinate relief work between UN and non-UN humanitarian agencies. Soon after, the ERC was given the status of Under-Secretary General and became the head of the newly created Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA). In 1998, the work of DHA was restructured and expanded to cover policy development and humanitarian advocacy, and was renamed the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).[18] IASC remains the primary mechanism through which OCHA carries out its functions of coordination of humanitarian interventions and response to complex emergencies.

OCHA is behind two of the most high-profile initiatives in inter-agency information sharing that have emerged in the past few years: Humanitarian Information Centers (HIC) and the cluster approach.[19] HICs are "open access facilities established in conflict and post-conflict zones to support the humanitarian assistance through the provision of information resources."[20] They began informally in Rwanda in 1994, but the first official HIC was set up in Kosovo in 1999. Called the Humanitarian Community Information Centre (HCIC –the word 'Community' was dropped almost immediately and they are now known as HIC), it provided information on the activities carried out by humanitarian agencies in the field, and was coordinated by OCHA's Humanitarian Coordinator and the agency's Geographic Information Support Team (GIST), together with a NGO representative acting as a liaison officer.[21] HICs were subsequently deployed during different emergencies (Sierra Leone and Eritrea in 2000, Afghanistan in 2001, etc), to mixed reviews: they are widely used and supply a number of common data, collected from different sources, that are useful especially for smaller NGOs that do not have the

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17 IASC is a "forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners." http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/about/default.asp (Last accessed on March 1, 2008).

18 From the UN-OCHA website, http://ochaonline.un.org/AboutOCHA/tabid/1076/Default.aspx (Last accessed on March 3, 2008).

19 It is important to note, however, that OCHA has not yet established clearly its leadership in the data gathering and coordination work in emergencies, and different agencies – both UN and non-UN – have assumed the 'lead information broker' role in different crises. See Currion, Paul. "A Little Learning Is A Dangerous Thing: Five Years of Information Management." Humanitarian Practice Network, 2006? http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?ID=2797 (Last accessed on March 1, 2008, and Sida, Lewis and Chris Szpak, An Evaluation of Humanitarian Information Centers including Case Studies of HICs for Iraq, Afghanistan, and Liberia. Jointly Funded by USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Date?

20 Stauffacher, Daniel, William Drake, Paul Currion and Julia Steinberger, Information and Communication Technology for Peace: The Role of ICT in Preventing, Responding to and Recovering from Conflict. New York, N.Y. : United Nations ICT Task Force, 2005. p26

21 Sida, Lewis and Chris Szpak, An Evaluation of Humanitarian Information Centers including Case Studies of HICs for Iraq, Afghanistan, and Liberia. Jointly Funded by USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Date? P.46 and 51.

resources to do comprehensive situation assessments. The manner and timeliness in which this information is collated and distributed, however, varies widely. In particular, HICs have generally not been able to provide need and gap analysis in a timely manner, making inter-agency coordination work more difficult. The biggest problem, however, is that the work of HICs is not systematized enough. The information they gather is frequently considered not timely and/or not relevant by its actual consumers, and it can be very fragmentary, leading to decisions made without a clear picture of the situation.[22] Although HICs would seem like a natural provider of information for OCHA's sitreps, not a single one of our interviewees as even mentioned them.

One of the most interesting tools implemented by OCHA within HICs is the *Who does What Where Database and Contact Management Directory* application (3W), an online guide with key information about different organizations' projects, maps and contact information.[23] However, the process organizations have to go through in order to submit data is very rigid and cumbersome,[24] and often information from smaller NGOs is missing. As we will see, many of our interviewees who use OCHA sitreps have mentioned the '3W – Who What Where' as crucial information that they would like to see from OCHA, but are not.

The second important initiative backed by OCHA is the so-called 'cluster approach,' introduced "as a way of addressing gaps and strengthening the effectiveness of humanitarian response through building partnerships,"[25] and to increase accountability during international relief efforts. IASC has designated eleven clusters, each under a global cluster lead, responsible for standards and policy-setting, and a field-based lead, that may be different in different emergencies.[26] Leads develop and maintain links with all the entities that respond to

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22 Currion, Paul. "A Little Learning Is A Dangerous Thing: Five Years of Information Management." Humanitarian Practice Network, 2006? http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?ID=2797 (Last accessed on March 1, 2008).
23 http://3w.unocha.org (Last accessed on February 26, 2008).
24 See for example the data submission form maintained by the Information Management Unit of OCHA Sri Lanka, at http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/srilanka/docs/3W_data_collection-how_it_works.pdf (Last accessed on March 2, 2008.
25 On the Humanitarian Reform website, set up following a review of humanitarian response carried out in 2005 under the auspices of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. At http://www.humanitarianreform.org/humanitarianreform/Default.aspx?tabid=70 (Last accessed on February 19, 2008).
26 Agriculture, led by FAO; Camp Coordination/Management, led by UNHCR and IOM; Early Recovery, UNDP; Education, UNICEF and Save The Children UK; Emergency Shelter, UNHCR and IFRC (Convener); Emergency Telecommunications, OCHA/UNICEF/WFP; Health, WHO; Logistics, WFP; Nutrition, UNICEF; Protection, UNHCR/OHCHR/UNICEF; Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, UNICEF.

emergencies: governments and local authorities, local civil society, and NGOs. Once again, there is a focus on organizing collective efforts, sharing information, and avoiding duplication and gaps. And once again, the results have been mixed, with a number of NGOs weary of the centralized and yet uncoordinated approach[27] and of the proliferation of coordination meetings.[28] Our research findings are completely aligned with this position.

The initiatives described above represent only a fraction of the efforts undertaken in the past few years to improve communication and create a more organized, and thus more effective, work flow during humanitarian emergencies. However, the practical results of these coordination initiatives – in terms of best practices, standards, or even easier work conditions - do not seem proportional to the effort that goes into them. As noted above, this is due partly to the significant increase in the number of NGOs involved in humanitarian efforts in the past decade, and partly to the mostly *ad hoc* approach to coordination initiatives. In 2005, Solomon & Brown noted that "HICs and humanitarian operational centers (HOCs) and NGO councils have played important and variously successful roles in field information sharing. Yet, each instance of cooperation has been worked out more or less on an ad hoc basis. To date, there has been no agreement about funding for mechanisms, procedures, responsibilities, or systems for information sharing, much less data standards. Moreover, scanty documentation has prevented others from learning from these useful and important experiences."[29] Three years later, despite improvements in specific areas, this is still mostly true.

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http://www.humanitarianreform.org/humanitarianreform/Default.aspx?tabid=70 (Last accessed on February 19, 2008).

27 As Currion notes, "More problematically, there is no cluster for coordinating data collection. In Pakistan, I found that NGOs were being asked to fill in six different data collection forms for various shelter cluster meetings. The Pakistan response was plagued by familiar problems: multiple assessments in some areas and no assessments in others; data collected in different formats by different agencies; information not being shared effectively." "A Little Learning Is A Dangerous Thing: Five Years of Information Management." Humanitarian Practice Network, 2006? http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?ID=2797 (Last accessed on March 1, 2008).

28 "Kenya: Crisis Highlights Cluster Complications." 12 February 2008, on IRIN, Humanitarian News and Analysis, another project by UN OCHA. http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=76698 (Last accessed on February 29, 2008).

29 Richard Solomon, Sheryl J. Brown. "Creating a Common Communications Culture: Interoperability in Crisis Management." In Virtual Diplomacy Series No 17, August 2005. Online at http://www.usip.org/virtualdiplomacy/publications/reports/17.html (Last accessed on November 17, 2007).

Participants

"The work you are doing is very interesting and I would very much be interested in knowing the outcome of it. As far as providing information to you regarding sitreps from our organization, I am not in a position to respond to your questions and requests." (A potential NGO interviewee)

When we began our project, in October 2007, we were focusing on NGOs internal sitreps. We knew that gaining access to the range of participants and documents we needed for our research was going to be a challenge. NGO staff are hard-to-contact and typically very busy, and, as we quickly found, NGOs can be very protective of their internal data. Despite having a reasonable network of personal contacts, and despite intense efforts to find interviewees and organizations willing to work with us, we couldn't find any NGO ready to commit to the project to the point of sharing their situation reports. Earlier this year, we extended our outreach efforts, but did not get better results. Many people expressed a great deal of interest in our project, and a few agreed to talk to us on a personal basis, but as the quote above shows, most of the people we contacted commented that it was a long overdue project, and expressed interest in seeing the results of our research, but not to participate in it. We are still unclear about the reasons for this behavior. Partly, it is due to the hectic and often unpredictable environment where these people work. Partly, sitreps are seen as an inevitable evil, used as the quickest way to keep management at headquarters "informed and off the back of field staff" *(P11, NGO)* but without enough value to justify the investment in time and in institutional energy necessary to change them. And finally, part of this reluctance may perhaps be understood through the lens of the academic literature on NGO accountability and learning, which points out how NGOs often lack effective ways of learning from what they do and improve upon it, not in the least because they lack effective information systems.[30] These outreach efforts, nonetheless, yielded a few, extremely useful interviews with NGO staff from different organizations, which complemented the ones we did during Fall 2007, and allowed us to better understand the issue of information sharing and cooperation at field level from the NGO viewpoint.

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30 See David Lewis and Shirin Madon. "Information Systems and Nongovernmental Development Organizations: Advocacy, Organizational Learning, and Accountability." The Information Society, No. 20, 2004. pp119-121.

An email we had sent to the Humanitarian ICT mailing list[31] as part of our outreach efforts was forwarded to OCHA, which contacted us to see if our work could inform the revision of their own situation reports. As mentioned earlier, the Information Management Review that OCHA had just conducted indicated several issues with sitreps, and OCHA was keen to address them. OCHA sitreps are public, which was very useful for us as we could have access to a corpus of documents large enough to be meaningful from a document analysis viewpoint; moreover, if OCHA sitreps showed enough similarities with NGO sitreps to justify a shared data model, OCHA would be in a good position to implement and diffuse sitrep standards among different humanitarian operators, making information sharing more effective for all parties involved.

With funding from the UC Berkeley *Big Ideas @ Berkeley* office and from the UC Berkeley School of Information ISD Clinic we went to New York during the week of March 24 – 28, where we conducted two roundtables and a series of interviews with OCHA staff, in person and over the phone. In the following weeks, we continued to interview OCHA staff over the phone, and we conducted two phone roundtable with donors, also organized by OCHA. We will discuss the details of our interviews in the findings section.

Methods

Because of our unfamiliarity with the field, we chose a qualitative approach to studying. During the first part of the project (October to December 07) we experimented with different methods, and identified interviews and document analysis as the most useful ones for our purposes. Interviews, in particular, were a natural choice, since they allowed us to understand the process as a whole and explore how it fit in the culture of different organizations. Our goal was to understand the role sitreps play in the wider information exchange and cooperation in humanitarian intervention. Semi-structured interviews uncovered issues that we would not have found by simply looking at the documents.

Document analysis was also a natural choice, to allow us to look in a systematic way at the corpus of documents, and as a complement to the interviews. By analyzing actual sitreps, we were able to cross-reference and ground the interviews, find answers to questions that

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31 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/humanitarian-ict/

emerged from the interviews and discover questions to ask interviewees. To a certain extent, document analysis served as our proxy to being on the ground.

Limitations

The main limitation in working with OCHA was that the office itself chose the people we interviewed, and most of our interviewees were at the New York headquarters rather than in the field, or in Geneva, where the second headquarters of OCHA is located. Moreover, a few people commented that more senior desk officers in New York were not interested in participating in the project, possibly because they had seen several attempts to reform sitreps that were never completed, and are skeptical about the entire process. This means that our findings are very skewed toward the view of the New York headquarters, and that the concerns and viewpoints of a significant part of this constituency may anyway be missing from our results. We are well aware of this, and we believe that by triangulating our findings between interviews and document analysis, speaking with people involved at different levels and in different roles in the process, and conduct interviews with external stakeholders such as donors and NGO staff, we have at least partly mitigated the effect of this partiality.

The biggest limitation of our research, however, is that it is all based on second-hand sources about information sharing processes in the field. We did not have a chance to visit the field, even though we believe that participant observation is a fundamental part of this project. Users at a field level are those who will bear the brunt of any change to the sitrep format, and it is important, as already noted in the OCHA Information Management Review, that any change be implemented with the full support of and input from the field, lest it fail. By looking at current practices in formatting sitreps that are implemented at field level, and building a series of recommendations around those, we hope that we have made a first step toward including all parties equally in our project. If the project is to move forward, however, and we are to develop more fully an OCHA sitrep data model, field research will be a necessary component of our research.

PART 2 – FINDINGS

Interviews

Participants & Methodology

The principal method of data collection for this research was through in-depth semi-structured interviews of a variety of people involved in information sharing in emergencies, and more particularly in the sitrep process. We developed a main interview protocol (attached in Appendix A), and the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed us to adapt it to the organization (OCHA or NGOs) and to the specific role of the interviewee (field or headquarter, operational staff or senior staff), and left us enough space to follow up on interesting themes that surfaced during the interviews. The questions were centered around:

1. the involvement of the participant with sitreps,
2. the role that sitreps play in the organization,
3. the process around information sharing at a field level and between the field and headquarters,
4. the main challenges, and the main advantages of sitreps.

A complete table that describes interviewees' roles and organizations is attached in Appendix B. We interviewed 12 people from s different NGOs (four in person, eight over the phone, all interviewed on their experience as field staff). Four of the NGOs are among the largest NGOs in the world, the others are medium size or small organizations, focusing mostly on development projects. All of the NGOs interviewees were found through personal contacts, and they were all speaking to us on a personal basis, not on behalf of their organization. Within OCHA, while in New York we conducted two roundtables, one with about 20 desk officers, the other with OCHA's Information Advisory Group, half a dozen people in New York and three in teleconference from Geneva. We also interviewed 39 individuals, 28 in person, the others by phone. Finally, we conducted two phone roundtables with two different groups of institutional donors, that is governmental agencies whose mandate it is to provide development as well as emergency assistance.

In this report, interviewees from NGOs are identified with their participant number and the generic acronym NGO – e.g. P1, NGO; interviewees from OCHA with their participant number and OCHA – e.g. P15, OCHA. Sentences in double quotation marks "" are verbatim transcriptions; sentence in single quotation marks '' are accurate but not verbatim transcriptions, typically from interviews that were not recorded.

In order to understand better the context that was emerging from the interviews, and to see if we could substantiate (or not) some of the practical issues that came up around sitreps, we decided to conduct an ad hoc document analysis to proceed side-by-side with the interview findings. We analyzed a corpus of 101 documents, representing all the OCHA situation reports sent out by OCHA's website ReliefWeb between March 18 and April 25, 2008. The number 101 has a fitting resonance with the famous Disney movie *101 Dalmatians*, because sitreps are like Dalmatians – all the same on the surface, but in reality each with its quirks and personality. The complete table of results for this document analysis is attached on Appendix C. For each document, we recorded the issuing office, the date on the sitrep (which at times was different from the date when the document was sent out by ReliefWeb), the number of days covered, if specified, how the document was named besides (or in addition) to "sitrep." Two people looked at different dimensions of the documents, and assigned either a grade on a scale 1 to 10, or chose one of two dimension. The grades were compared and averaged. We looked at the following dimensions:

- **1 to 10 scale:**
    o unstructured to structure: 1 corresponds to an entirely narrative document, 10 to an entirely structured (with tables, maps, etc); this doesn't refer to the amount of data or analysis in the document;
    o data-driven: 1 corresponds to a document with very little hard data (e.g. amount of population affected), 10 entirely data-driven;
    o needs-response-gap: 1 corresponds to a complete absence of needs-response-gaps coverage, 10 to the entire document devoted to needs-response-gap; reference to NRG can be in a separate section or woven through the text;
    o sourced: 1 corresponds to a practically unsourced document, 10 to a very well sourced document. Documents that hover around 3/4 tend to feature laundry lists of NGOs and other UN agencies' activities that are reported as is without external corroboration or other context;

- o mentions of UN agencies (percentage); mentions of NGOs (percentage): indicates the number of times UN agencies are mentioned in the document vs number of times NGOs are mentioned.

- **Binary (either/or or yes/no):**
    - o UN or OCHA: whether the masthead of the document belongs to the UN or to OCHA;
    - o natural or complex: whether the emergency is natural or complex; there are a few documents where it's both, and one where it's neither;
    - o chronic or acute: whether an emergency is chronic or acute. Note that although most emergencies are natural and acute, or complex and chronic, there are cases of acute episodes in chronic emergencies;
    - o sitrep used in the title: whether the document calls itself a sitrep or not;
    - o header entitled 'gaps': whether or not there is a specific and clearly visible section dedicated to gaps (or needs)
    - o English or other language; the majority of reports not in English are in French; there is one in Spanish.
    - o Pdf: documents that are not in PdF format were sent out as email text;
    - o Maps: whether or not the document has maps;
    - o sectorial or geographical grouping of information: indicates how the information is organized. On occasions, it can be 'both' or 'neither'.
    - o availability of contact information.

The results from this document analysis are mentioned in the interview findings when useful to illustrate particular points. It is important to note that this analysis was done in addition to the more in-depth document analysis that will be discussed later, and is not as rigorous as the latter. However, it revealed interesting issues that sometimes supported, and sometimes contradicted evidence from interviews, and it made certain points raised by interviewees much clearer. For example, both donors and NGO staff mentioned that they often get OCHA sitreps from ReliefWeb, rather than from OCHA's mailing lists or main website. The distribution of sitreps will be discussed in depth below, but it is interesting to note that in our month-long corpus of documents there wasn't a single document from, for example, Sri Lanka, even though we know from the OCHA Sri Lanka website[32] that in the same period it issued no fewer than 6 reports. It may be that these reports were just for in-country circulation, but by comparing them with reports from other countries sent through ReliefWeb, it is not clear what criteria are used to choose what to send out through which vector.

Also, evaluating some of the chosen dimensions was a judgment call that might have yielded different results if the analysts had been humanitarian operators: for example, is Zimbabwe a

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32 http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/srilanka%5Fhpsl/Catalogues.aspx?catID=1 last accessed on May 6, 2008.

chronic or an acute emergency? Is the aggravation of the fuel crisis in Gaza an acute episode in a chronic emergency (as we decided after reading the sitrep), or a 'regular' update in a chronic emergency? Although these are important questions, we believe that the utility of the 101 document analysis, by itself and as a support for the interviews, will become evident when discussing the findings.

Findings

In the course of our interviews, we saw three separate 'constituencies' of sitreps emerging, that is groups that share similar views, concerns, and expectations. Below is an overview of these three groups, that summarizes in a general manner what are their concerns and positions.

1. OCHA operational staff, that is Desk Officers in New York and Geneva and Information Officers in regional and field offices. They work directly with sitreps, writing them (at field or sometimes regional level), adding information and editing (regional or support offices), and adding the headquarters perspective and sending them out (desk officers at headquarters). Field and headquarters staff use sitreps differently, but many of the concerns and opinions they expressed were similar enough to group them in one category. This category comprises the majority of our interviewees, although our sample is numerically skewed toward headquarterss rather than people in the field. To address at least in part this unevenness, we referred to the experience of our NGO interviewees, most of whom were field staff. This allowed us to understand better the general constraints and the ways in which information is and is not shared in the field. In very general terms, operational staff is involved in the mechanics and politics of data gathering and information sharing at a very granular level, and they bear directly the consequences of what does and does not appear in sitreps. Many interviewees stressed the uniqueness of each crisis and of each country's situation, as a way to express ambivalence about formats and templates developed from headquarters, and thus unlikely to be adaptable to varied circumstances. We should also note that informal conversations we had in New York pointed out that more senior desk officers were not participating to our roundtables or interviews, partly because after having seen the topic of sitreps tackled several times before and never solved, they were skeptical about reopening the question yet again.

2. OCHA senior managers, who are much more concerned with the bigger picture and with how sitreps fit within OCHA's mission, and are much less involved with the situation in the field, and the details of gathering information. Being more detached from the process, they tended to express stronger opinions about the reasons behind the flaws of current sitreps, and the best ways to address them. Some senior managers brought up two important issues that did not surface in most interviews with operational staff: the role of training and the role of technology in current and future sitreps. A clear concern expressed by most interviewees is that OCHA sitreps need to find a specific identity and a value to add, also in comparison to other organizations' sitreps.

3. Sitreps users, which includes external actors (governments in their capacity as donors, NGOs, and agencies in the field were invariably mentioned as the main audience of OCHA sitreps); and internal users (e.g. OCHA's press officers, ReliefWeb editors, and people working in other positions who use OCHA sitreps as input for their work). Users also comprise a diverse and wide category, but once again, the concerns these interviewees expressed toward sitreps were very homogeneous, as we will see below. In general, sitreps users are interested in seeing the bigger picture of humanitarian intervention, and in particular to see trends, consolidated and cohesive numbers, and gaps. They also want to see more reliability in sitreps, both in terms of content and in terms of format and timeliness. Among users, donors are the ones that OCHA staff mentioned most often, and the one big gap in our research is that we talked to very few donors, and these were all headquarters staff. Donors often have offices in the countries where OCHA is present, and there is an entire set of information exchanges and dynamics between OCHA and donors both in the field and between field and headquarters that we fail to capture in this research.

Now that we have introduced the actors involved in the creation, distribution, and consumption of sitreps, we can explore the main findings of our research. They are organized by themes, and each theme presents the differences or similarities in viewpoints of the three constituencies, and where appropriate, data from the document analysis to shine a light on these findings and opinions.

1. Defining Sitreps

"Sitreps are a fundamentally confused document." (P46, OCHA)

Sitreps have their roots in the military, where they were – and are – used by operations officers to provide to their superiors an overview of the conditions of their unit and of the general situation, including enemy capacities and possible courses of action.[33] The transition from military to humanitarian document hasn't necessarily been a natural one. In the process, the document lost the clear mandate and the strict structure of its military origins. Sitreps are also the remnant of an era where communication between field and headquarters happened through telex and fax, and a single document represented the available overview of the situation and a request for assistance. As more communication tools became available, "gradually the monopoly of the sitrep was lost, as information spread to other places." *(P33, OCHA)*. OCHA (and its predecessor) created different platforms to serve the more specialized functions of sitreps: IRIN (Integrated Regional Information Networks) was started in 1995 to provide humanitarian news and analysis;[34] financial tracking databases were set up to record humanitarian aid and highlight appeals for assistance;[35] and the website GDACS (Global Disaster and Coordination System) with its section for humanitarian operators only, the Virtual OSOCC (On Site Operation and Coordination Center), allows actors in the field to facilitate the coordination and exchange of information.[36] These topical areas now effectively function outside sitreps, which are however left with plenty of redundant legacy information, and a confused identity.

Perhaps the most interesting embodiment of the confused nature of sitreps is the uncertainty, both within and outside OCHA, over what exactly an OCHA sitrep is. On the OCHA side, some people think that sitreps are documents issued when there is an event that triggers an emergency: "When I think sitrep, I think urgent…" *(P15, OCHA)*. Other people refer to all the reports issued by their offices as sitreps (for example, P18, when asked to describe the last sitrep he had worked on, enumerated three different types of reports: a weekly report, a

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33 See for example John E. Edwards. Combat Service Support Guide. Stackpole Books: 2004. P.140 and following.
34 See http://www.irinnews.org/about.aspx last accessed on May 2, 2008.
35 For example, FTS (Financial Tracking System), at http://ocha.unog.ch/fts2/pageloader.aspx?page=home, and CERF (Central Emergency Response Fund), at http://ochaonline.un.org/cerf/CERFHome/tabid/1705/Default.aspx, last accessed on May 2, 2008.
36 GDACS is at http://www.gdacs.org/coordination.asp and Virtual OSOCC at http://ocha.unog.ch/virtualosocc/, last accessed on May 2, 2008.

humanitarian update, and a fact sheet; when asked if he considered them all to be sitreps even though they had different titles, he emphatically said yes). There doesn't seem to be a consensus on the different usages, however, and "that's where you get different hybrids of sitreps, 'humanitarian overviews' or whatever they're called, is that still a sitrep?" *(Roundtable 1, OCHA)*. The confusion within OCHA is once again mirrored by the confusion of sitrep users, as this excerpt from the Donor Roundtable 1 shows:

> *"Interviewer: Can you tell me about the last OCHA sitrep you received?*
> *Answer: What exactly do you mean by "situation report"? Can you define?*
> *Interviewer: When you think of a sitrep, do you have a specific doc in mind?*
> *Answer: No – we looked at all the products OCHA puts out. We saw that there are often multiple products that overlap, with no clarity about what each product offers. You might have an overall briefing, but then ad hoc documents that do not come out on a regular basis."*

Since there is no common understanding and agreement on how 'sitreps' are named, and on what the names actually mean, we turned to the actual documents to see whether their naming and issuing was as random as it seemed from the interviews.

DATE	DAYS COVERED	REGION	EMERGENCY	SITREP?	ALT NAME	CHRONIC OR ACUTE
March 19	1	Kazakhstan	natural	Y	-	acute
March 7-17	10	Colombia	complex	Y	humanitarian situation report	chronic
March 20	1	Somalia	complex	Y	-	chronic
March 21	doesn't say	Albania	natural	Y	-	acute
March 20	doesn't say	Southern Africa	natural	Y	-	acute
March 25?	doesn't say	Bolivia	natural	Y	-	acute
March 26	doesn't say	Albania	natural	Y	-	acute
March 24-28	5	Zimbabwe	complex	Y	weekly situation report	acute
March 27	1	Ethiopia	natural	Y	-	acute
March 28	doesn't say	Southern Africa	natural	Y	-	acute
February 28	doesn't say	Madagascar	natural	Y	-	acute
April 1	doesn't say	Tajikistan	natural	Y	-	acute
April 2	doesn't say	Iraq	complex	Y	humanitarian situation report	chronic
April 1	doesn't say	Ecuador	natural	Y	-	acute
April 3	31	West Africa	both	Y	monthly situation report	chronic
March 29 - April 4	7	Zimbabwe	complex	Y	weekly situation report	acute
April 10	doesn't say	Southern Africa	natural	Y	-	acute
April 11	doesn't say	Somalia	complex	Y	-	chronic
March 1 - 31	31	Uganda	complex	Y	humanitarian situation report	chronic
no date	doesn't say	doesn't say	natural	Y	-	acute
April 15	doesn't say	Baghdad	complex	Y	-	chronic
April 16	doesn't say	RDC	natural	Y	rapport de situation	acute
April 16	doesn't say	Tajikistan	natural	Y	-	acute
April 18	doesn't say	Somalia	complex	Y	-	chronic
April 17	doesn't say	Gaza	complex	Y	humanitarian situation report	chronic
April 20	14	Ecuador	natural	Y	-	acute
April 23	doesn't say	Gaza	complex	Y	-	acute
April 5 - 21	17	Colombia	complex	Y	humanitarian situation report	chronic
April 16 - 25	10	Somalia	complex	Y	-	chronic

Fig. 1 - Documents with 'sitrep' in the title

Although ReliefWeb sends out every report with the title OCHA SitRep, out of the 101 documents only 29 actually used "situation report" in their title. Eleven of these are issued by countries with chronic emergencies – typically conflicts of a political nature, which have been on-going for long periods - and these "sitreps" also use alternate names, which indicates a need to better define the nature of the situation report.

Conversely, looking at the documents that do *not* use the word sitrep in the title, we see some clear trends in how they are named:

CATEGORY	ACTUAL NAME	# OF DOCS
WEEKLY	weekly humanitarian news	5
	protection of civilians weekly report	5
	weekly bulletin	4
	humanitarian action weekly bulletin	4
	weekly situation report	2
	weekly note on emergencies	1
	weekly information bulletin	1
FORTNIGHTLY	situation humanitaire - rapport hebdomadaire	4
	fortnightly situation overview	3
	bulletin d'information hebdomadaire	3
MONTHLY	monthly situation report	1
	monthly cluster report	1
HUMANITARIAN	situation humanitaire	15
	humanitarian update	5
	humanitarian situation report	5
	humanitarian situation update	3
	humanitarian fact sheet	2
	humanitarian bulletin	1
	humanitarian overview	1
	humanitarian action snapshot report	1
	action humanitaire: fair et chiffres	1
	regional humanitarian update	1
VARIOUS	joint factsheet	1
	update on insecurity	1
	socio-economic fact sheet	1
	pastoralist voices	1
	protection of civilians summary data tables	1
	implementation of the agreement on movement and access	1
	ERF and NGO micro-grants	1

Fig. 2 – Titles of documents without 'sitrep' in the title

These initial results clearly indicate that even though there are no formal, shared definitions of sitreps nor fixed distinctions between sitreps and other types of reports, there is a de facto separation that is *consistent across offices* between sitreps triggered by a specific event, and on-going updates on chronic emergencies. The distinction is not limited to the name of the document. On average, documents that call themselves sitreps are shorter than other documents, and the period they cover is shorter. This difference is aligned with the practices described by some – although not all - of our NGO interviewees, who talk about sitreps as triggered by a specific event, more frequent at the beginning of an emergency and interrupted as the emergency subsides, when the more regular updates on the NGO's activity take their

place. It is important to note that OCHA does not have clear rules about what triggers a sitrep (regardless of what we consider to be a sitrep), how frequently it is issued, when to change the frequency and when to stop it. Operational staff mentioned that it was always a judgment call, but this seemed to cause some (justified) anxiety. In the case of natural emergencies, the decision is easier: a specific event triggers a report. In the case of certain complex emergencies ("on-going emergencies that fall off the radar then peak up again" *(P11, NGO)*), leaving the decision about when and how often to issue a sitrep to field or desk officers in New York without making clear what are the expectations, means that everybody will make a different decision in a similar circumstance, with great confusion for both operational staff and sitreps users, who never know when and if to expect an update. The 101 document analysis shows that 33 reports *do not* specify what is the period covered by the report. They are almost all reports dealing with acute situations, where, especially at the beginning, there are particularly high expectations on OCHA sitreps to convey the general picture while the situation is confused and in flux. Stating the period covered by the sitrep and when the next one will be due would do a lot to change the perception of sitreps, especially if the rules were the same throughout OCHA. As we will discuss in the conclusions, having a set of rules does not mean *not* allowing exceptions from the field. Many OCHA operational staff have emphatically stated that each emergency is different, and we indeed appreciate that there are countries and situations that will not fit the rules. However, the 101 document analysis shows that there are many similarities in the process that leads to sitreps, and having rules that reflect these similarities would make operational decisions easier and sitreps more predictable, as well as put the burden of justifying why rules should not apply to the office that makes the decision.

2. The Function of Sitreps

When discussing OCHA sitreps in general, and not focusing on the confusion over their trigger, frequency, and names, many interviewees agreed that they should have the first official information available about humanitarian emergencies, and that their goal should be to 'help the humanitarian community establish a common understanding about what is going on, alerting people to the problems that are coming down.' *(P50, OCHA.)* This is echoed by donors, who see OCHA as a publicly recognizable, citable source that provides cumulative data about people affected, the damage, and, ideally, the response and the gaps in the response *(Donor Roundtable 1)*. For better or for worse, OCHA sitreps represent the *public humanitarian*

consensus about an emergency, yet the sitrep production process and most sitrep content does not reflect this ideal.

We will look in detail at the different shortcomings of the sitrep document and the processes around it, but it is useful to begin by analyzing a few possible causes of the confusion. The 101 document analysis shows that sitreps are suspended between gathering and analyzing information, and facilitating coordination. Interviewees' ideas about these functions are equally fluid: "Some people think sitreps should be a coordination tool, but I don't think so. Sitreps should be more of an analysis tool rather than a coordination tool. " *(P43, OCHA)*; "It's both things: information and coordination. That's the big challenge." *(P22, OCHA)*; and 'OCHA sitreps give an overview, because they use a wide variety of sources. It's more accurate and less likely to exaggerate [than other reports] but it's still not a dispassionate view of the situation, because it comes from agencies rather than from investigation. You're still compiling propaganda." *(P25, OCHA)*.

In fact, good information and analysis *will* facilitate coordination of response efforts, but the fact that they are perceived as different indicates a degree of confusion over the type of information that should go in the report. The essence of sitreps' nature is perhaps best captured by a sentence that we have heard surprisingly often in the course of our research: sitreps are intended to "feed the beast at headquarters" *(P46, OCHA)*. The first to mention 'the beast' was an NGO interviewee: "it's one of the reasons why sitreps are like, 'F***, I have to do a sitrep!' Because the amount and the kind of information – it's like a ravenous beast." *(P3, NGO)*. During our week of interviews, we heard several variations on the concept: "We have to be able to feed the beast. We have to give talking points to ERC and sector governance…" *(P47, OCHA)*; sitreps need to "get credible information out and use it for advocacy. They are feeding the internal machine." *(P25, OCHA)*. The idea of a beast fed by sitreps conveys well the feeling that most of our interviewees expressed: sitreps are a burden to put together, to write, edit, to distribute, and to use; they are time-consuming; they are always perceived to be useful to someone else, not for those who produce them; they require a lot of information. It is as if they were humanitarian workers' Sisyphean task, where "…there's an information beast here that needs to be fed all the time – but you can overfeed the beast, and the beast gets tired of it and doesn't

want any more." *(P15, OCHA)*. The biggest problem, however, is that nobody is sure about what the beast wants to eat.

All the document analyses we performed showed that a wide variety of content is included in sitreps. Although section titles can be relatively stable (e.g. situation overview, response, coordination), the content varies from unsourced news about the political situation at a micro-level, to lists of humanitarian activities carried out by different actors. More observant OCHA interviewees realize that sitreps are "a reactive rather than proactive document" *(P31, OCHA)*, and, more importantly, the sitrep audience is aware of this. "Data collection can be active or passive; OCHA is reactive; they take what is given and it lacks triangulation, analysis, contextualization, and it is not clear why this is." *(Donor Roundtable 2)*.

Reactive means that sitreps are put together by OCHA field officers under the pressure of the moment, who include the information that is available on short notice, and that are not targeted specifically at one audience. The 101 document analysis confirms that this ad libbing goes beyond the content, and it extends to sourcing, to distribution, and to the aesthetic appearance of the document, which can change from one sitrep to the other even when they are issued by the same office (see for example the variety of mastheads in documents issued by the OCHA offices in the Occupied Palestinian Territories or those concerning the Democratic Republic of Congo). We observed that there are three main factors at the core of the confused nature of sitreps: [1] The lack of a clear and shared understanding of who the audience of OCHA sitreps is and what it wants from them; [2] the lack of reliable and stable sources of information to tap into during an emergency when information needs to be gathered quickly; and [3] the lack of a clear information gathering methodology and mandate. Let's start by looking at the audience.

3. Audience & Content
"For our draft, we have a clear image of what audience we serve, but we never asked them."
(P34, OCHA)

OCHA sitreps, as public documents, exist mostly to serve the needs of their audience. Most OCHA interviewees identified the audience as humanitarian actors at large, who look at OCHA sitreps to make funding decisions, for advocacy, and to support decision-making (e.g.

whether to go to the field or not), who are therefore seeking specific information about existing response activities in the field. More prodding revealed that the main audience that both operative staff and senior management have in mind is governments in their capacity as donors, followed by organizations in the field that need details about what is happening. The private sector in its potential capacity as donor was rarely mentioned, although one desk officer mentioned that "I get so many calls from the private sectors to (see if they can) help" *(P24, OCHA)*.

Some interviewees see an almost direct causality between OCHA sitreps and donors' funding decisions ("Sitreps are used by those considering donating," *P44 – 45, OCHA*), although some are more cautious ("The main tool for donors are appeals. CHAP - Consolidate Humanitarian Action plan - that's the big one. OCHA sitrep gives broader context." *P21 – 22, OCHA*). Many people expressed the conviction that sitreps were useful for donors to decide what to fund, but the interviews with donors revealed more ambiguous positions:

> *"Q: Do OCHA sitreps play any role in your decisions to fund actors in the field?*
> *A: Depends enormously on the situation, **but overall not very much in terms of what we are going to fund or not** [emphasis ours]. It comes down to the ambassador in the country, our people in the country or regional staff. If we know there is a critical gap there from an OCHA sitrep, if we know that there's a certain number of people affected that haven't received help, that could make a difference."*
> *(Donor Roundtable 1)*

> *'**We never allocate money on basis of OCHA sitreps; the information must be triangulated** [emphasis ours]. It can point you in the right direction, it's part of the picture; large critical unmet needs indicated (in sitreps) will inspire looking into a sector and will influence the direction we will go in, but is always triangulated and compared to standards.' (Donor Roundtable 2)*

This is an area that will be worth exploring more in depth, especially because we do not have any perspective from donors that are also in the field. What is clear is that sitreps do not influence directly funding, but that OCHA can add tremendous value to the funding decision-making process by providing reliable, consolidated view of the overall situation and response, especially in circumstances where donors are not on the ground. Donors are not looking for details about agencies activities, contrary to what many OCHA operational staff seemed to believe, since donors typically have their own direct relationship with these agencies. They are mostly looking at cumulative numbers – what are the needs, what is the response, what are the

gaps - especially in areas that are hard to reach. However, these are also the areas where OCHA's sitreps are weakest.

4. Needs – Response – Gap in Context

"What is frustrating is that sitreps don't put things in a context, the most useful things – these are the needs, this is provided, this is the gap – that's what I feel people want to know." (OCHA Roundtable 1)

'Needs-response-gap' quickly became the mantra of our interviews, both within and outside OCHA: a good sitrep provides an overview of the *consolidated* needs, *consolidated* response, and *consolidated* gap, all put in context. This is perceived by everybody as the raison d'être of an OCHA sitrep, but the 101 document analysis showed an almost complete focus on the response that different organizations were carrying out, disconnected from any needs assessment, without context, and without consolidation. A practical example might be helpful to understand this point. The most common type of OCHA sitrep in our corpus presents information as follows (document 10 in Appendix C):

ReliefWeb/OCHA Situation Report : Burundi Weekly Humanitarian News 10 - 16 Mar 2008
Source: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ACTIVITIES AND UPDATES
> Repatriation of Burundian refugees: During the reporting week, UNHCR facilitated the return of 4,578 Burundian refugees from Tanzania and 29 spontaneous returnees. The increase in the number of returnees is quite remarkable considering that in January only 435 persons were registered while in February 1,980 Burundians returned to their country of origin. Due to this increase in the number of returnees, UNHCR has increased the number of weekly convoys to Muyinga Province from 2 convoys to 4 per week. This massive registration for returns is in anticipation of the Lukole camp closure in June as earlier announced by the Tanzanian Government. On 10 March UNHCR received the first convoy of 262 refugees who left Burundi in 1972. Since the beginning of 2008, UNHCR has registered a total of 7,004 returnees.(…)
> Update on food aid distribution: WFP supplied 240 MT of food aid to 51,476 beneficiaries mainly through its programs which cater for nutritional centers and return packages for repatriated refugees.

The report does not specify how many Burundian refugees there are in Tanzania. It doesn't show the trend of returns, even though it notices that the numbers are increasing. It doesn't specify whether there are unmet needs in the repatriation process. It does not mention if there

are other agencies (NGOs or governmental agencies) involved with the returns, despite the fact that many OCHA interviewees remarked that if they don't include information from the government or NGOs, these entities will complain.

The sitrep from Kazakhstan (document 4 in Appendix C), on the other hand, seems closer to the ideal of consolidated needs-response-gap. But it is a rare document, and even in this document the needs-response-gap information was relegated to an annex while the fact that "UNICEF has indicated that the placement of a water filter is a priority to allow water purification at the source" was featured prominently in the "highlights" section at the top of the sitrep, without context and without overview.

Annex. Table of Priority Needs

Relief item	Quantity	Quantity provided	Organisation	Outstanding need
Shelter items (tents/yurtas)	500 based on government assessment	650 tents 460 yurtas 100	Government Government UNHCR	400 based on government assessment
Bed sheets, mattresses, blankets	770 family sets	100 family sets 370 family sets	UNHCR IFRC	300 family sets
Cooking sets, kitchen utensils	770 family sets	370 family sets 100 family sets 100 kerosene stoves	IFRC UNHCR UNHCR	300 family sets
Food	370 family rations	370 family rations of one month	IFRC	---
Clothing incl. children's clothing	400 family sets, especially children's clothing	Unspecified	KRCS	400 family sets, especially children's clothing
Vacuum flasks for families with young children	150	--	--	150

Fig. 3 – Annex from Kazakhstan Floods Sitrep No. 2, 19 March 2008

The 101 document analysis suggests that the collection of data for sitreps is done backwards: it starts from the response; it rarely looks at existing gaps; it never looks at the needs. OCHA is, at least for the time-being, trapped in a Catch-22 situation: needs are based on assessment, and assessment is not the role of OCHA, as donors are aware. The establishment of clusters in 2005 was supposed to mitigate this situation: clusters are in charge of gathering assessment data from their participants, and OCHA, as the overall coordinator, has to consolidate cluster information. In the long-term, this will hopefully yield initial lists of needs against which OCHA can match responses and therefore highlight any gap. For the time being,

however, clusters have not been very successful. One of the key problems, noted by a few OCHA interviewees and supported by a report issued in 2007 by OCHA,[37] is that common indicators that allow clusters to collect data that are comparable and harmonized do not exist yet.

The 101 document analysis does not show a difference in quality of data from sitreps that are organized by clusters and those that are not, and donors have observed that '[the cluster approach is] patchy; sometimes there is a disconnect between the cluster in place and the quality of information gathered. Inclusiveness of non-UN actors should be greater in the cluster approach but it is not always the case.' *(Donor Roundtable 2)*. Even more importantly, NGOs interviewees expressed a lot of skepticism toward clusters, and this could slow down their effectiveness, if NGOs are to be a primary source of data. NGOs interviewees have expressed frustration with the number of meetings that the clusters approach involved, and the impression that reporting is just something else that heads of clusters have to do – not a priority, in any case. Comments such as "Before the clusters there were lots of meetings, after the clusters there were even more meetings." *(P11, NGO)* and "Four times the number of meetings – that's about the only difference I see!" *(P10, NGO)* summarize well the attitude of NGOs toward clusters.

Another important weakness in the reporting of needs-response-gap that has been brought up in interviews, and once again confirmed by all the document analyses, is the complete lack of historical data and trends: "Often the information is only for the week – they are not reporting cumulative numbers, it is often just a snapshot, and you need to pull data every week to make your own chart." *(Donor Roundtable 1).* This is not helped by the format of sitreps – unstructured, narrative Word documents – and seems both a cause and a consequence of the reactive nature of the document, where every sitrep seem to start from a blank slate. Some sitreps try to overcome the physical limitations of the format by referring to specific, previous reports (for example, document #100, from Colombia), but they are a minority. In general, the 101 document analysis showed that sitreps are extremely narrative-driven, rather than consolidating data in tables, and even when they provide information about needs and gaps, they tend to do so in a way that is interwoven with the text and difficult to find unless one is reading the document closely.

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37 Lynette Larsen. Strengthening Humanitarian Information Management: A Status Report. OCHA: June 2007.

5. Sources of Information

"I think OCHA should be more up front about their sourcing. If this is something coming from the ground, that's different than something that comes from second and third-hand sources, and I felt that sometimes they weren't being open about which was which. I just think it would better if they were more consistent in specifying the source of the information. That would help me use the information." (P9, NGO)

The 'needs-response-gap' triad can be effective only if there is a good flow of information at field level, and if there is a system in place to assess needs and gaps, which as we have seen does not exist yet, or anyway is not effective. From our interviews, we understand that there are two general scenarios that illustrate how information is collected by OCHA. The first is when OCHA has a solid infrastructure in place, typically in countries with complex, long-running emergencies (e.g. Occupied Palestinian Territories, Colombia, Sri Lanka):
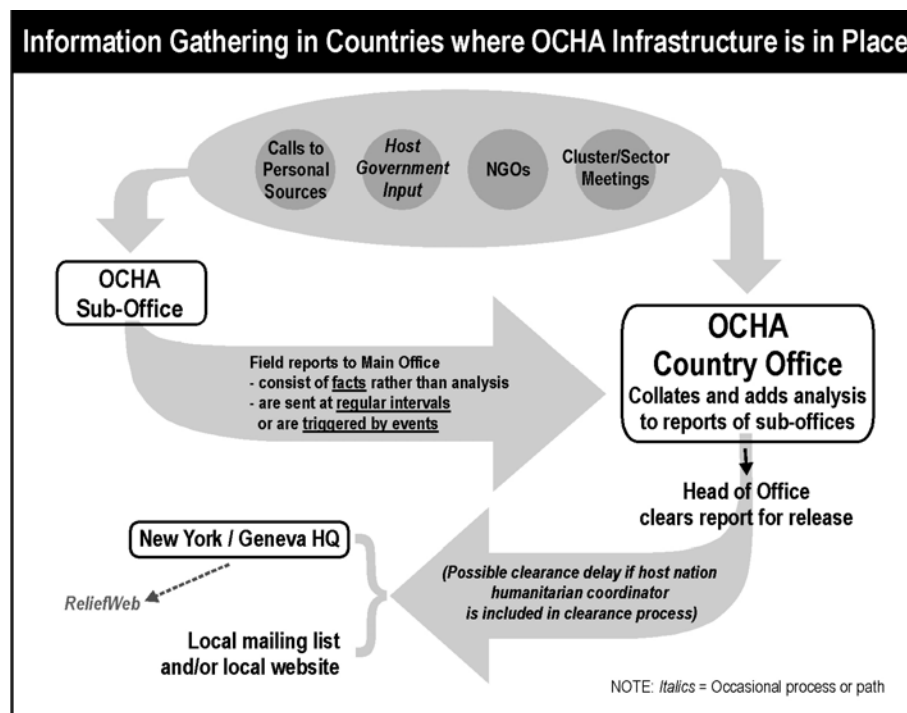
Fig. 4 – Information gathering in countries with an OCHA infrastructure in place

Because OCHA does not have processes maps, we have pieced together this information flow from different interviews. It may or may not be accurate, but it represents the *mental model* that some OCHA field and headquarters' information officers share. In this first scenario, OCHA has a stable network of informants and/or sub-offices, information is fed constantly to the main country office, which sometimes collects them into databases, and has sufficient

manpower to analyze it, provide cumulative data, and be ready in case of sudden emergencies: "It's not like all the sudden we are drafting a report – we have our regular sources. " *(P28, OCHA)*.

The second scenario is information gathering in a country where OCHA is not present. It is divided into two sub-scenarios, and we are not clear to which extent they coexist, or it they are mutually exclusive scenarios. None of the interviewees mentioned an emergency where the two modalities of information gathering were deployed at once, but this does not mean that they are not/cannot coexist:
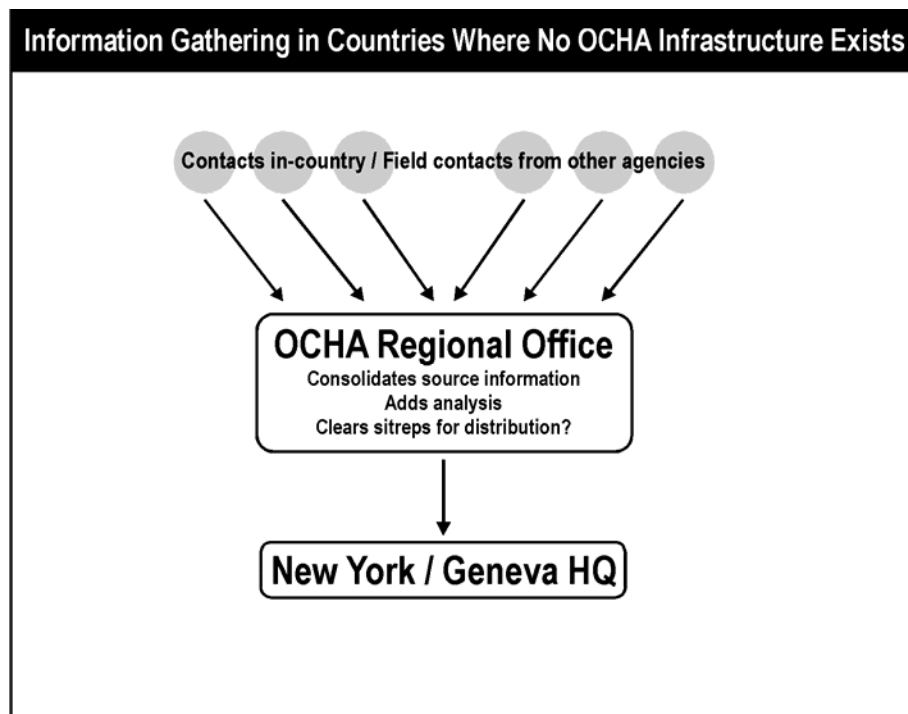
Fig. 5 – Information gathering in countries without an OCHA infrastructure in place
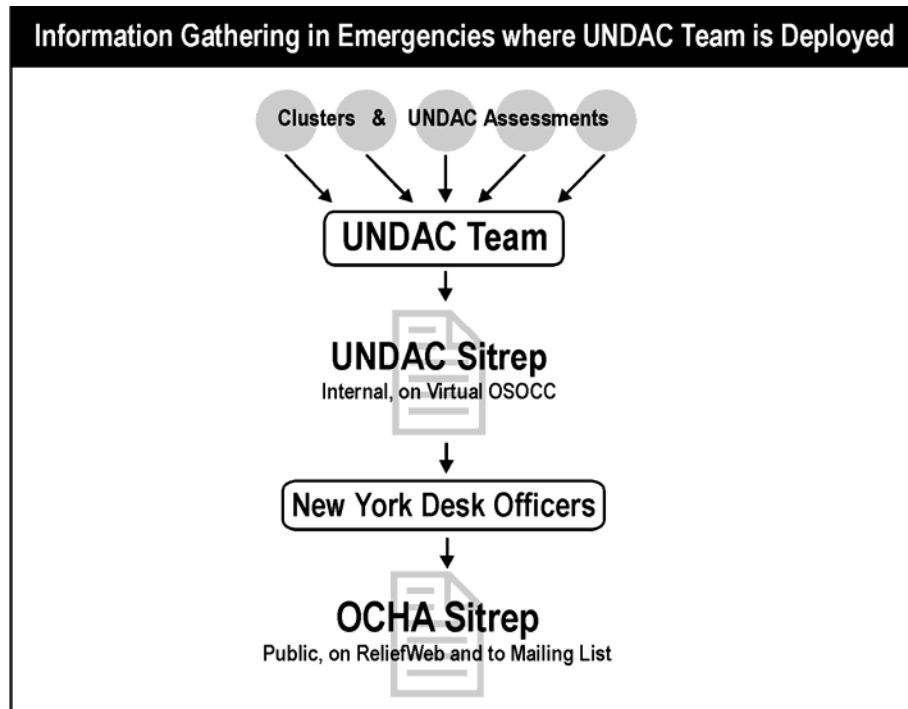
Fig. 6 – Assessment by the United Nations Disaster Assessment Team

Figure 5 could be a model for much of Latin America, where OCHA has a regional office in Panama that acts as a hub for collecting information from more or less formal contacts in countries where it does not have a presence. Figure 6 shows how information is gathered when the UNDAC team – a group of specialized disaster management personnel financed by OCHA and other UN agencies, ready to be deployed on short notice[38] – is deployed. UNDAC intervention has to be requested by the host country, and the team can be deployed and carry out initial assessments very rapidly. These assessments are collated into internal sitreps, that are then posted on the Virtual OSOCC website and sent to OCHA, where information can be added before the documents are issued as OCHA sitreps. UNDAC does not issue public sitreps, although its internal sitreps are accessible by all humanitarian actors that have access to Virtual OSOCC.

Given that it is easier to do well in an emergency what one does well in regular situations, countries with a stable OCHA office and network should be the best prepared to collect information in extraordinary circumstances. However, two of the interviewees that worked in offices with stable infrastructure express concern that, despite collecting longitudinal

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[38] http://ochaonline.un.org/Coordination/FieldCoordinationSupportSection/UNDACSystem/tabid/1414/Default.aspx
last accessed on May 6, 2008.

data, "It is not useful information at the moment, because we are not able yet to quantify the gaps." *(P18, OCHA)* and "We're very efficient in capturing information about the context, but weak in the coverage/response." *(P37, OCHA).* Not having access to the entire corpus of data these offices collect, it is difficult to say definitively why this is. The absence of common indicators, however, seems a reasonable explanation.

Moreover, it is common for donors and NGOs to have a more stable presence and a more reliable flux of internal information in countries with complex, long-running emergencies, so they consider OCHA sitreps as particularly important for sudden emergencies in countries where nobody has a presence, which is exactly OCHA's weakest point at the moment. Two quotes from donors illustrate the point:

> *"There was this situation brewing in the Comoros, we were all waiting for months for it to happen, and when it did, the humanitarian impact was not clear to anyone, and an OCHA sitrep could have been extremely valuable, but there wasn't one, or if there was… well, there wasn't anything that we could find. In that case, a sitrep could have been like gold, because we had no information." (Donor Roundtable 1)*

> *"A specific example: Bolivia. It was particularly frustrating and also typical. It was not a rapid onset emergency, the floods gradually worsened. South America is not an area of particular focus for us. There was a Flash Appeal from the UN in February (…) We watched closely for several weeks but information was difficult to get, we knew the general issues but not the details. We looked to OCHA contacts for info at head offices but did not find out much for the first weeks. What came out in OCHA sitreps was contradictory. Opinions about what was going on were changing, which is normal, but the information we got from OCHA was not useful." (Donor Roundtable 2)*

Part of the problem is that getting information is a matter of banging on doors, and this is true at all levels – for operational staff, NGO staff, donors. Both the incentives for and the benefits of sharing information are unclear. OCHA staff often highlights how visibility is an incentive "it is about being visible. Donors want to see them." *(P13, OCHA)*, but neither donors nor NGOs seem to agree. In fact, a donor mentioned that "You mean does it matter if an NGO is highlighted? Generally no – it means they have funding and can operate. We're really looking at gaps. We might say, oh, this looks great, but we know about NGO reputations based on our own institutional experiences." *(Donor Roundtable 1).* Two commonly recurring issues around information sharing between OCHA and NGOs – namely, visibility and the sharing of information - are summarized by the following quote:

"(We get feedback) mainly from NGOs, because they want our sitreps to reflect their work, want to reflect what they are doing… . All acknowledge that it's useful, but they complain that their work is not reflected on sitreps, and we reply that we're happy to receive on a weekly basis information on what they do, but this never happens, nobody has the time for dedicated Information Officers to sit down and do that every week. Tricky situation, they complain and we tell them give us the information." (P37, OCHA)".

Interviews and document analysis paint a more nuanced picture. On the matter of visibility as a big incentive for NGOs to provide information about their activities, the 101 document analysis shows that OCHA sitreps are heavily focused on UN agencies. This is confirmed by donors, who point out that "OCHA's mandate is to pull it all together, but what we see is in fact a UN SITREP. UN agencies are big players in terms of funding, but even if they are not, OCHA sitreps seem to assume that the UN is the only player in a particular response. So they shortchange their mandate." *(Donor Roundtable 2)*
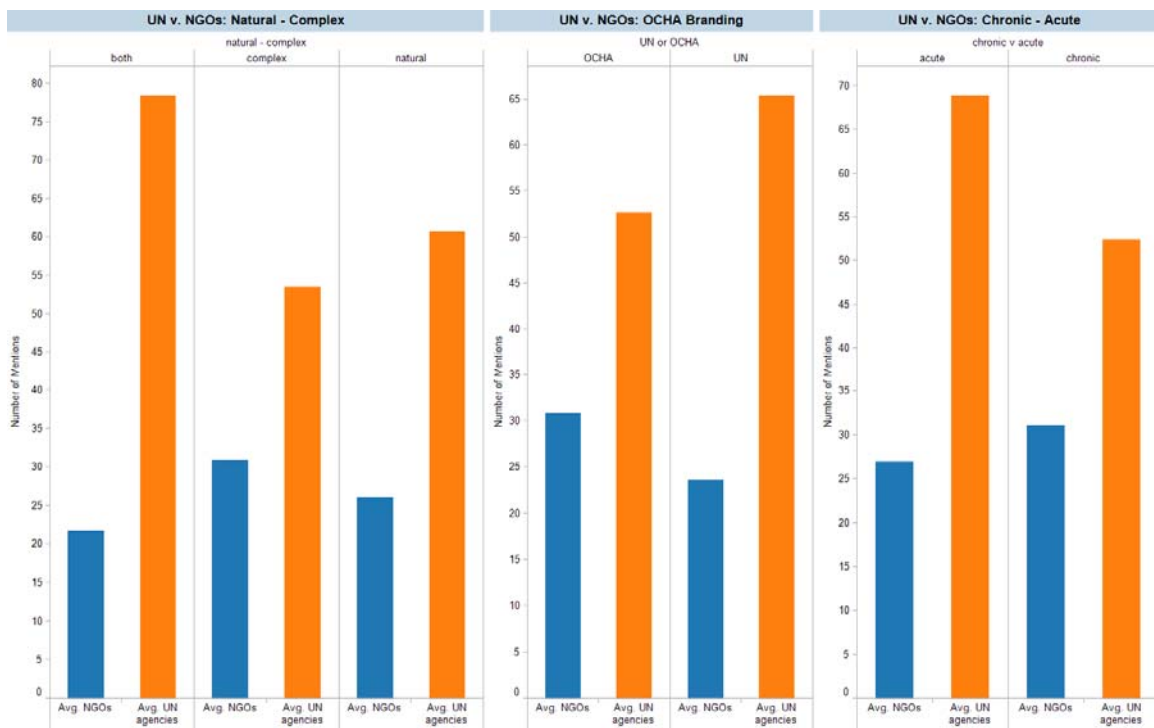
Fig. 7 – NGOs and UN mentions

The graphics above show the percentage of NGOs (in blue) versus UN agencies (in orange0 mentions in the 101 document analysis. They are divided up into sitreps issued in different circumstances: natural or complex emergencies, chronic or acute situations, and issued

under the OCHA heading or the UN heading. In every case, UN agencies are mentioned up to three times as much as NGOs.

Establishing a better working relationship with NGOs might be an important priority for OCHA, if it's true that "the UN has less and less presence in the field, it's becoming less and less operational. After OHCHR and WFP, there are NGOs, those are the main actors of tomorrow, they have good field information and the best way to reflect that is in sitreps." *(P35, OCHA)*.

OCHA is also unclear about what kind of data it needs/wants from NGOs, and both OCHA and NGO interviewees have pointed this out. More importantly, however, OCHA doesn't seem equally willing to share information back, and to show its own added value, as the quotes below show:

> *"I think… first of all, I don't want to generalize, it depends a lot on personal relationship you have with OCHA people, there are contexts where you have a fantastic relationship with them, organizations share with them, and they share and do things as well; it's a two-way information exchange. There are other contexts where it's never the case. Information should always be both ways, if it's only one-way, I might do it for a while, then I'll stop." (P12, NGO)*

> *"If OCHA can provide good information, we're happy to share our information. It's getting something out of it. In a place like Angola where the government had put in place very confusing regulations on NGOs, going to OCHA forums was really helpful because they would take on some of those issues, and work with the government to provide clearer regulations. So it was worthwhile to go to the OCHA meetings because we were getting something out of it. But if it's just another meeting and you're not really getting something out of it, then why bother?" (P9, NGO)*

The quality of the information put out by OCHA is not always reliable, and not always useful. Once again, donors and NGOs are unanimous in lamenting the inconsistent and sometimes contradictory sourcing of sitreps. This does not mean that OCHA should only issue data that are verified; rather, sitreps should specify what data is verified and what is not, and cite sources for contradictory information, in order to help its readers understand it and contextualize it. The 101 document analysis fully confirms the distrust expressed by sitreps users: on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means completely unsourced and 10 completely sourced, the average was 5. This seems reasonable, but what it really means is that typically sitreps do not source the majority of the political information they report, and when they do it tends to be bulk-sourced (i.e. a footnote that says that information comes from OCHA and other

sources and every effort is made to verify it). What they source is the information that comes from UN agencies and NGOs about response activities (e.g. "UNICEF and RI have drilled 7 boreholes in Maban," doc #1), which is the journalistic equivalent of reporting verbatim a press release.

6. The Process: Templates and Distribution

"I know in NY they are working on general standards – I've seen the drafts – and they are basically two years behind every field office." (P18, OCHA)

"There's all kinds of mailing lists on Lotus notes that we use that are maintained by a small group of elves…I mean, I don't who maintains them, but (…) that needs to be looked at." (P15, OCHA)

Finally, it is useful to look at two smaller issues that have emerged in the course of our research, that are not as crucial as the ones mentioned above, but that still have a disproportionately negative impact on both operational staff and users of sitreps: the use of templates for OCHA sitreps, and the distribution of sitreps.

Several people mentioned the existence of a standard OCHA sitrep format, years ago. The specifics about this template are vague: some people mentioned two separate templates, one for natural emergencies, one for complex ones *(P21 & 22, OCHA)*; others mentioned only one ("Four-five years ago there was one OCHA sitrep which was very clear, now there are many variations in lay-out, use of pictures, who issues it, on whose behalf, these are all elements that have leapt in the scene, not sure if that's based on demand side, rather on the supply side." *(P34, OCHA)* and *P33*). A quick search on OCHA's website and on ReliefWeb did not return sitreps that were significantly more standardized than the ones that are issued now, but we did not conduct an in-depth research. It is interesting to note that there is an almost universal objection to a template coming from headquarters and being imposed in the field, partly because there is a strong perception of the uniqueness of each situation, as mentioned above, and partly because headquarters are perceived as being out of touch with what happens in the field. However, it is not clear that there is an opposition to a template as such. The most vocal opponent of templates are the offices that have put a lot of efforts into developing their own formats, but the way this opposition is expressed ("The standard may not meet the needs and hamper our ability. It would be better to have recommendations and know that each crisis is

different." P28, OCHA) seems to indicate more a distrust of a top-down approach to templates, rather than a straight refusal of a template. Several interviewees expressed a desire for a more standardized form at least in terms of appearance ("OCHA branding" as several people put it), which would also help the predictability of the document.

In our view, there are good reasons to suggest the adoption of a common template: the document analyses show that there are implicit templates that are used, that is sections that are commonly used in chronic and acute emergencies (see the document analysis section for more details). Templates mean predictability, and predictability is, if nothing else, a time-saver at different levels. A template can direct and to a certain extent control the kind of information that is collected, by making it clear what is needed, as some NGOs' interviewees pointed out: "People appreciate the template, because then they're not recreating the wheel, they're very clear about what they need to produce." *(P8, NGO)* and "The way sr was structured asked staff to focus, on who they thought they could reach and backing it up and look at what they were doing." *(P11, NGO)*. It is not a substitute for training, but it can help reducing the variability of data collected. A predictable template also facilitates the job of people who deal with sitreps as users/contributors, so, for example, if cartographers know that all sitreps are organized in a certain way, they can prepare maps accordingly.

The distribution channels of sitreps came up in almost every interview we conducted. To summarize:

- **there are no rules about what is distributed where:** "There is no standard way to send sitreps around. Sometimes they go directly to New York, sometimes to the regional office. There is no standardized list of dissemination, even in-country, sometimes there is a UN list only for UN partners, but not to NGOs and others," *P35, OCHA)*. The main consequence of this, aside from the fact that it is never clear who receives what, is that the same report can be issued in a country through the country mailing list, and then also from the New York desk officer, after having been edited by the desk officer, so as a different document.
- **the main OCHA sitrep distribution list is a mystery to all parts involved.** "The list was put together at the beginnings of OCHA (…) We have gradually added to the list – now it's much bigger and more complex. We need to look at the distribution list and the

audience." *(P33, OCHA)*. It is not clear whether the list has ever been purged or updated. Desk officers do not know who is on the list, and have to deal with bounce-backs manually. The procedure to add and delete addresses from it is obscure, so much so that a few desk officers have mentioned cc'ing people manually to make sure that they were among the recipients ("I don't know who runs it or how people join. I usually have a group of people I cc when I send sitreps," *P43, OCHA*).

- **sitrep users are equally confused**: "OCHA has different products, and each has a different mailing list, and if you miss out you have to get on the mailing list, which is difficult – sometimes we need to get information on ReliefWeb, and it can be difficult to get the info and to get on the mailing list in a timely manner." *(Donor Roundtable 1).* Many people get around this problem by getting sitreps from ReliefWeb, which has the advantage of a relatively straight-forward sign-up process. However, ReliefWeb does not have all the sitreps that are available, for example, on the main OCHA website, although nobody is sure why this is. Moreover, ReliefWeb is often mistaken as the 'owner' of sitreps, whereas its editor do not have any control over the documents.
- to overcome these difficulties, there is a proliferation of ad hoc lists and web postings, both at the country and headquarters level, which will make it very hard to control what comes out from OCHA, and therefore the perception users have of OCHA public material.

Document Analysis

Methodology

The goal of document analysis was threefold: We wanted to gain a broad sense of what kinds of information are in sitreps, how sitreps vary by context, and how information in sitreps might change during the course of a single emergency. To accomplish this we conducted two additional document analyses. For the first, we gathered a collection of 35 sitreps from two of OCHA's public facing web sites, OCHA's UN home page[39] and ReliefWeb.[40] For the second analysis, we tracked the changes in sitreps from a single emergency, a cyclone and flooding in Pakistan during the summer of 2007.

Document Analysis 1:

In selecting a corpus of documents to analyze, we sought to gather a collection that was geographically diverse, that included various types of natural disasters as well as complex emergencies, and that included both early and later sitreps.

For each situation report in the collection, we identified key information components, such as the UN OCHA-branded document header below:

Fig. 8 – OCHA-branded header

For each component, we wrote definitions and recorded them in a table similar to the one below.   See appendix D for a more detailed version of this table.

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[39] http://ochaonline.un.org/
[40] http://www.reliefweb.int/

Component Harvest Table

Source: AfghanistanWinter20080214.pdf
Document Type (Sitrep, Weekly Update, Monthly, etc.): Situation
Report
Emergency Type (Natural or Complex): Natural

Component Name	Semantic Description	Notes
UN OCHA-branded header	The UN symbol along with the OCHA name with an added "Partnership for Humanity"	
Emergency Heading	A section that includes the sitrep number, country name, sitrep date, and disaster title.	
Sitrep number	This sitrep's number in the series of sitreps for this emergency.	"Situation Report 6"
Country Name	Name of the country/region affected	"AFGHANISTAN"
Date	The publication date of this sitrep	"14 FEBRUARY 2008"

Fig. 9 - Table of Information Components

OCHA categorizes emergencies into two types, complex emergencies and natural disasters.[41] Since our interview data suggested possible differences in the information requirements of the two emergency types, we decided to track whether or not the two types yielded different types of components.

Once we had recorded information components for each document, we consolidated them into a single table similar to one below:

	Source	
Component	AfghanistanWinter20080214.pdf	BangladeshCyclone20071206.pdf
OHCA-specific Header/Logo	X	X
Sitrep number	X	*X*

Fig. 10 – Table of Consolidated Components

[41] http://ochaonline.un.org/News/ComplexEmergencies/tabid/4391/Default.aspx

This enabled us to see which components appeared consistently across a broad collection of documents as well as which types of documents yielded which kind of components.

Document Analysis 2:

For the second document analysis, we tracked a single emergency over time, noting changes in the structure and content of sitreps. The specific emergency we chose was the cyclone and floods in Pakistan during the summer of 2007, which provided 26 sitreps written between July and December of 2007.

This second document analysis involved two stages. We first read each document and recorded notable changes in the documents' structure and content. If the authors added or removed different kinds of content, or conveyed similar information in new ways, we noted it. For the second stage, we converted the documents from PDF to text and conducted word counts of different types of sitrep content, such as OCHA cluster activity. We then calculated the proportion of various types of content as a percentage of words in the document. This enabled us to graph certain content and visualize changes over time.

Constraints

Since we can analyze only a limited set of documents, the trends we identify may not be indicative of trends in OCHA situation reports as a whole. Although we have attempted to choose a diverse collection of documents that is representative of OCHA sitreps, our attempt is, at best, an approximation. However, an approximation can still provide value.

One challenge of selecting a corpus of documents to analyze is that, as noted earlier, different people define sitreps differently. While some define a sitrep broadly to mean any one of a broad range of documents called humanitarian bulletins, weekly or monthly updates, humanitarian updates, regional updates, or situation updates, others define a sitrep more narrowly to mean a document written in the context of an acute emergency. Document analysis will yield different results depending on how one defines sitrep. The challenge of selecting documents is exacerbated by the fact that during certain emergencies, depending on the political environment, OCHA may hesitate to issue a situation report, may brand a situation

report as a non-OCHA document, or may call the document something other than a "Situation Report."[42]

Another part of our document analysis involves analyzing the siteps of a single emergency and assessing how or if the structure or content of the documents changes over time. A key limitation of looking at just one emergency is that this one emergency may not be representative of other emergencies. Consequently, we can infer little about other emergencies' sitreps based solely on what we learn from analyzing this emergency's sitreps.

Findings
Document Analysis 1: 35 Sitreps

When browsing the 35 situation reports for the first time, one is initially struck by how different they are in their organizational style and their presentation. Some sitreps make extensive use of maps or tables while others present information entirely as a narrative. Some consist of a single page while others span many pages. Some are clearly branded as OCHA documents while others are not. Even sitreps that appear to be derived from a common template vary significantly in how they organize similar information. Perhaps not surprisingly, the most open-ended parts of the documents, those describing the situation and response efforts, varied the most.

Although few information components appeared in every document, some appeared in most documents. The most constant information components were the following:

OCHA-Branded Header – Although some documents provided little indication that they were OCHA documents, most did contain some OCHA branding.

Metadata – Nearly every document contained a grouping of information that one might characterize as metadata about the sitrep. This generally consisted of the nature and location of the emergency, the sitrep's date or date range, and a sitrep number. Although sitreps varied in which metadata components they included, nearly all of the 35 sitreps contained a section similar to the one below:

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[42] See Appendix B, P23, OCHA
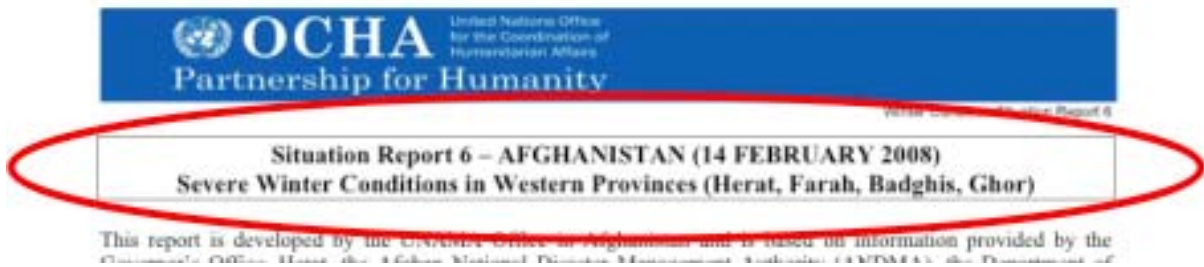
Fig. 11 – Sitrep Metadata

Highlights – Nearly half of the sitreps contained a small section of bullet points summarizing key points similar to the one below:
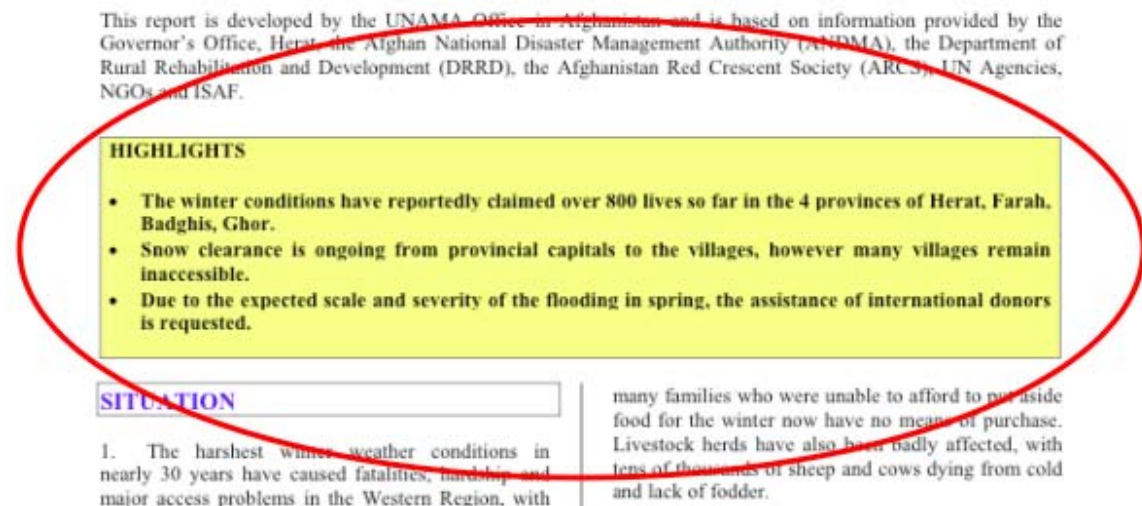
Fig. 12 – Sitrep Highlights Section

Situation – All of the sitreps contained one or more sections describing the context and key developments. Some of the names for these sections included "Situation", "Situation Overview", "Overview of the Situation", "Situation Update", "Background", and "Context." The internal structure of these sections and any subsections varied greatly sitrep to sitrep.

Response – Sitrep authors also organized response-related information in a great variety of ways. Some of the names for this information included "Local Response", "National Response", "International Response", "National and International Response", "Humanitarian Response" and simply "Response." Some authors included a separate "Coordination" section while others did not. Some organized information by region while others organized information by need or by OCHA cluster.   Some described response efforts in narrative form while others used bullet points or tables. Sitreps for natural emergencies generally organized response-related information into sections for "National Response" and "International Response" while sitreps for complex emergencies did not.

Map – Many sitreps contained one or more maps of the affected region.

Contact Information – Most sitreps contained the names, phone and fax numbers, email addresses of people to contact for more information. Most often, this was presented in a table similar to the one below:

Contact Details		
Desk Officer (New York)	Ms. Heidi Kuttab	Office Tel: + 1 917 367-3365 Office Fax: +1 212 963-36 30 E-mail: kuttab@un.org
Humanitarian Affairs Officer GCMS (Geneva)	Ms. Aoibheann O'Keeffe	Office Tel: +41 22 917 4329 E-mail: okeeffe@un.org
OCHA Regional Office for the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia	Mr. Abdul Haq Amiri Head of Office Dubai	Office Tel. + 917 4 368 1022 Office Fax + 917 4 368 1023 E-mail: amiri@un.org
Press Contact: (New York)	Ms. Stephanie Bunker	Office Tel : + 1 917-367-5126 Office Fax: + 1 212-963-1312 Email: bunker@un.org
	Ms. Christina Bennett	Office Tel: + 1 917 367 8059 Office Fax: + 1 212 963 1312 Email: bennett1@un.org
(Geneva)	Ms. Elizabeth Byrs	Office Tel + 41 22 917 26 53 Office Fax + 41 22 917 00 20 E-mail: byrs@un.org

Fig. 13 – Contact Information Table
Document Structure

Despite the great variation in sitreps' presentation and in the naming of their components, some structural patterns did emerge over time. Most sitreps included high-level sections for situation-related information followed by one or more high-level sections for response-related information:

Situation
Response

This was true for both complex emergencies as well as natural disasters. One difference that emerged between complex emergencies and natural disasters was that most natural disasters followed a more specific form of this pattern that complex emergencies did not. Most natural disasters organized information in the following way:

Situation
National Response
International Response

Of the 25 sitreps for natural disasters in our collection, 19 followed this pattern and contained a major section for situation, followed by major sections for national and international response. Of the 10 sitreps for complex emergencies, none followed this pattern. One possible explanation for this difference is that, in the context of a complex emergency, a section for national response may be less appropriate.

Document Analysis 2: A Single Emergency

Viewing the 26 sitreps of the 2007 cyclone and floods in Pakistan enabled us to see how the structure and content of sitreps might change over time during a single emergency. Initially, OCHA published a sitrep everyday. For the first two weeks of the emergency, OCHA issued 12 sitreps. Over time the sitreps became less frequent and eventually each one described a week's worth of developments. Five months into the emergency, OCHA issued a sitrep covering the developments of an entire month. Accordingly, as the sitreps became less frequent, they described events occurring over a longer range of time. This is reflected in both the sitreps' content and structure. Over time, sitreps' summary and highlights sections became more prominent, and perhaps not surprisingly, sitreps focused less on the cause and background of the emergency and more on the response efforts. This shift is apparent in the structure of the documents. The major sections of sitrep 1 and sitrep 25 share none of the same major section names:

Major Sections of Sitrep 1

Situation Overview
National Response
Specific Requirements
International Assistance

Major Sections of Sitrep 25

Highlights
Overview
Coordination
Relief Activities

Sitreps' sections and subsections did not remain static during the emergency. Information appearing as part of one section sometimes appeared in as part of other sections in subsequent sitreps. One example of this is cluster-related information, which appeared in several different parts of the sitrep at different times during the emergency:

Sitrep 5 – After a few brief mentions in early sitreps, a subsection for "Cluster Activities" first appears in the "INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE" section.
Sitrep 7 - "Cluster Activities" is now in a new "Coordinated Assistance (International and National)" section and each cluster has its own subsection.
Sitrep 8 - "Clusters" is now its own high level category.
Sitrep 13 - "Clusters" is now called "Cluster Response" and is still a high level category.
Sitrep 14 - "Cluster Response" is called "Clusters" again.
Sitrep 16 - "Cluster Activities" now back in the "Coordinated Assistance (International and National)" section.
Sitrep 23 - "Cluster Activities" is now in the "Coordination" section
Sitrep 24 - "Cluster Activities" is no longer in "Coordination" section and is now in "Relief Activities."

The above example demonstrates the fluidity of the documents' sections and subsections.

Overall, the most notable change over time was the rapid growth of cluster-related content.

Clusters as a Percentage of Words
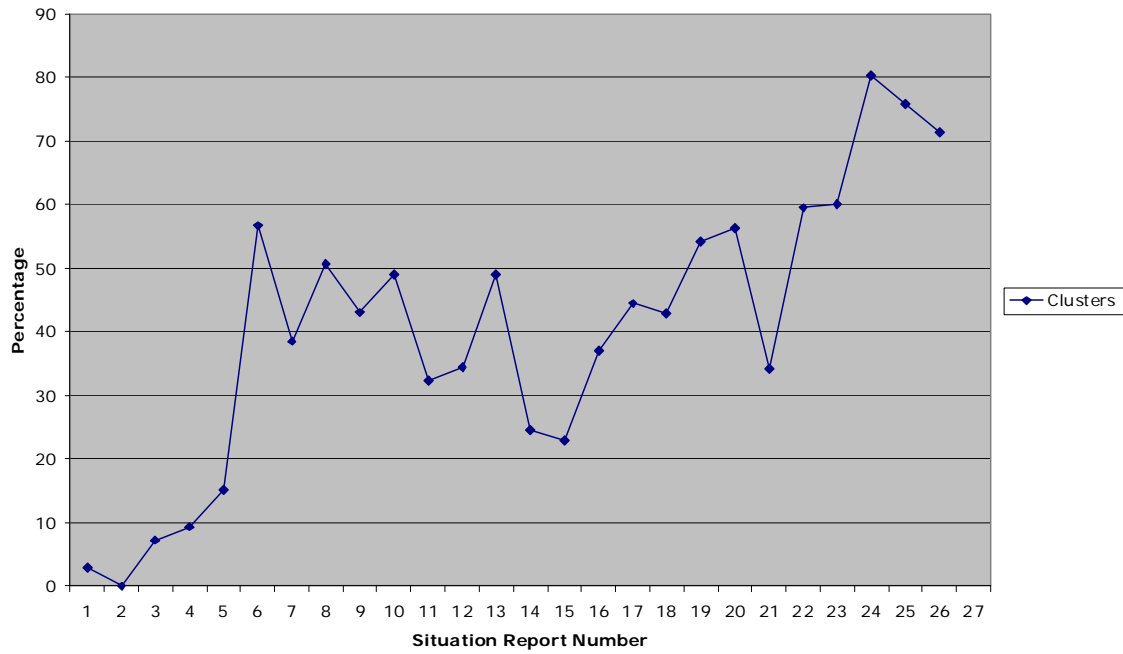
Fig. 14 – Cluster Activity as a Proportion of Words

After receiving a few mentions in early sitreps, cluster-related content became a majority of the document's content by the sixth sitrep.   It then continued to grow over time, though inconsistently.

PART 3 – TOWARD A SHARED SITREP MODEL

Sitreps are dead: long live sitreps!

An important goal of this project was to understand the shared practices and expectations around sitreps, as a first step toward creating a common mental model of them. Before moving to our conclusions, however, we are compelled to ask: are sitreps still a useful document for OCHA?

As we saw above, new technologies have already began to insinuate themselves in areas that used to be the domain of sitreps, so perhaps what is left should also surrender to them. Information about needs and gaps could be sent out through text messages in the field and RSS updates from OCHA's websites, and political and humanitarian analysis could be left to press releases and specialized reports. "Sitreps are a thing of the past. We need something new and sophisticated to talk to multiple audiences." *(P23, OCHA)*. This was not a widespread opinion; in fact, most interviewees, even when very negative toward the document and the process around it, still referred to sitreps as a necessary part of OCHA's work. The interviewees that saw beyond the era of sitreps were mostly thinking in terms of technological improvements (i.e. information stored in databases) that would allow the production of 'reports on demand,' with different views of the same data, according to the audience preferences. This is very much aligned with the recommendations of OCHA's Information Management Review, which recommended emphatically to break documents into information components that can be easily reused. This is not the place to discuss the implications of a similar decision. We will limit ourselves to note that if the goals that OCHA wants to achieve with the information it gathers are not clarified, and if the process around information collection and analysis is faulty, as we believe it is, breaking down the components of a sitrep into a database-driven form will not improve the quality of information delivered, and might in fact make it worse. The fact that OCHA offices that do have databases and reasonable processes in place still do not have a hold on response and gaps seems to indicate that the more urgent problem lies in the process and in the strategic decisions around it, rather than in the technology.

We believe that sitreps are still a valid tool for the time being. The humanitarian emergency field is changing dramatically: beginning in the 1990s, there have been several

initiatives to bring standardization and accountability in the humanitarian sector, such as the

Humanitarian Reform (2005), the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in

Disaster Response (1998)[43], the Emergency Capacity Building Project mentioned in the literature

review, and several internal efforts to systematize emergency response among larger NGOs.

These initiatives are changing the humanitarian field, and once they are more deeply-rooted,

technology will really be able to leverage the increased coordination and standards into better

quality information and on-demand reports. For the time being, a published, fixed sitrep has an

enormous value insofar as it captures the humanitarian agreement in situations of crisis. As a

senior manager (partial to database-driven solutions, we may add) stated, 'From a historical

perspective, that is something that is important, it's a publication that sets the record, that

certain things have been agreed upon. It's a baseline for what was the situation at a certain

time.' *(P39, OCHA)*

Moving ahead, we see two sets of decisions that OCHA can make to move towards a

shared sitrep (mental) model: 1, tactical decisions to quickly implement a cohesive image, and

fix small, but damaging, problems. These decisions are mostly tied to maintaining sitreps as they

are in terms of format – Word or PdF documents that are sent out as 'units of information.' 2,

strategic decisions about what OCHA sitreps are, what kind of information they contain, who

they are aimed at. These latter are technology-independent decisions, in the sense that they

have to be made regardless of whether the output is a sitrep in the form of a document, or a

database-driven document-on-demand.

1. Tactical Decisions

Tactical decision are geared toward addressing in the short-term the more superficial

confusion that has accumulated around sitreps. They consists mostly of developing specific

guidelines about different aspects of sitreps, which are likely to be welcome by both internal

and external audiences. Despite the skepticism expressed by many interviewees toward a sitrep

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43 The Sphere Project was launched in 1997 by a group of humanitarian NGOs and the Red Cross, with the goal of improving quality and accountability during humanitarian operations. The Humanitarian Charter, which the Sphere Project published in 1998, and revised in 1999 and 2004, consists of a series of standards designed to help humanitarian operators meet these goals. It sets out a number of minimum requirements, based on existing humanitarian laws and on practical field experience which represent both a goal to achieve, and a yardstick against which to measure the effectiveness of NGOs intervention. The standards are organized in different sections, and include more or less specific key indicators to assess whether they are met or not; a few OCHA sitreps mentioned how given projects fared against Sphere standards. See http://www.sphereproject.org last accessed on May 6, 2008.

format, there is a lot of demand for a clearer leadership on what is required: "Let's agree on a format and what kind of information is necessary. What should and shouldn't be there? It could also help us gain a lot of time" *(P24, OCHA)*. Developing guidelines around sitreps does not mean that there should be strict formats imposed from headquarters to the field; nor that there should be additional burdens imposed to the field. Systematizing different types of OCHA reports would help people see what it is that they are doing; it would help users distinguish between the products, and know what to expect from each; and finally, when there are countries and/or emergencies that do not fit the existing models, the onus would be on the field office to justify why there should be an exception. In our view, the following are the main decisions that can be implemented in the short-term:

- **Recognize and codify existing reporting practices in the field:** sitrep users have expressed the need for regular updates on on-going crises ("Monthly, quarterly maps that show how things are going would also be useful." *Donor Roundtable 1*), and many field offices are already doing them. However, these should be separated from actual 'sitreps,' which should be reserved for event-triggered reports. The 101 document analysis suggests that this is already happening. Making the distinction explicit would allow people to choose what kind of reporting they are looking for, and would make it clear when there is a sudden spike in an on-going emergency. In other words, if all the reports coming from Somalia are called sitreps, 'reader fatigue' makes it likely that the sitrep that highlights a real deterioration of the situation will be missed.

- **Create a style guide and style sheet**, which include graphics and branding rules common for (and distributed to) everybody. "If there's a corporate standard, people know what they can expect. Then they know how to use it. We definitely need a corporate definition of sitreps" *(P22, OCHA).* In particular:

  o OCHA should settle on one and one only masthead for all its reports; the variety collected from the 101 document analysis, attached in Appendix C, is hard to justify, and very confusing for external audiences.

  o Add a mandatory contact information box at the end of any report. 27 documents from the 101 document analysis were without a contact information; there might be political implications on whom to list as contact person, but the impression is that reports that do not have a contact have simply forgotten about it.

- **Mailing list:** Desk officers must have control over it, and know who is in the list. There must also be clear procedures, country by country, on how to sign up. It might be worth remembering that sitreps sent out as email attachments can sometimes be heavy documents, which can be a problem in areas with bad internet connection. As an NGO interviewee who uses ReliefWeb for sitreps noted, "That is less good in some of these places where internet access if very poor. Now, what's the alternative? I don't know. But maybe looking into ways for their website to take up less bandwidth… so if you're working with a very slow dial-up connection, accessing sitreps on ReliefWeb can be really hard"*(P9, NGO)*

- **Sourced data:** to mitigate the impression of unsourced data, source every piece of information individually. If there are contradictory data, cite them all with sources, and elaborate in the analysis why they might or might not be credible. Some sitreps (100 document analysis # 57 is a good example) embed a link on the document to online sources when available, which is an unobtrusive and effective way to validate information, if done properly (i.e. links are to reliable and recognized websites).

2. Strategic Decisions

While analyzing the interviews and the documents, we identified the following as the main points of confusion over the identity of sitreps:

- **What is the role of politics in sitreps?** Within OCHA, interviewees were divided. Some see sitreps as a place of 'neutral' information about emergencies, sometimes because of a true belief that information can be divided into political and non-political ("We try to identify what information is relevant, neutral, and will help governments and donors to take action." *P35, OCHA)*, sometimes because of a more realistic understanding of the overall political situation ("We try to be very politically correct – especially with the government. The government can be extremely sensitive." *P18, OCHA*). Most interviewees, especially at field level, were well aware that OCHA needs to get along with host governments, because its remaining in the country depends on it. However, it is a difficult balancing act between practical considerations, institutional role, and external expectations, how much politics and political analysis to include in sitreps: 'In some sitreps, you are talking about governments, and they can be very soft on human rights, protection issues... Then we get pushbacks from the NGOs – what's up with OCHA and human rights?' *(P23, OCHA)*. Donors are divided about what kind of information they expect:

"I don't think that we're looking to OCHA for political analysis situation – they are the coordinating body for humanitarian effort, so we are looking for what are the conditions, what is the response – not policy or political issues. That's not what our focus is, that's not OCHA's niche either… We do look at them for security issues – ongoing fighting between groups, but not general political analysis." (Donor Roundtable 1)

"To what extent is OCHA mandated to do political analysis about the protection of civilians? It would probably be dangerous for them to do, but we would like to see them use the humanitarian lens to look at these issues." (Donor Roundtable 2)

During the first roundtable with OCHA desk officers, it was mentioned that one possible solution would be to divide political and humanitarian information, leaving the former to a UN sitrep and the latter to OCHA. This is connected with an issue that we do not fully understand. In countries where the political situation is particularly volatile, often 'the info in the sitrep is not perturbing, the fact that there is a sitrep is the problem.' *(P23, OCHA)*, because OCHA sitreps indicate the existence of an official emergency. In certain occasions, OCHA issues sitreps, but under the United Nations heading. However, it is unclear whether this is left to ad hoc negotiations, or if there are specific guidelines. The 101 document analysis showed that 17 out the 101 documents have been issued as UN sitreps, although they have mostly been compiled by OCHA officers. We are not sure about the meaning and implications of decisions in this field, but a few interviewees expressed a great deal of frustration over it, so it seemed a worthwhile point to raise.

- **Are actors in the field looking at OCHA sitreps to make operational decisions?** This is almost a rhetorical question, but worth asking because even though most parties agree on the answer, sitreps do not reflect this agreement. It seems clear, from both OCHA staff, and even more from NGO interviewees, that humanitarian actors in the field do not need the granularity of information that is currently featured in sitreps. The main ways to share information in the field are more or less formal meetings, and personal contacts. In the words of an OCHA senior manager, 'program staff in big NGOs sit at the same table and already talk about coordination; by the time an OCHA sitrep is being written, tents are already going somewhere.' *(P39, OCHA)*. Donors at headquarters are even less interested in the details of interventions; they want to know trends, and whether there are gaps in the response. However, we are not clear about the role of donors in the field, e.g. embassies, and about how information is shared with them. Both NGOs and OCHA field staff mentioned that field donors are an important element in post-emergency activities. NGOs may even share the occasional internal sitrep with an embassy, in

order to get funding for specific programs. This may have consequences in terms of granularity of information and of language used for sitreps.

- **Who is the audience?** This determines what content/format sitreps take. We discussed the different audiences and their needs above, but it is worth mentioning again that clarifying and prioritizing who the audiences for OCHA sitreps are will help prioritize what information is needed, and more importantly, what is its value added. Clarifying the audience and the information it needs will also help clarifying to people who are putting together sitreps *why* they are doing so. Most operational staff, in OCHA and among NGOs, sees sitrep as something to do because it has to be done, but doesn't see the relevance, or even the consequences, of it.

- **What is OCHA's network of information?** The network that OCHA is going to rely on to get information during emergencies has to be established in advance. "An emergency system not used on a regular basis before an emergency will never be of use in an actual emergency"[44] is a valid principles for technical system but even more for human networks: if there are not pre-existing effective working relationships, they are not going to appear during a crisis.

Opportunities for Information Technology

Although information technology has played an increasingly important role in international disaster response in recent years, especially in the areas of geographic information and logistics support, its adoption is conspicuously lagging in the current practices of situation reporting. Even modest improvements in the information systems used for this process could offer important benefits. Improving the interface used by sitrep writers to create their reports could make this arduous and time-consuming task more efficient and help to ensure the completeness and accuracy of the information provided. Adding structure to common elements of the document, such as the location, type, coverage, and required funds of specific projects – information currently recorded in narrative form – could make key data amenable to database storage, opening opportunities for trend and gap analysis that would require extensive manual labor under the current system. And promoting the adoption of a single, flexible data standard

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44 Murray Turoff. "Past and Future Emergency Response Information Systems." Communications of the ACM, Vol.45 No.4: April 2002. p29.

by different organizations across the sector could enable fast, effective information sharing and aggregation between agencies, providing value for all actors involved in emergency relief. Technology can also facilitate data-driven analysis, as we have mentioned above, but only if the approach to collecting and reporting data is well thought-out and competent. Technology, however, cannot compel the use of a common format or the collection of better data, and cannot solve the issue of lack of training.

There are a number of reasons why the promise of information technology has been difficult to realize in the general context of emergency relief, that OCHA should keep in mind as it decides what to do. One commonly cited issue in the literature is the technical challenge of working in areas where the communications infrastructure, often poor to begin with, has been damaged or destroyed by the effects of the disaster. More important, however, are the significant social and organizational barriers to technology adoption.[45] The decentralized, geographically dispersed nature of many humanitarian organizations, OCHA included, makes it difficult to implement a single solution across multiple offices; especially in emergencies, individual choices and preferences often trump any kind of official mandate. There is often little funding available for technological innovation, and even successful pilot projects are often not considered replicable in multiple offices. Perhaps most importantly, the string of failed or mediocre technology implementations that seems common at a number of organizations, including OCHA, has left staff with a deep cynicism about the benefits of IT projects.

Though thorny, these problems are not intractable. They do, however, require an approach to IT implementation that draws heavily on user research for a rich understanding of the institutional issues that must be addressed. We hope that our research can make a contribution to this understanding.

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45 See for example Paul Currion. "Information and Technology Requirements Initiative: Assessment Report, Findings and Recommendations." The Emergency Capacity Building Project, September 2005 – March 2006. Online at http://www.ecbproject.org

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ReliefWeb: http://www.reliefweb.int
Who What Where: http://3w.unocha.org
GDAC and Virtual OSOCC: http://www.gdacs.org/

APPENDIX A – Interview Protocol

Initial Questions
- Can you tell me a little bit about your background working in humanitarian response? (how long how you been with NGO/OCHA, in which positions, did you have experience in the sector before?)
- Can you tell me how you work with sitreps? (follow up appropriately with author or reader)

Author (follow up if not covered in story)
- (segue appropriately) Can you tell me the story of the last sitrep from the moment you started working on it to the moment it left your desk?
- Where do you get the information you put into a sitrep? (follow-up: how do you get info from other organizations, how do you evaluate it?)
- How do you actually record the information? (examples: writing on an office computer, a laptop, a notebook, memory)
- What guidelines and/or formats do you follow in writing sitreps, and where do they come from? What do you think of them?
- What audiences do you have in mind when you write a sitrep?
- What are the biggest challenges you face when writing sitreps? (potential examples: technical problems, security, time constraints, political issues)
- What do you think are the most important parts of the sitreps that you write in different emergencies?
- How do sitreps are different from emergency to emergency?
- Is there anything about the sitrep format that you would change?
- Do you see the sitreps you write as having any use for you, the author?
- Do you get feedback from the people who read your sitreps?
    - o (If yes, and if feedback seems like an important issue) What kind of feedback do you get?
    - o What do you think about the feedback?

Country officers / Desk officers (sitrep reader or editor)
- Can you tell me the story of the last sitrep from the moment you started working on it to the moment it left your desk?
- Do you use sitreps from other organizations? Is yes, how?
    - o (If they mention "good" sources, ask why they're useful and what might make them more useful)
- What are all the ways that country officers talk to headquarters during an emergency?\
- How do sitreps are different from emergency to emergency?
- What role do sitreps play in this communication?

Critical/Personal analysis
- What do you think is the main purpose of sitreps within your organization?
- What parts of the sitrep do you think are most important to the organization? What parts are least important?
- (what role do sitreps play in the org's overall response to emergencies?)
- What parts of the process seem to work best? What do you see as the biggest challenges in the process?

- Have sitreps changed in the past 5 years? Do you think that new technologies could improve the sitrep process? If so, how, if not why not? What do you think would be the biggest concern of applying new technologies to the sitrep process?

OCHA DONOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
- Can you walk me through the last emergency you worked with: what kind of information did you rely on to assess it?
- do you use OCHA sitreps? How? What kind of information do you find most helpful? What kind of information is not important for your purposes? Any specific example?
- does the info you look for in OCHA sitreps change as the emergency evolves? Does it change for different types of emergencies? (If yes, how? Can you give me a practical example?)
- what are other sources from which you get information about humanitarian emergencies? How are they different from OCHA? (which ones, where do you find them, are they sent to you directly, etc)
- If there is your staff in the country where the emergency is happening, does this change the information you ? How? (Is staff in the field also using OCHA sitreps? Are funding decisions decentralized?)
- What do OCHA sitreps offer that other sources of information do not? What could they offer that they don't offer now?
- (if hasn't come up yet): agencies responding to emergencies seem to want their work to appear on OCHA sitreps for visibility purposes. Is that useful for you as a donor? (Do you notice? do you base your decisions on that?)
- If you could change one thing in existing OCHA sitreps, what would you change?

APPENDIX B: Interviewees

OCHA Interviewees
-Operational Staff (desk, field and regional officers, and/or individuals interviewed in their capacity as sitrep writers/editors): P15, P18, P21, P22, P23, P24, P26b, P27, P28, P31, P33, P34, P35, P36, P37, P38, P40, P41, P42, P43, P44, P45
- Senior Management: P13, P14, P39, P46, P47, P48, P49, P50
- OCHA Staff that work indirectly with sitreps: P16, P17, P19, P20, P25, P26, P30, P32

DONOR Interviewees
- Donor Roundtable 1: Western government agency whose mandate it is to provide development and emergency assistance. Telephone roundtable with 6 individuals
- Donor Roundtable 2: Western government agency whose mandate it is to provide development and emergency assistance. Telephone roundtable with 4 individuals

NGO Interviewees
- Organization 1: large international NGO active in development and emergency relief; P11
- Organization 2: large international NGO active in development and emergency relief; P1, P8
- Organization 3: large international NGO active in development and emergency relief; P3, P4, P5, P6, P10, P12
- Organization 4: medium-size NGO mainly focused on development projects; P2
- Organization 5: very small NGO focused exclusively on development projects; P7
- Organization 6: small-size NGO focused on migration during conflicts; P9

APPENDIX C: 101 Document Analysis

#	DATE	DAYS COVERED	REGION	SCALE 1 TO 10						UN or OCHA
				Structured(1)	Data-driven(2)	NRG (3)	Sourced (4)	UN agencies	NGOs	
1	March 9-15	7	Sudan	2	4	3	2	95	5	UN
2	March 1-17	17	Nepal	1	2	1	3	95	5	OCHA
3	27 Feb - 4 Mar	7	OPT	4	9	1	7	0	0	OCHA
4	March 19	doesn't say	Kazakhstan	7	8	10	8	80	20	OCHA
5	March 7-17	10	Colombia	5	7	1	10	50	50	OCHA
6	March 20	doesn't say	Somalia	2	6	1	7	30	70	OCHA
7	March 5-11	7	OPT	4	9	1	7	0	0	OCHA
8	February	29	OPT	9	9	1	7	0	0	OCHA
9	March 12-18	7	Katanga	2	4	3	5	25	75	OCHA
10	March 10-16	7	Burundi	2	6	1	7	90	10	OCHA
11	March 21	doesn't say	Albania	5	7	5	10	80	20	OCHA
12	March 20	doesn't say	Southern Africa	5	4	1	6	80	20	OCHA
13	March 11-17	7	Province Orientale	2	3	1	7	90	10	OCHA
14	March 25?	doesn't say	Bolivia	2	4	4	9	95	5	OCHA
15	March 15-21	7	DR Congo	2	2	1	3	50	50	OCHA
16	March 18-23	6	Province Orientale	2	3	3	4	80	20	OCHA
16b	March 26	doesn't say	Albania	5	7	7	10	0	0	OCHA
17	March 19-25	7	Sud Kivu	2	4	3	3	10	90	OCHA
18	March 20-26	7	Kenya	3	3	2	9	45	65	UN
19	March 24-28	5	Zimbabwe	4	1	1	2	85	15	UN
20	March 19-25	7	Katanga	3	3	2	4	25	75	OCHA
21	March 8-27	20	RDC Province Centre/Ouest	1	2	1	4	90	10	OCHA
22	March 17-23	7	Burundi	1	1	1	4	50	50	OCHA
23	March 27	1	Ethiopia	2	3	7	4	30	70	OCHA
24	March 12-18	7	OPT	3	9	1	7	0	0	OCHA
25	March 28	doesn't say	Southern Africa	5	5	2	4	70	30	OCHA
26	March 17-20	4	RDC	2	3	2	4	70	30	OCHA
27	March 28	doesn't say	OPT	3	7	4	7	100	0	OCHA
28	March 27	7	Darfur	3	4	1	5	75	25	OCHA
29	February 28	doesn't say	Madagascar	2	6	3	3	50	50	OCHA
30	March 18-31	14	Nepal	1	1	1	3	100	0	OCHA
31	April 1	doesn't say	Tajikistan	2	3	4	6	80	20	OCHA
32	March 31	doesn't say	Latin America & Caribbean	2	4	1	9	100	0	OCHA
33	March 25-31	7	RDC Province Orientale	2	3	1	3	50	50	OCHA
34	April 2	doesn't say	Iraq	2	5	4	5	70	30	OCHA
35	April 1	doesn't say	Ecuador	4	5	4	7	100	0	OCHA
36	March 26 - April 1	7	Katanga	2	2	3	8	70	30	OCHA
37	April 3	29	Gaza	3	8	1	4	100	0	OCHA
38	April 3	31	West Africa	2	2	3	4	95	5	OCHA
39	March 23-29	7	Southern Sudan	2	4	4	4	80	20	UN
40	March 28 - April 3	7	Congo	2	2	4	6	85	15	OCHA

101 Document Analysis – 2

#	DATE	DAYS COVERED	REGION	Structured(1)	Data-driven(2)	NRG (3)	Sourced (4)	UN agencies	NGOs	UN or OCHA
							SCALE 1 TO 10			
41	March 22 - 28	7	North Kivu	2	3	1	4	30	70	OCHA
42	March 24 - 30	7	Burundi	1	2	1	4	55	45	OCHA
43	March 27 - April 2	7	Kenya	2	3	1	3	70	30	UN
44	March 19-25	7	OPT	3	8	1	7	0	0	OCHA
45	March 29 - April 4	7	Zimbabwe	2	2	1	2	100	0	OCHA
46	April	doesn't say	Africa	1	1	1	3	0	0	OCHA
47	March 26 - April 1	7	OPT	3	9	1	7	0	0	OCHA
48	April 7	doesn't say	Ethiopia	2	3	3	2	50	50	OCHA
49	April 7	50	Timor-Leste	6	5	3	7	50	50	OCHA
50	March 30 - April 4	6	Southern Sudan	3	5	1	4	80	20	UN
51	March	31	Somalia	1	2	1	4	40	60	UN
52	March 31 - April 7	8	RDC Province Orientale	2	3	1	7	30	70	OCHA
53	April 10	doesn't say	Southern Africa	4	5	5	6	65	35	OCHA
54	MISSING									
55	April 2 - 8	7	Katanga	2	3	3	4	30	70	OCHA
56	April 2 - 8	7	Sud Kivu	2	2	2	5	5	95	OCHA
57	April 4 - 10	7	RDC Provinces Centre-Ouest	3	3	3	7	95	5	OCHA
58	March 31 - April 6	7	Burundi	1	2	1	3	70	30	OCHA
59	April 11	doesn't say	Somalia	1	3	2	6	50	50	OCHA
60	April 3-9	7	Kenya	2	2	2	4	75	25	UN
61	April 7 - 11	5	RDC	3	3	4	4	20	80	OCHA
62	March 1 - 31	31	Uganda	2	2	3	3	100	0	OCHA
63	April 1 - 14	14	Nepal	2	1	1	3	95	5	OCHA
64	same as 63									
65	Feb 20 - March 4	14	OPT	7	9	1	7	0	0	UN
66	no date	doesn't say	doesn't say!	3	3	1	10	0	0	OCHA
67	April 16	doesn't say	Chad	2	3	4	4	65	35	OCHA
68	same as 67, but in English									
69	April 16	doesn't say	Chad	3	4	4	4	90	10	UN
70	April 15	doesn't say	Sadr City, Baghdad	2	7	4	5	10	0	OCHA
71	April 6 - 12	7	Southern Sudan	2	4	4	7	90	10	UN
72	April 16	doesn't say	RDC	2	3	4	7	40	60	OCHA
73	same as 72, but in English									
74	April 16	doesn't say	Tajikistan	4	3	4	8	80	20	OCHA
75	Feb - March	doesn't say	Iraq	4	4	4	8	10	90	OCHA
76	April 17	7	Darfur	2	3	4	4	40	60	OCHA

101 Document Analysis – 3

#	DATE	DAYS COVERED	REGION	SCALE 1 TO 10						
				Structured(1)	Data-driven(2)	NRG (3)	Sourced (4)	UN agencies	NGOs	UN or OCHA
76b	March 5 - 18	14	OPT	7	9	1	7	0	0	UN
77	April 16	doesn't say	Chad	2	4	4	4	90	10	UN
78	April 18	doesn't say	Uganda	7	6	1	4	30	70	OCHA
79	April 10 - 16	7	Kenya	3	5	4	4	90	10	UN
80	April 18	doesn't say	Somalia	1	4	3	3	80	20	OCHA
81	April 18	31	Gaza	3	3	4	4	60	40	OCHA
82	March	31	Somalia	4	4	5	4	30	70	UN
83	April 17	doesn't say	Gaza	3	2	1	1	0	0	OCHA
84	April 7 - 12	6	Burundi	2	3	4	4	80	20	OCHA
85	April 22	doesn't say	Burundi	1	2	1	2	50	50	OCHA
86	April	doesn't say	OPT	8	8	1	7	0	0	OCHA
87	April 20	14	Ecuador	3	2	4	3	60	40	UN
88	April 2 - 8	7	OPT	3	9	1	7	0	0	OCHA
89	April 23	doesn't say	Gaza	2	6	3	7	70	30	OCHA
90	April 15 - 21	7	Province Orientale (sic)	3	3	3	4	50	50	OCHA
91	April 16 - 22	7	Sud Kivu	3	2	4	4	10	90	OCHA
92	April 23	doesn't say	Chad	2	4	3	3	95	10	OCHA
93	April 23	doesn't say	Chad	2	3	5	3	10	0	OCHA
94	April 13 - 19	7	Sudan	3	5	3	4	90	10	UN
95	April 10	7	Sudan	2	3	3	4	70	30	OCHA
96	April 24	7	Sudan	2	3	3	3	60	30	OCHA
97	March 1 - 31	31	Central & East Africa	1	2	2	3	95	10	OCHA
98	April 14 - 20	7	Burundi	2	2	3	3	90	10	OCHA
99	April 18 - 24	7	RDC	2	2	3	4	40	60	OCHA
100	April 5 - 21	17	Colombia	5	3	1	8	30	70	OCHA
101	April 16 - 22	7	Katanga	2	3	4	4	30	70	OCHA
102	April 16 - 25	10	Somalia	1	1	1	4	60	40	OCHA
			AVERAGE	2.8	4.0	2.5	5.0	53.3	23.9	17 UN
			'SITREP' IN TITLE	3.1	4.1	3.2	5.8	60.0	23.1	2 UN
			'NO SITREP IN TITLE'	2.7	4.0	2.3	4.8	51.4	24.6	15 UN

LEGEND:
unstructured - structure(1): 1 corresponds to an entirely narrative document, 10 to entirely structured; this doesn't refer to the amount of data v analysis
data-driven(2): 1 corresponds to a document with very little data, 10 entirely data-driven
NRG(3): 1 corresponds to complete absence of needs-response-gaps, 10 the entire sitrep is devoted to needs-response-gap; reference to NRG can be in a separate section or woven through the text
sourced(4): 1 - practically unsourced; 10 - very well sourced. Sitreps that hover around 3/4 tend to be laundry lists of NGOs and other UN agencies' activities.

101 Document Analysis – 4

#	DATE	DAYS COVERED	REGION	N - C (5)	SITREP IN TITLE?	ALT NAME	C - A (6)	GAPS (7)	ENG (8)	# PAGES	MAPS	S or G (9)	CONTACT (10)
													BINARY
1	March 9-15	7	Sudan	C	N	weekly bulletin	C	N	Y	6	N	s	Y
2	March 1-17	17	Nepal	C	N	fortnightly situation overview	C	N	Y	4	N	s	Y
3	27 Feb - 4 Mar	7	OPT	C	N	tection of civilians weekly re	C	N	Y	28	N	g	Y
4	March 19	doesn't say	Kazakhstan	N	Y	-	A	Y	Y	4	N	s	Y
5	March 7-17	10	Colombia	C	Y	humanitarian situation repor	C	N	Y	4	Y	g	Y
6	March 20	doesn't say	Somalia	C	Y	-	C	N	Y	2	N	s	Y
7	March 5-11	7	OPT	C	N	tection of civilians weekly re	C	N	Y	21	N	g	Y
8	February	29	OPT	C	N	ion of civilians summary data	C	N	Y	19	Y	g	Y
9	March 12-18	7	Katanga	C	N	situation humanitaire	C	Y	N	8	N	both	N
10	March 10-16	7	Burundi	C	N	weekly humanitarian news	C	N	Y	2	N	s	Y
11	March 21	doesn't say	Albania	N	Y	-	A	N	Y	3	N	neither	Y
12	March 20	doesn't say	Southern Africa	N	Y	-	A	N	Y	8	Y	g	Y
13	March 11-17	7	Province Orientale	C	N	situation humanitaire	C	N	N	3	N	both	N
14	March 25?	doesn't say	Bolivia	N	Y	-	A	N	Y	2	N	g	N
15	March 15-21	7	DR Congo	C	N	humanitarian situation update	C	N	Y	2	N	s	Y
16	March 18-23	6	Province Orientale	C	N	humanitaire - rapport hebdo	C	N	N	2	N	g	N
16b	March 26	doesn't say	Albania	N	Y	-	A	Y	Y	3	Y	neither	Y
17	March 19-25	7	Sud Kivu	C	N	situation humanitaire	C	Y	N	5	N	both	N
18	March 20-26	7	Kenya	C	N	humanitarian update	A	N	Y	6	N	s	Y
19	March 24-28	5	Zimbabwe	C	Y	weekly situation report	A	N	Y	2	N	s	Y
20	March 19-25	7	Katanga	C	N	situation humanitaire	C	Y	N	5	N	g	N
21	March 8-27	20	C Province Centre/Ou	C	N	humanitaire - rapport hebdo	C	Y	N	4	N	both	Y
22	March 17-23	7	Burundi	C	N	weekly humanitarian news	C	N	Y	1	N	s	N
23	March 27	1	Ethiopia	N	Y	-	A	Y	Y	4	N	g	Y
24	March 12-18	7	OPT	C	N	tection of civilians weekly re	C	N	Y	20	N	g	Y
25	March 28	doesn't say	Southern Africa	N	Y	-	A	N	Y	5	Y	g	Y
26	March 17-20	4	RDC	C	N	situation humanitaire	C	N	N	3	N	both	N
27	March 28	doesn't say	OPT	C	N	humanitarian situation update	C	Y	Y	4	N	both	Y
28	March 27	7	Darfur	C	N	nanitarian action weekly bull	C	Y	Y	4	N	both	Y
29	February 28	doesn't say	Madagascar	N	Y	-	A	N	Y	4	N	s	Y
30	March 18-31	14	Nepal	C	N	fortnightly situation overview	C	N	Y	4	N	s	Y
31	April 1	doesn't say	Tajikistan	N	Y	-	A	N	Y	5	Y	s	Y
32	March 31	doesn't say	tin America & Caribbe	both	N	weekly note on emergencies	C	N	Y	3	N	both	Y
33	March 25-31	7	RDC Province Orienta	C	N	humanitaire - rapport hebdo	C	N	N	3	N	both	N
34	April 2	doesn't say	Iraq	C	Y	humanitarian situation repor	C	N	Y	2	N	both	N
35	April 1	doesn't say	Ecuador	N	Y	-	A	N	Y	6	Y	s	Y
36	March 26 - April	7	Katanga	C	N	situation humanitaire	C	Y	N	8	N	s	N
37	April 3	29	Gaza	C	N	humanitarian fact sheet	C	N	Y	3	N	s	Y
38	April 3	31	West Africa	both	Y	monthly situation report	C	Y	Y	9	Y	both	Y
39	March 23-29	7	Southern Sudan	C	N	kly bulletin - humanitarian ac	C	Y	Y	6	N	s	Y
40	March 28 - April	7	Congo	C	N	situation humanitaire	C	Y	Y	3	N	both	Y

101 Document Analysis – 5

#	DATE	DAYS COVERED	REGION	N - C (5)	SITREP IN TITLE?	ALT NAME	C - A (6)	GAPS (7)	ENG (8)	# PAGES	MAPS	S or G (9)	CONTACT (10)
										BINARY			
41	March 22 - 28	7	North Kivu	C	N	humanitarian situation update	C	N	Y	4	N	s	Y
42	March 24 - 30	7	Burundi	C	N	weekly humanitarian news	C	N	Y	2	N	neither	N
43	March 27 - April	7	Kenya	C	N	humanitarian update	A	N	Y	6	N	s	Y
44	March 19-25	7	OPT	C	N	tection of civilians weekly re	C	N	Y	20	N	both	Y
45	March 29 - April	7	Zimbabwe	C	Y	weekly situation report	A	N	Y	4	N	s	Y
46	April	doesn't say	Africa	neither	N	pastoralist voices	neither	N	Y	4	Y	neither	Y
47	March 26 - April	7	OPT	C	N	tection of civilians weekly re	C	N	Y	20	N	g	Y
48	April 7	doesn't say	Ethiopia	C	N	humanitarian bulletin	C	N	Y	2	N	s	N
49	April 7	50	Timor-Leste	C	N	humanitarian update	C	N	Y	14	N	s	Y
50	March 30 - April	6	Southern Sudan	C	N	weekly bulletin	C	N	Y	5	N	s	Y
51	March	31	Somalia	both	N	humanitarian overview	C	N	Y	4	Y	s	Y
52	March 31 - April	8	RDC Province Orienta	C	N	humanitaire - rapport hebdo	C	N	N	3	N	both	N
53	April 10	doesn't say	Southern Africa	N	Y	-	A	N	Y	3	Y	neither	Y
54	MISSING												
55	April 2 - 8	7	Katanga	C	N	situation humanitaire	C	Y	N	9	N	both	N
56	April 2 - 8	7	Sud Kivu	C	N	situation humanitaire	C	Y	N	5	N	both	N
57	April 4 - 10	7	C Provinces Centre-O	C	N	situation humanitaire	C	Y	N	4	N	both	Y
58	March 31 - April	7	Burundi	C	N	weekly humanitarian news	C	N	Y	1	N	s	N
59	April 11	doesn't say	Somalia	C	Y	-	C	N	Y	2	N	s	Y
60	April 3-9	7	Kenya	C	N	humanitarian update	A	N	Y	8	N	s	Y
61	April 7 - 11	5	RDC	C	N	situation humanitaire	C	N	N	2	N	both	N
62	March 1 - 31	31	Uganda	C	Y	humanitarian situation report	C	N	Y	6	N	both	Y
63	April 1 - 14	14	Nepal	C	N	fortnightly situation overview	C	N	Y	4	N	s	Y
64	same as 63												
65	Feb 20 - March	14	OPT	C	N	of the agreement on movem	C	N	Y	8	N	g	Y
66	no date	doesn't say	doesn't say!	N	Y	-	A		Y	2	N	both	N
67	April 16	doesn't say	Chad	C	N	etin d'information hebdomad	C	N	N	3	N	s	Y
68	same as 67, but in English												
69	April 16	doesn't say	Chad	C	N	anitarian action snapshot re	C	Y	Y	5	N	s	Y
70	April 15	doesn't say	Sadr City, Baghdad	C	Y	-	C	N	Y	3	Y	s	N
71	April 6 - 12	7	Southern Sudan	C	N	weekly bulletin	C	Y	Y	6	N	s	N
72	April 16	doesn't say	RDC	N	Y	rapport de situation	A	N	N	2	N	s	Y
73	same as 72, but in English												
74	April 16	doesn't say	Tajikistan	N	Y	-	A	Y	Y	4	N	s	Y
75	Feb - March	doesn't say	Iraq	C	N	ERF and NGO micro-grants	C	N	Y	6	Y	both	Y
76	April 17	7	Darfur	C	N	anitarian action weekly bull	C	N	Y	4	N	both	Y

101 Document Analysis – 6

#	DATE	DAYS COVERED	REGION	N - C (5)	SITREP IN TITLE?	ALT NAME	C - A (6)	GAPS (7)	ENG (8)	# PAGES	MAPS	S or G (9)	CONTACT (10)
									BINARY				
76b	March 5 - 18	14	OPT	C	N	of the agreement on movem	C	N	Y	8	N	g	Y
77	April 16	doesn't say	Chad	C	N	tion humanitaire: fair et chiffr	C	Y	N	4	N	s	Y
78	April 18	doesn't say	Uganda	C	N	joint factsheet	C	N	Y	2	N	both	Y
79	April 10 - 16	7	Kenya	C	N	humanitarian update	A	N	Y	7	Y	s	Y
80	April 18	doesn't say	Somalia	C	Y	-	C	N	Y	1	N	neither	Y
81	April 18	31	Gaza	C	N	humanitarian fact sheet	C	N	Y	2	N	s	Y
82	March	31	Somalia	C	N	monthly cluster report	C	Y	Y	7	Y	s	Y
83	April 17	doesn't say	Gaza	C	Y	humanitarian situation repor	A	N	Y	3	N	s	Y
84	April 7 - 12	6	Burundi	C	N	weekly humanitarian news	C	N	Y	2	N	s	Y
85	April 22	doesn't say	Burundi	C	N	update on insecurity	C	N	Y	1	N	g	N
86	April	doesn't say	OPT	C	N	socio-economic fact sheet	C	N	Y	14	N	s	N
87	April 20	14	Ecuador	N	Y	-	A	N	N	5	N	s	N
88	April 2 - 8	7	OPT	C	N	tection of civilians weekly re	C	N	Y	20	N	both	Y
89	April 23	doesn't say	Gaza	C	Y	-	A	N	Y	2	N	s	N
90	April 15 - 21	7	Province Orientale (si	C	N	situation humanitaire	C	Y	N	2	N	both	N
91	April 16 - 22	7	Sud Kivu	C	N	situation humanitaire	C	Y	N	3	N	s	N
92	April 23	doesn't say	Chad	C	N	weekly information bulletin	C	Y	Y	4	N	s	Y
93	April 23	doesn't say	Chad	C	N	etin d'information hebdomad	C	Y	N	3	N	s	Y
94	April 13 - 19	7	Sudan	C	N	weekly bulletin	C	Y	Y	4	N	s	Y
95	April 10	7	Sudan	C	N	manitarian action weekly bull	C	N	Y	2	N	both	Y
96	April 24	7	Sudan	C	N	manitarian action weekly bull	C	N	Y	4	N	both	Y
97	March 1 - 31	31	Central & East Africa	C	N	egional humanitarian update	C	Y	Y	4	Y	both	Y
98	April 14 - 20	7	Burundi	C	N	weekly humanitarian news	C	N	Y	2	N	s	N
99	April 18 - 24	7	RDC	C	N	situation humanitaire	C	Y	N	3	N	both	Y
##	April 5 - 21	17	Colombia	C	Y	humanitarian situation repor	C	N	Y	3	Y	both	Y
##	April 16 - 22	7	Katanga	C	N	situation humanitaire	C	Y	N	10	N	both	N
##	April 16 - 25	10	Somalia	C	Y	-	C	N	Y	1	N	neither	Y

LEGEND:
N- C (5): indicates whether the emergency is natural or complex
C – A (6): indicates whether the emergency is chronic or acute
GAPS (7): indicates whether or not there is a specific and clearly visible section dedicated to gaps or needs
ENG (8): indicates whether the report is in English or in other languages (typically French)
G - S (9): geographical or sectorial, indicates whether the information is organized geographically or sectorially
CONTACT (10): indicates whether or not there is contact information

APPENDIX D: Document Analysis

35 Situation Reports are available at:
http://people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~jbward/SitrepProject/Sitreps/

35 Document Analysis are available at:
http://people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~jbward/SitrepProject/Analysis/

A Consolidated Table of Information Components is available at:
http://people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~jbward/SitrepProject/CandidateComponents.xls

Document Analysis of a Single Emergency is available at:
http://people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~jbward/SitrepProject/SingleEmergWordCounts.xls