Agenda

0845  Refreshments
0900  Introduction (Ashraf Ghani)
0915  Presentation on overall information strategy, including proposal for Information Strategy Task Force and AIMS advisory board (Nigel Fisher)
0930  General discussion
1030  Coffee Break
1045  Working session in sectoral groups
1145  Plenary presentations and discussion
1300  Close

**0900 Introduction**

The Interim Administration realizes the importance of information management to ensure the effective functioning of government. Mr. Ghani noted that information is still seen as power by many people in the Afghan and international community, and tended to be manipulated. The responsibility for the current ‘hoarding’ of information is equally distributed on all sides; therefore the responsibility for sharing also needs to be distributed equally.

In addition, there is a problem in the perception of international effort by Interim Administration, and vice versa. As a result there needs to be awareness-raising on both sides to ensure that they can work together. Information management is one way of encouraging this process.

From the point of view of the ACA, Mr. Ghani wants an understanding of who is doing what where, and what is being planned for the future. This is not in order to control activities undertaken by international organizations, but to plan properly for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

**0915 Presentation**

From the UN side, Nigel Fisher noted that information management is important for reporting and accountability. There have been a number of initiatives attempting to fill the gaps in our knowledge – notably, AIMS attempts to set up the Who’s doing What Where (activity tracking database) and the Survey of Surveys (a list of surveys and assessments being carried out). Unfortunately the response to these initiatives has been very poor. As a result the picture of assistance to Afghanistan is still partial, fragmented and driven by sectoral concerns.

The UN identifies 3 types of information – 1) Basic reference data, 2) Aid tracking, and 3) Development indicators – as a useful way of identifying key needs. In order to
effectively implement information management there needs to be an information needs assessment (which this meeting today will begin), followed by the application of basic standards across the assistance effort.

UNAMA and the Interim Administration are setting up Programme Groups (for major fields of work such as health, agriculture, education, etc.); each Group will be responsible for developing an information strategy specific to its needs. At present there are a number of elements already working on information management issues. AIMS is undertaking operational support, providing a range of products and services to the assistance community. In addition UNDP and World Bank will be bringing valuable inputs to the Interim Administration in the coming months. A proposal is also on the table for a Chief Information Officer for the ACA.

0930 General Discussion

The discussion ranged widely; a few main points are recorded here:

- Both UNAMA and the AACA expressed their disappointment at the poor response to the “Who’s doing What Where” (WdWW) exercise. Ashraf Ghani explained that the Administration will first request responses, then demand them, then compel organizations to take part. One solution offered was that AIMS should invest in “outreach” capacity in order to follow up on exercises like WdWW by visiting NGOs and UN agencies in person. It might also be possible for donors to build an information reporting requirement into contracts with implementing partners.

- NGOs have very limited capacity to dedicate to information management, but they are often the richest source of data. There is therefore a need for communication, not just data collection. Although the Sectoral Working Groups provide a focus, they are often not functioning well – Groups might perhaps appoint a “secretariat” of 1 UN representative, 1 government representative and 1 NGO representative to manage these responsibilities.

- A clear desire was felt for one clear portal into the Interim Administration. The ACA might be able to provide this role, but dedicated “implementation cells” are planned for each ministry in order to move things forward.

- The need for translation of official documents was clearly identified as a key need for the assistance community. One major obstacle to this is lack of a translation service, which is an area that may require donor attention. Concern was expressed that the “little old lady in downtown Kabul” does not know what is going on in her own country – emphasizing the need for clear public information.

- There are many assessment and survey teams coming in from the outside but no coordination. The results of these missions are not being shared widely, indicating that distribution and dissemination are still a problem. Having a single focal point such as AIMS for this dissemination is a sound idea but only if organizations pass their reports and findings to AIMS in shareable forms.
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Paul Currion (AIMS) presented the framework and draft TORs for a Task Force (to develop the Information Strategy) and an Advisory Board (to act as a feedback mechanism and strategic guide specifically for AIMS). (These documents are attached to this report as Annexes 1 and 2 respectively.)

There was general consensus on the need to develop an Information Management Strategy. In order to do this UNAMA will convene a Task Force to develop and oversee the implementation of the Strategy, with participants drawn from those present at the Strategy Meeting.

The Task Force will also agree TORs for a smaller group to act as an Advisory Board to AIMS. Representatives from four stakeholder groups will be contacted by the following parties, ensuring balanced representation on the Board. In addition one or more independent parties will be identified for participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Interim Admin</th>
<th>UN</th>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>Donor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focal Point</strong></td>
<td>Ashraf Ghani (ACA)</td>
<td>Nick Leader (UNAMA)</td>
<td>Ian Purves (ACBAR)</td>
<td>Norway (APB)</td>
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</tbody>
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The Guiding Principles circulated by AIMS (outlined in Annex 3 below) were not challenged and will form the basis for the development of the Strategy.

**1045 Working Groups**

**1145 Plenary presentations and discussion**

1. Refugee/IDP returns
2. Health
3. Education/training
4. Malnutrition
5. Small-scale infrastructure
6. Donor group¹

The small groups were asked to use the following template to identify ‘next steps’ in improving information management.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decision requirement</td>
<td>How should we manage resources for refugee and IDP returns?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information needs</td>
<td>Where are the refugees and IDPs going to? What is the situation like in districts of return? What resources are available already?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Resources</td>
<td>UNHCR/IOM return data, existing population estimates, district profiles, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvements</td>
<td>What more do we need to do to get this information?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ The Donor group replaced a proposed group on “Labour intensive projects for ex-combatants”, for which no participants volunteered.
The groups were based on self-selection and participation was not necessarily based on sectoral expertise. The intention behind the groups was not to develop an information strategy for that sector, but to lead participants through the process of developing such a strategy. The details of these small group discussions will not be reported here as it is the responsibility of sectoral working groups to develop strategies. However a number of interesting points arose from these group discussions.

- The basic use for all the information discussed is to **allocate resources effectively**. All sectoral information strategies should aim to maximize the efficient use of available resources.

- One of the key needs is therefore information on **who’s doing what where**. This data should also include information on planned activities, and particularly give indication on the funding attached to these activities.

- In order to measure appropriateness and impact of who’s doing what where, there is an equivalent need for information on the basic needs in Afghanistan. However a lack of **baseline data** was felt by almost every sector, reinforced by a lack of data collection capacity. One solution proposed is to build up the capacity for local data collection at the district level – this could then feed into monitoring and evaluation activities.

- The need for agreed **data standards** for all sectors was identified. This includes geographical standards (ie geocodes), as well as quantitative and qualitative measures for assessments. Such standards should also consider information security for sensitive data (for instance, relating to protection issues).

- There should also be **better use of existing literature** (assessments, reports, studies, etc). This relates to the importance of locating all information management in a framework that allow for **analysis over time**, not just over space. This approach also allows for the inclusion of **monitoring & evaluation** of activities using the project life cycle model. This sort of feedback mechanism was felt to be essential for information management.

- An **holistic approach** is necessary, connecting the work of sectors to each other. This supports the need for an **over-arching information strategy**, without taking away the need for individual sector strategies. However this sort of approach requires a clear definition of the various roles and responsibilities of the actors involved, enabling joint responses to be mounted.

- **Sharing information** is as important as collecting and analyzing it. The more wider information is shared, the more useful it is. Key factors are accuracy, timeliness and relevance – all of which emphasise the need for **quality control** on information. In particular some groups noted the importance of getting information to the beneficiaries in a useful form (and in some cases, collecting it in a useful form, ie Dari language surveys!).

- Most importantly is the **use of information**. Information should not just be collected for information’s sake – it must be used effectively. A lack of analytical capacity was felt, which meant that often survey information addressed the symptoms rather than the causes of humanitarian problems.
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These clear points can be used to guide the development of information strategies for each sector. AIMS was asked to support this and has prepared an introduction sheet for Sectoral Working Groups to help them begin this process (attached as Annex 4).

Donor Group

The donor community had some specific comments that they wanted to share with the meeting.

A small group of large donors (EC, USAID, DfID) has been working with AIMS since December 2001 to develop a Donor Funding Database. The database is geocoded and uses the DAC codes so it will be compatible with any later developments, and a pilot version has been tested. The next step is to work out variable levels of access to the database to enable different users to generate reports. The donors want to share the database with the AACA and assume that the AACA can then apply it to other donors. The Donor Funding Database demonstrates that donor coordination is working and that there is a commitment to provide wider access to this information.

The donors had a number of concerns related to this. There is a danger that an overload of reporting requirements will lead to diminishing returns – essentially, that people will get tired of filling out forms. Often, the lack of response to requests for information is based in a lack of capacity, not a lack of will. The formation of an Advisory Board for AIMS would be a critical interface to look at ways of dealing with these and other issues.

The donor group did not have time to discuss everything it intended, but wanted the following issues to be noted:

1. What was the role of the “Synergy” database that UNDP intended to introduce to track assistance? The donors felt that they had already invested in developing a database that delivered what was needed.
2. No matter what system is used there need to be data standards. Measures also need to be taken to address common problems in data collection, such as double counting.
3. There is still a big need to address the shortfall in basic data.

Conclusions

Nigel Fisher emphasized the need for information to be presented in the most useful format to end-users – not just electronic versions, but hard copies and through walk-in services. It was also clear that there needed to be a clear vision of the structure of the Interim Administration, with focal points and channels for sectoral information. In order to ensure that information was used properly there also needed to be a process of educating managers and decision-makers. Finally, he pointed out that perfection was not essential and that the real need was to disseminate appropriate information as rapidly as possible.

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More detailed reports from these small groups will be issued as an addendum to this report at a later date.
Outline TORs for the Information Strategy Task Force

a. The Information Strategy Task Force will be responsible for developing the Strategy and for overseeing the implementation of that Strategy.
b. The Task Force will be composed of operational level personnel working on technical (tracking, database development, etc) and programme issues.
c. The Task Force will generate the Strategy through a process of consultation with key actors. The Task Force and the AIMS Advisory Board will be responsible for setting out this list of key actors.
d. The development of the Strategy will result in the production of an Information Strategy Document that can be distributed to a wider group of stakeholders.
e. Approval of the Strategy will rest with a senior level group. This group will support the efforts of the Task Force, particularly in terms of mobilizing key actors.
f. The implementation of the Strategy is the responsibility of those actors that have been identified as resources during the development of the Strategy. The Task Force will have responsibility for mobilizing those actors.
g. The Task Force will not be time-limited but will continue to meet until the Information Strategy is fully developed and implementation has begun. At this point a review should be carried out to decide whether the Work Group needs to change its composition or character for successful implementation; these TORs will need to be reviewed.
ANNEX 2

Advisory Board for Afghanistan Information Management Service (AIMS)
Terms of Reference

1. To meet on a regular basis of not less than once a month with the express purpose of discussing information management issues, particularly as they relate to the ongoing work of AIMS;

2. To provide strategic guidance to the AIMS project in order to ensure that the project responds in an appropriate and timely manner to needs in the field;

3. To receive and respond to reports by the Project Manager and the managing organizations (UNOCHA and UNDP) on the progress of the project;

4. To ensure the participation of other organizations and projects in the work of AIMS;

5. To work to improve information management both within their own organizations and in the wider community. This will include presenting the tools and services provided by AIMS in other bodies or meetings, supporting data collection and distribution exercises, and assisting AIMS in mobilizing resources for information management activities undertaken by AIMS or other organizations.

The members of the Advisory Board will be acting as the representatives of their organizations and of the wider community to which they belong, not as individuals. The members of the Board will be responsible for ensuring that their organization is represented at Board meetings. Should any Board member fail to attend two consecutive meetings they will no longer be considered representative. In this instance the remaining members of the Board will consider alternative organizations for membership.

The AIMS Project Manager will be responsible for convening meetings of the Advisory Board. The Board should meet once a month. However an extraordinary meeting may be convened by the joint request of any two members of the Board to the Project Manager.

The AIMS Project Manager should provide a monthly report to the Board. This report will not be a full report but will be an update on progress against activities previously indicated or approved by the Board.
Guiding Principles for Information Management

- **Interoperability**: In view of the number and variety of independent data providers and consumers in the context of Afghanistan, the technical success and effectiveness of an information management strategy must be based on the interoperability of available information. This does not refer to specific software or other applications, but on accepted and implementable common standards and formats for information collection and exchange.

- **Accessibility**: The viability over time of an information management system is based on the perception of access by users. Specifically, information providers will cease to do so if they cannot receive timely and relevant access to information to meet their needs. Similarly, information users will not use the system and revert to fragmented independent processes if their needs are not met.

- **Flexibility**: Coordination and collaboration will be required to ensure that proposed systems, practices and processes are compatible with existing standards. Planning is also necessary to ensure that new systems are capable of meeting the full range of expected customer requirements for the systems they are replacing. System deployment must also be compliant with and allow update of standard geographic coding (geocodes) as developed by AIMS and the AIA/Central Statistics Office (CSO). Flexibility also recognizes that the same information can and will be used by different users according to their level and focus. To meet these needs, data should be defined to the smallest consistently useable level and groupable/un-groupable to various levels of aggregation. To meet this end information managers should agree to and apply consistent and common referents and formats to their data in accordance with the intended use.

Finally, and most importantly:

- **A commitment to build capacity**: The new information environment requires new skills and working practices to succeed, on the part of both information professionals and decision-makers that wish to make effective use of information. This is probably the most critical part of the entire strategy and it must not be underestimated. All stakeholders in ARIMS will actively work to develop and maintain individual and organizational Afghan skills, technology and practices. It is also the responsibility of all assistance organization managers to ensure that the people working within their organisations have the skills required to be effective in the developing information environment.

A strategy is not a physical document. It should be a set of Guiding Principles and Practices that the various actors involved voluntarily choose to incorporate into their work. The following points should be borne in mind:

1. An Information Strategy must be related to the Sector strategy. This provides it with the framework for implementation, as information management involves financial, human, IT resources, etc.
2. An Information Strategy must have clear and realistic objectives that relate very clearly to the needs that have been identified by the sectoral working group.
3. An Information Strategy requires the support of senior management.
4. An Information Strategy should clearly identify different types of information and the different purposes that this information is used for (security updates, baseline data collection, situation reports, etc). The Strategy should recognize that different types of information have different uses for different actors and seek to maximize information that is multi-purpose.
5. A Strategy Document is a useful guide to the Strategy BUT should not be mistaken for the Strategy itself. Such a document might include the elements listed below. However it is useful to bear in mind that each of these elements are only reflections of processes.

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

Background
A brief explanation of the context in which the strategy is being implemented, including an outline of the opportunities and problems that the strategy will have to account for.

Information Needs
This is the identification by the key players of what they require, in the context of section 2, and how these needs will be incorporated into the strategy. Not all information needs to be included and there should be discussion of what is and is not within the scope of the strategy. This should include an audit of existing information resources and a list of requirements based on that.

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

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

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