Meeting Record

Crisis Mapping, Humanitarian Principles and the application of Protection Standards - A dialogue between Crisis mappers and Operational Humanitarian Agencies
17 November 2011 – Geneva.
by Louise Searle and Phoebe Wynn-Pope

Crisis Mapping

The use of maps in humanitarian response is not a new phenomena - the shift with application of new technologies is in live mapping, which enables presentation on a map not only of geographic reference points, but also of events, needs, and stories. Live maps present material over both time and space – mappers collect information, visualize, analyse and geolocate events that allow for a response to that information. Live maps are not static but are ever-changing and represent trends and developments as they progress over time, potentially strengthening understanding of evolving situations.

Consequently, live maps developed by crisis mapping volunteers or by registered contributors can become a part of a decision-making toolbox available to humanitarian practitioners. They have the potential to reduce information overload by acting as a filtering mechanism, providing output in a manageable and digestible format, and providing enhanced situational awareness for up-to-date contextually-based decision making. However along with advantages presented by the technology there are some risks and challenges. These were discussed at a dialogue convened by World Vision between crisis mappers and NGOs in Geneva on 17 November 2011.

The purpose of the dialogue was to discuss the relationship and potential for collaboration between international NGOs, UN Humanitarian Agencies and Voluntary and Technical Communities (VTCs) operating in humanitarian crises and to explore the application of humanitarian principles and standards.

NGO/Crisis Mappers Dialogue: Participants

Speakers for the day included:
> Patrick Meier – Co Founder of Ushahidi and the Standby Task Force
> Pierre Gentile – Head of Unit, Protection of Civilian Population, ICRC
> Andrej Verity – Information Management at UN OCHA

Participants included NGO representatives, think tanks, and crisis mappers allowing for a broad exchange of views. A full participants list is attached.

Advantages of Live Maps and Crisis Mapping Technology

Access: The very nature of crowd sourced crisis mapping enables access to information in countries where physical access for international personnel is either difficult or impossible to obtain. In Libya, the crisis map developed by the Standby Task Force (SBTF) at the request of UN OCHA enabled collection of information at a time when OCHA had no presence, and where the international community was encouraged to evacuate the country as the conflict continued.

Data and capacity: the value of the crowdsourced mapping in Libya was that several hundred volunteers collecting and collating data from traditional and new media brought an extraordinary wealth of information to the map www.libyacrisismap.net.   While the map itself may not appear helpful at first glance, the wealth of data and information behind the map enabled sophisticated reports to be developed.

Speed: The depth, type and quantity of data being collected and mapped can provide detailed and comprehensive information very quickly.

Identifying gaps: Crowdsourced data does not necessarily provide a complete picture and it should be recognised as one tool, in an entire toolbox of analysis and assessment tools. Inevitably there are gaps in the data presented by live maps, particularly an absence of data from affected persons who do not have access to mobile phones or the internet. While some in the humanitarian and crisis mapping communities view this as a disadvantage, as those traditionally marginalized and excluded from humanitarian action are likely to continue to be excluded, others highlight that a component of analysising crowdsourced data should include analysis of gaps, prompting questions about what data is missing and providing impetus to direct further assessment or data-collection.

Operational efficiencies: Traditional data gathering mechanisms utilised by humanitarian agencies and practitioners can learn from the style and speed of the crisismapping community. Since exposure to the Libya Crisis Map, OCHA has improved some internal operational processes enabling much greater collaboration and coordination among OCHA teams and offices.   This has included using skype chats, on-line forums, and google docs for sharing information, and building teams across countries and time-zones.

Challenges in the Libya Crisis Map

OCHA commissioned the Standby Task Force to undertake a crisis map of Libya. OCHA noted that working with the VTCs introduces new challenges to humanitarian response.

Perspective: Operational humanitarian agencies work differently to volunteers undertaking crisismapping; the former have a broader view on operational response, including on-the-ground challenges such as logistical and budgetary constraints, and additional data gathered from field-based assessments. The

latter are more focused on enabling and facilitating citizens to help citizens. OCHA found there is a tension to understanding the different levels of engagement, activity and priorities between different actors operating in the same environment, including those operating virtually from a distance.

Time Frames: The ability of globally situated VTCs to work around the clock contribute to operational challenges. While this greatly speeds up the turn-around time of data analysis, it can also increase demands on staff, who are 'expected' to respond to volunteer questions quickly. Additional work needs to be done to coordinate and manage volunteers, including managing expectations, with both VCTs and humanitarian actors needing to adjust their expectations and traditional ways of working.

Impact: While the impact of the map itself on humanitarian response decision-making is difficult to ascertain (indeed little is known about the degree to which traditional paper maps impact on decision making) OCHA found there was a 'gold mine of data' that was extracted by OCHA staff and put into regular communications products, such as Situation Reports.

Do No Harm: Questions of how to apply the principle of 'Do No Harm' arose with the large influx of data, some of which may not have been appropriate to collect. This was an issue in the pilot that should be addressed in future efforts. The extent to which the Libya Crisis Map should have been made public continues to be debated and discussed.

Data Sharing: The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) requested access to information for verification of Human Rights abuses.   In addition, the International Criminal Court also queried the presence of material that may be useful to their investigations although data was not released to the ICC.   Providing material to the ICC has profound implications for operational humanitarian agencies and the implications of this should be further explored. It also arguably has even more profound implications for persons providing the data, who may share data regarding abuses through social media without considering the potential risks and consequences of doing so.

Challenges meeting the *Professional Standards for Protection Work Carried Out by Humanitarian and Human Rights Actors in Conflict and Other Situations of Violence[1]*

Other challenges to the relationship between humanitarian organisations and the VTCs emerged in a presentation on Protection Standards and Data Management . Pierre Gentile from ICRC led participants through the Protection Standards in data collection and management and noted that data collection in conflict zones is extremely sensitive as it may put people at risk, or distort reality in a way that may invoke harm. The Professional Standards developed by ICRC in cooperation with the NGO community provide guidelines for assisting in harm

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[1] *Professional Standards for Protection Work: Carried out by Humanitarian and Human Rights Actors in Armed Conflict and other situations of Armed Violence* ICRC (2009)
http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0999.pdf

minimization when collecting and communicating sensitive data. These Standards are being presented with new challenges, particularly in view of the advent of new technologies, and are currently undergoing review.

Some of the challenge posed by the standards for VTCs undertaking crowdsourced crisis mapping activities were identified as:

<u>Informed Consent</u>: The standard of ensuring informed consent in the collection and storage of crowd-sourced information is complex and important. Current protection standards require that those providing information know and understand how the information they provide will be used. While this is not always possible either in the field (for example in the case of unaccompanied children), or in remote data collection, it is an issue that requires further consideration, particularly where data may be used by institutions such as the International Criminal Court.

<u>Verification</u> and corroboration of data is fundamental to good programme design and development. The use of crowd-sourced data presents particular issues and was recognised at the International Conference of Crisismappers as one of the most significant issues for the VTC community at this time. Triangulation and confirmation of information through multiple sources is commonly used for verification purposes, and VTCs are rigourous about noting when reports have been verified or not. However, security issues related to not knowing 'the crowd' remain problematic for data verification.

<u>Risk mitigation</u>: It is the responsibility of an organisation collecting data to be very clear regarding the purpose of the data, its relevance, and the realistic capacity of the organisation to respond to the information provided in the data. An organisation collecting data must undertake its own risk analysis. It is insufficient to allow an individual sharing information to be solely responsible for risk management. Questions remain regarding whether any ethical responsibility for VCTs exists to notify other agencies of reported needs or allegations of abuses when they analyse and geo-locate data onto a map. For example, should a report of a group of separated and unaccompanied children be reported to UNICEF, the UN agency responsible for protection of children? These questions should also be explored taking into consideration the humanitarian principle of Do No Harm.

<u>Ownership</u> and control over the data. Professional standards require that data ownership is retained by the individual the data is concerning, even when stored by an organisation that has collected the data. This is not always possible with data collected through social media and is an area for further review.

<u>Trending:</u> Data is collected and mapped over a period of time, and can therefore reflect how a situation is broadly changing in that time period. It is then possible to analyse emerging trends that might not be evident in analysis undertaken on data collected at a single point in time, from individual sources.

Ethics and Communication: Collection and collation of a wide range of open source data can lead to pressure to communicate and share the data without due consideration for the potential risks and respect of ethical standards.

Impartiality: This principle involves avoiding a discriminatory approach in humanitarian response, and ensuring response is based on assessed need. It is particularly important to address issues of potential bias in data collection. For example, in crowdsourced data one bias may be towards those who have access to communication and social media.   Another may be the way data and volunteers may be influenced by international media bias supporting one side in a conflict. Issues of bias are difficult and complex, and no less so with remotely gathered information.

Lack of knowledge: There is an increasing need for operational humanitarian agencies to know and understand new technologies and an increasing need for crisismappers to know and understand the humanitarian context they are mapping.

Other **broad challenges** to the use of remotely gathered information and data include:

Interpretation: In conflict, undertaking satellite analysis of military action, may not be able to distinguish between military activity that is legal, versus those activities that may be illegal. It is important to remember that military activity in itself is not illegal activity. The implications of VCTs mapping legal military activity are not currently well understood.

Operations: VTCs may need to consider whether they would ever consider being involved in data collection that does not serve humanitarian but military purposes.   This may include collecting data for verification of human rights abuse, or data that is used for investigative processes leading to prosecution.

Next Steps

There may be a need for shared guiding principles that will apply to VTCs and humanitarian agencies working together. This may involve the adaptation of the Do No Harm principles/framework for the crisismapping community.
> Matthew Scott (World Vision), Jennifer Chan and John Crowley (Harvard Humanitarian Initiative) and Lea Shanley (Woodrow Wilson Centre) have agreed to have further conversations on this issue, together with CDA Collaborative Learning Projects.

The idea was mooted of forming a Community of Interest addressing issues of coordination and cooperation between the VTCs and the non-UN humanitarian community.

More work is needed to understand the 'data scramble' that inevitably occurs during a rapid-onset emergency from the point of view of humanitarian actors to

ensure that initial data collection in humanitarian emergencies and disasters is interesting and useful to practitioners in the field.

The idea was mooted by Patrick Meier to establish a webinair for the Standby Task Force on Protection Standards, led by Pierre Gentile, ICRC.

Conclusion

The meeting concluded having constructively initiated dialogue between academic, crisismapping and NGO communities, and provided a forum for raising issues, increasing understanding, and creating space for future collaboration.

A significant number of issues and challenges were raised in the meeting and the scope of these is highlighted by the report. The authors have chosen to allow the issues, learnings, benefits and challenges to provide the framework for the report and have chosen not to undertake a commentary on the meeting in order to ensure an accurate representation the dialogue.

It is hoped that the report will provide a framework for further dialogue, work, study, research and collaboration. We would like to thank all the participants for their engagement and contribution.

Documents

World Vision - the HISS-CAM CivilMilitary and Police Engagement Tool - a practical decision-making tool to guide decisions on when and how to work with military actors.
http://www.worldvision.org.uk/upload/pdf/Principled_pragmatism.pdf
For a copy of the tool itself contact Louise Searle at
louise.searle@worldvision.com.au

Andrej Verity – OCHA – Lessons learned from the Libya Crisis Map power point

https://docs.google.com/document/d/168-e1VHj9-xf8xDyWV8F12ONY6dbNFctYUkR69Ld46o/edit?hl=en_US&authkey=CNz75LgO

Patrick Meier - Crisis mapping overview power point.

https://docs.google.com/open?id=0BzKkO3odnjoeYjhkZjM3MGQtY2ZjZS00ODM5LThhNWEtYmI2OTkxMTA3YTU2

Participants list

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