

The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining Communications Review

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

The mission of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining [GICHD] is “to serve as a leading centre of excellence on mine action, and to help States Parties to implement the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, the Convention on Cluster Munitions and other relevant instruments of international law”.

The GICHD’s 2012-14 strategy identifies that the Centre “bridges the gaps between research, lessons learnt and practice; it promotes evidence-based policies, develops standards and enhances professionalism, making mine action faster, cheaper, safer, more effective, sustainable and inclusive”. The strategy goes on to describe the GICHD as “a knowledge hub for mine action”.

Clearly, therefore, how that knowledge is packaged, disseminated and communicated is key. As set out in the Terms of Reference (attached in Annex A), this review was commissioned in order “to assess whether the GICHD is providing the **right communication products to the right audiences through the right channels at the right moment**”.

Guidance for the review included that, “The evaluation will provide recommendations to the Management Board, for review and action, to position the GICHD more effectively to meet future communications needs and challenges. The evaluation will take into account recent developments within GICHD communications, relevant trends and identify key lessons learned to increase the impact of GICHD communications efforts”.

Because communication does not happen in a vacuum, the review inevitably touches on some wider organisational issues that could be strictly deemed to be beyond the remit of the Terms of Reference. This reflects the wider nature of issues raised by both GICHD staff and external respondents. It also reflects the view of the authors that addressing some of these broader issues would help to enhance the demonstrable impact of the GICHD’s work, as well as acting as a vital enabler for more effective organisational communications.

1.2 REVIEW METHODOLOGY

In undertaking the review, we carried out the following:

1/ Semi-structured interviews, with

- 12 staff at the Centre, including a good diversity of perspective and opinion;
- 19 external stakeholders from a range of audiences with whom the Centre engages, including National Mine Action Authorities, NGOs and UN agencies.

(A list of interviewees is attached in Annex B.)

2/ An e-survey that was distributed to the Centre's Council of Foundation members, offering them a chance to contribute to the review (anonymously), which resulted in five responses.

3/ A desk review of the GICHD's communications products and presentation, alongside an assessment of comparator organisations' practices and resources.

We conducted a greater number of interviews than initially intended, which we believe helps to strengthen the quality and weight of the findings. Inputs were not definitively representative but have provided a good perspective on how GICHD is seen from different angles. The fact that, in many of the key areas, there was a good degree of consensus bestows extra validity on the findings and conclusions set out in the report.

A meeting was held with the GICHD Management Team to discuss our initial findings and to gather feedback and responses that have contributed to this report. We also received helpful feedback from the Centre on a draft version of this report and made some amendments in response to this.

We are grateful to the Centre for managing and facilitating the review in a highly efficient, constructive and open manner.

2 HEADLINES

Most stakeholders interviewed spoke positively about the Centre and the work that it does. It is generally a respected organisation at the international and national level. The GICHD is well regarded and widely seen as an expert organisation that plays an important role within the mine action sector, providing a valued service. There is agreement that in recent years the GICHD's communications – notably the publications - have improved.

But the GICHD is not communicating as effectively as it could, with the result that the mine sector is not benefitting from the full value of the Centre's expertise. Our assessment, supported by a consensus amongst respondents to the review, is that the GICHD should take a set of inter-linked steps that would embed the communications function more clearly within the organisation. Having made improvements to some

individual communications components (notably the publications), GICHD is now positioned to move to the next stage, which could best be enacted through developing a more robust communications strategy and plan.

A set of inter-linked changes to the way the Centre communicates, and organises its communications function, will enable the GICHD to be more effective and efficient in its communications, and ensure that existing good practice is institutionalised and built on. In particular, there should be more stringent processes of developing communications products, with clearer identification of purposes and audiences, and the use of a more mixed and integrated portfolio of communications products and channels. The Centre should also take greater opportunity to enhance interactivity in its communications.

Underlying these changes, the GICHD should integrate communications considerations more strongly into wider organisational processes and programme development. Communications about and from the Centre should be more holistic, delivering a message from the organisation as a whole, rather than individual departments.

At country level, support from the GICHD should be based on a cross-programme (i.e. organisation wide) assessment of needs and an articulated theory of change as to how the Centre's response can help achieve development outcomes. Communications priorities would be integral to this - what information, influencing methods and delivery channels are likely to be most successful in delivering the desired change? In this way communications would become a strategic tool to help the Centre achieve its objectives. As a corollary, the communications evaluation framework should focus on the role of communications (and associated capacity building) in achieving organisational outcomes. The importance of this is accentuated both by the increasing trend to position mine action as part of a wider landscape of armed violence reduction and peacebuilding, and by the increasing donor emphasis on evidencing results.

3 THE COMMUNICATIONS FUNCTION

3.1 ROLE OF COMMUNICATIONS WITHIN THE GICHD

Communication is clearly integral to the achievement of the GICHD's strategic objectives. As a centre of excellence, the GICHD will succeed in increasing global clarity about explosive hazards and developing high-performing National Authorities only if it is able to communicate its knowledge to the people who need it, in a manner that they can absorb and then use. This understanding should infuse everything the Centre does.

Our findings show that the GICHD is widely seen as a "dependable" organisation, one that "inspires confidence" in its expertise and objectivity. One excellent characteristic of

the Centre's communications that was highlighted by a number of interviewees was the inclusive and transparent nature of its approach. The availability and accessibility of staff was commended by many. There have been important developments within the communications function in recent years, as noted below.

But the GICHD is not communicating as effectively as it could, with the result that the mine sector is not benefitting from the full value of Centre's expertise. The core strength of the GICHD resides in its research, less so in its communications. To date, the communications function has been conceptualised in too limited a way, with the focus on operational delivery (primarily through producing publications) at the cost of developing and implementing a more coherent and strategic overview.

We describe the context in more detail below, and set out ways to strengthen the role and the function that will position communications more clearly as a means towards bringing about the changes that GICHD wants to achieve.

The GICHD is aware of the need to develop the communications function, as commissioning this review itself demonstrates. Indeed, many of the areas for development that we set out in this report are known to the Centre already, and, in some cases, action has already been instituted to address existing shortcomings.

3.2 ELEMENTS OF THE COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMME

3.2.1 PUBLICATIONS

The GICHD's publications are generally well regarded in the sector. The evaluation of the Centre undertaken in 2010¹ identified that, "The publications were generally very well received", and our findings are broadly consistent with that assessment. It is clear that there has been improvement in recent years to both design and content, with publications becoming better presented and more accessible, whilst retaining their authority. The style was also praised by some interviewees as not too prescriptive, with a general message conveyed that 'these are the best practices that could be adapted to address your context'.

However, an overall feeling emerged from interviews that, given that many key sectoral themes have been extensively researched, a reduction in the volume of publications - with a greater focus on quality rather than quantity - would be appropriate. This view is bolstered by the sense that publications are not always widely read and that some are perceived as 'good to have' rather than being 'must have'. Some interviewees openly questioned the value of certain publications.

¹ David Hewitson and Arianna Calza Bini (May 2010): A General Evaluation of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD)

The GICHD is a response- and demand-driven centre but could benefit from a more rigorous process of identifying specific needs for publications, as well as maximising value through improved dissemination. Given the significant cost and time invested in the publications programme, a reduction in outputs would be one way to free up resources to develop broader and more tailored communication approaches (see sections 3.4 & 3.5).

3.2.2 WEBSITE

The website is generally regarded as a useful source of information and fairly accessible, although there were mixed views around both of these points, with some indicating that structure (and sheer size; one interviewee described the website as a 'sprawling giant') militated against searchability.

Some interviewees found information easy to find whilst others found it more cumbersome. More than one stakeholder highlighted the fact that the website is structured as the Centre is internally, rather than how external audiences might think of an issue. For example, it may not be clear to a visitor what issues would be covered under 'Strategic Management'. By contrast, for example, the Small Arms Survey website is clearly structured under key themes.

Introductory text should more clearly explain the Centre's purpose, role and way of working. Sites such as those of the Small Arms Survey and Landmine and Cluster Munitions Monitor offer clearer descriptions in these kinds of areas.

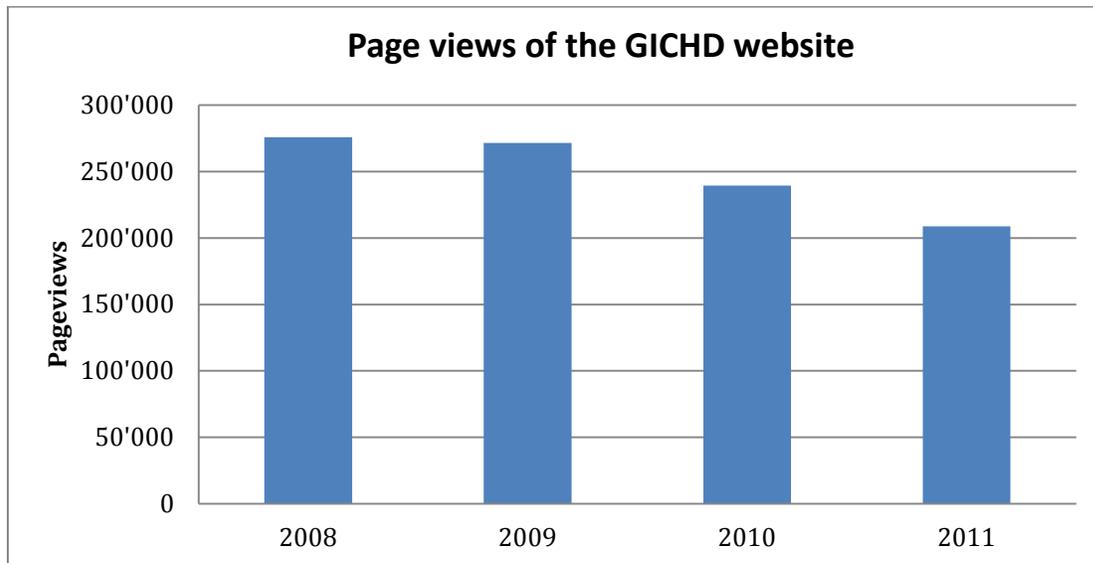
There is considerable scope to introduce greater visual elements, and to make the site more user-friendly and attractive. Again, other sites we reviewed (though not all) were generally easier to navigate and more pleasant to use.

Fundamentally, the site is typically regarded, and currently operates more, as a repository/library, rather than something that is dynamic and immediate in the ways that information is presented. As a resource bank, the site has its strengths, but by taking this approach, the Centre is not fully exploiting the potential benefits of the medium.

We understand that, across the suite of GICHD websites, there are in total over 3000 pages. Extrapolating from internal records, it could be concluded that hundreds of pages are modified, to correct errors and update information, each year. This is not without value but comes at a cost in terms of the staff time needed to maintain all current site components. It may be possible to continue to maintain this level of service whilst simultaneously developing the website along the lines suggested above.

If this is not possible, an alternative option would be to review the site overall and identify if there are components of it that could be archived at relatively low costs in terms of detriment to information provision. This could reduce the burden of ongoing updating and enable greater attention towards ensuring that the website gives a continually current (and prioritised) picture of services and resources.

Data show a year-on-year decline in numbers accessing the website:



It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions from these data: there could be different reasons to explain the decline (for example, the reduced profile of the landmine issue). We were able to access visitor numbers from comparator organisations (provided confidentially) that showed that in the same period they were experiencing significant growth in numbers of visits, with one organisation seeing a doubling in the visits. This presents a contrasting picture, but given the unique space that the GICHD occupies, there is of course no direct equivalence between these organisations and the GICHD and so this information is not conclusive.

This comparative information – together with what we know about other similar organisations in different sectors – does also highlight that the number of daily/monthly visit to the GICHD site is on the relatively low side.

It is worth stressing, however, that tracking numbers of unique visitors is a fairly crude measure of assessment, because it neglects visitor 'quality'. What is important is the right people are using the site and accessing the right information, for them. In relation to this, our findings from interviews, albeit anecdotal, was that audiences' appraisal of the website is mixed rather than being universally positive, with some using it but others not.

These findings together point to the desirability of introducing some changes to the site. One organisation we heard from, for example, described how they had redesigned their site towards an ‘electronic publishing’ model, with the focus on driving traffic to downloads rather than simply encouraging numbers of page clicks, which has itself stimulated a substantial growth in use, and with a radical increase in the number of downloads in particular.

Consideration should also be given to making the site more interactive, building in more feedback mechanisms and developing the site as a place for discourse, for example through establishing a community of practice, which could be a valuable means of connecting practitioners and promoting lesson learning, and could lead to some useful knowledge products for the Centre and sector.

3.2.3 TRAINING AND CONFERENCES

Training courses are generally seen as valuable by national centres and international organisations (for example, the course on contracting was highlighted by a number of interviewees). As noted below, examples where training is integrally linked to publication roll-out could usefully be taken up as a standard practice by the Centre.

Conference management has professionalised in recent years, and interviewees highlighted the excellent logistical support provided to the annual National MA Directors’ and UN Advisers meeting and inter-sessionals for the Mine Ban Convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions, for example.

A number of respondents commented on the volume of meetings each year with inter-sessionals for the Mine Ban Convention, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, plus the annual Directors’ meeting and others. Whilst recognising that many of these meetings are mandated by the Treaty bodies and that the GICHD does not set this timetable, it is worth considering what voice the Centre could have in encouraging a rationalisation of the current schedule.

(We discuss the role of training and workshops within an overall picture of communications in sections 3.5 & 5.4 below.)

3.2.4 SOCIAL MEDIA

There is a growing use of social media tools in certain of the Centre’s programmes. RSS feeds have been developed, for example, and some departments are making use of tools such as Twitter.

But overall this remains an under-explored area for the GICHD to date. A more consistent and Centre-wide approach will be important given that social media is an increasingly accepted way of ‘pushing out’ information, as well as a means of bolstering

profile. Small Arms Survey, for example, uses Twitter and Facebook seemingly to useful effect.²

3.3 TRENDS IN COMMUNICATIONS

There are a series of inter-related trends in communication that the Centre should be alert to, notably:

Shifts **from information consumption to participation** (reinforced and exemplified in the growth of social media), with communications seen as more of a two-way process. This points to the desirability of more interactive content, an area where the Centre could usefully do more.

A move **from passive to pushed** dissemination (with communicators more proactively ensuring that information reaches people where they are, rather than expecting them to seek it out). The Centre has taken steps along these lines, recently launching an email alert service, but take up - and even awareness - of it was very low amongst interviewees. A number of people interviewed said that the Centre does not effectively communicate when a publication has been released. "I generally only find out about them when I visit Geneva or see them on the website" was a typical response. One survey respondent noted the desirability of "a newsletter with the latest publications/studies etc. ... I [currently] have to look for information on my own on the GICHD website". This suggests that opportunities for more proactive dissemination are not being fully exploited.

From broadcasting to multicasting, implying the need for more tailored content, and clarity around primary and secondary audiences. Currently within the Centre, audiences for specific communications are often too broadly and/or vaguely defined, and with a 'one size fits all' approach underlying the focus on publications.

From PC to mobile (hence the communications mantra, 'mobile first'). It is estimated, for example, that by 2016 there will be a billion mobile phones in use in Africa.³ There are diverse views within the Centre about the relative merits of, and appetite amongst audiences for, paper vs. PDF outputs. Whilst the trend to online is continuing, there will always be people who, for different reasons, prefer paper copies of books. Arguably the more pertinent issue is how to present information in ways that people

² It is recognised that the GICHD is a different organisation to Small Arms Survey in many ways, but they both have a focus on providing high-quality research and information to technical audiences. As one of the closest comparator organisations in the field of publications they are used as an occasional reference point in this report. This is not to make any judgement on overall organisational effectiveness but to seek to identify good practice where relevant.

³ e.g. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/13/world/africa/mobile-phones-change-africa/index.html>

with limited connectivity and/or mobile technology can access what they need to know, which would imply greater searchability and more packaging of bite-sized information. Awareness of the trend of mobile accessibility also means being conscious of keeping format and graphics simple for ease of access on telephones.

Underpinning these trends has been a massive proliferation of (the accessibility of) data and information, which in turn has been a driver of an increased need and desire for, and expectation of, concise, quickly accessible products.

The fact that a number of interviewees confessed to not having read a GICHD publication in recent years highlights that the Centre's target audience are busy people with scarce available time to read lengthy reports.

Feedback from interviewees to this review suggests that the mine sector generally is behind the curve in terms of the adoption of these trends around communications (although this would not apply to all parts of it, such as Information Management constituencies).

There does not seem to be an external clamour for the Centre to follow through on the implications of these trends, but there remain significant advantages in the Centre being more sensitive to them. This could help to ensure continuing communications relevance, and exploit enhanced opportunity for impact. Some of the Centre's peer organisations have kept abreast of these trends to useful effect.

3.4 PUBLICATION PRODUCTION PROCESSES

The 2010 evaluation of the Centre noted that, "The adoption of a clearer understanding of quality in relation to delivery of the organisation's product would be helpful". We note that some steps have been taken towards this, but greater consistency in project management, and greater standardisation in publication development processes, are required for the Centre to ensure that its expertise is efficiently and effectively disseminated.

There is good practice but it is not institutionalised. A common process should include:

1. Clearer early identification of purpose and audience,

This would entail greater precision about specific audiences, and the change the Centre is seeking to effect, or contribute to, through the publication. Any judgments about which publications to take forward should be made on the basis of assessments of added value rather than a simple calculation of audience numbers; a small group can be at the forefront of change in the mine action industry: the Centre's work around liability,

for example, is by all accounts well used even though of apparently direct relevance only for a small audience.

2. A clearer thread from research to frontline.

Overall there should be a clearer project management process, with costs clearly articulated. Communications experts should be involved in early planning and decision-making processes, and more systematically throughout. Project progress, and key milestones within it, could usefully be more clearly set out too: several GICHD staff and external respondents for example mentioned that requests for comments and inputs often came at very short notice of impending deadlines (meaning that people cannot set aside time for comments in advance). If few experts are able to critique draft publications, this risks resulting in outputs that are not as authoritative as they could be. At an early stage, there should also be more explicit consideration of alternative or complementary formats and dissemination routes such as factsheets and issue briefs, as well as through the deployment of other communications channels.

3. More systematic dissemination.

Publications are, we heard, always comprehensively distributed at conferences. But other routes and approaches seem a bit more 'hit and miss'. The Centre needs to be more proactive in maximizing the value of its publications and ensuring that they reach their intended audience.

4. Better tracking of results.

(See section 5.4.)

Whilst we advocate introducing a greater degree of consistency and rigour along these lines, it is important that quality management processes are as nimble as possible, eschewing unnecessary bureaucracy, to ensure that the Centre can be reactive and agile in the ways that it engages with the sector.

3.5 TOWARDS A PROGRAMMATIC APPROACH

Delivery of the various individual elements in the communications mix has undoubtedly improved. The greater challenge is that the communications elements are not consistently linked together in ways that would create coherent knowledge roll-out through a suite of mechanisms, including for example training, publications, briefings, web, social media and other multimedia platforms.

The production of flagship publications – and the embedded rigour of the supporting research processes - can be important in maintaining and demonstrating the GICHD's standing and authority. But, at a basic level, and as was widely recognised (including internally), there should be a greater focus on accompaniment, through the use of

multiple communication channels, linked together within a coherent dissemination plan. This would include:

- Linking publications to a programme of training roll-out, as is already done in some cases.
- More systematic follow-up (identifying who is the specific target audience for that issue in each national centre, and - wherever possible - following up to discuss relevance and training needs, for example).
- Having as a starting point that a full book publication is one tool only, and should not necessarily be the default option.

Some we spoke to advocated for still greater simplicity within publications, moving towards being shorter, with less text and more images, and simplified language. But the significant solution will be to develop a suite of products for different purposes and audiences, building on the introduction of Issue Briefs, and expanding to increased options. In some cases, there may need to be authoritative, full-scale outputs, but the paramount need is to find ways to also summarise and highlight information better.

Example of the range of written products published by Small Arms Survey

- Yearbooks: annual reviews of global armed violence and violence-related issues.
- Research Notes: condensed policy information gleaned from published international research.
- Issue Briefs: similar concept to Research Notes but more detailed overview.
- Occasional Papers: original research produced by SAS staff and consultants.
- Special Reports: detailed reports on thematic or country issues produced jointly with partners.
- Book Series: drawn from larger pieces of SAS research.
- Co-publications: SAS research published with partners.
- Handbooks: practical guidance on UN small arms processes.

The opportunity to develop communication approaches using multiple media – film, sound clips, etc. – is also worth exploring further.

3.6 INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Beyond specific production processes, there are wider issues around internal communications and the need for more fluid information flows between programme and communications (and external relations) functions, as well amongst operations and information management staff.

Internal flow of information is not as well coordinated as it would ideally be, exemplified by the fact that some on the communications side seem to have difficulty accessing timely information from others in the organisation. Communications professionals will in future need to be better linked into management planning and decision-making processes, alongside the need to work more closely, as a communications team. The more general issue seems to be that whether the right people have the right information depends on what is provided by individuals, which is variable. The Centre is improving in this regard, but it remains an ongoing challenge.

The fragmented nature of the organisation was highlighted in different ways during the course of the review. For example, the website is structured around the pillars of the different departments. And each department's section on the website is structured slightly differently (e.g. Strategic Management has photos of its staff, Information Management just lists the names of its staff, and Operations does not mention the names of its staff at all). It was striking when interviewing external stakeholders how many of them referred to working with X's department as opposed to the Centre as a whole. These are minor points but, taken in conjunction with the individual nature of the departmental support to National Mine Action Authorities, they do not communicate the sense of an overall GICHD approach.

4 AUDIENCES AND REACH

4.1 THE GICHD'S PRIMARY AUDIENCES

Primary audiences include technical staff and management of National Mine Action Authorities and National Mine Action Centres [referred to in the following as NMAAs], some of whom are at operational level, but the main relationship with the National Authority essentially revolves around support to policy and standards. UN and other international agencies, including International NGOs and commercial operators in the mine action industry also represent key audiences. Secondary audiences include donor governments and the research community. At field level, audiences include UN staff, INGOs, operation teams within the NMAAs, large national operators, and commercial and military elements.

The GICHD's staff know their audiences: at its core, it is a small community, and expert staff are typically deeply in touch with networks of practitioners. Communications seem fairly well targeted at primary audiences, although there are suggestions that in some cases they may be more tailored to needs of Western international stakeholders than national authorities/field, and to Technical Advisers and other individuals who often have a very similar background to the Centre's own staff, shared language skills and similar cultural references.

Website statistics seem to support the assessment that the Centre's audiences are disproportionately based in the West (though recognising that web usage will typically show a greater orientation towards Western than Southern audiences).

For example, data relating to the top viewing countries for the GICHD's most popular publication in English (the GICHD's Overview Brochure) show that almost half of all global views were from either Switzerland or the US, with eight out of the top ten viewing countries being in the West (and only two mine-affected countries featuring).

Data relating to users who created an account in 2011 so that they could order publications online reveal the following breakdown relating to 'type of organisation', showing that NMAAs comprise less than 10% of this audience sub-set, as well as hinting that the research community is more than simply a secondary audience:

CATEGORY	NUMBER
Academic and Research	24
Commercial	21
Non Governmental Organisations	11
International Organisations	9
National Authorities and Centres	7
Donor Countries	6
Discussion Groups and Networks	3
TOTAL	81

This is not systematic evidence but perhaps gives some extra credence to the views we heard from some stakeholders.

There was also a suggestion from some national centres that communication was sometimes too limited to two or three senior managers and the centre would benefit from greater understanding about the technical responsibilities of other staff.⁴

⁴ By contrast, it should be noted that the Director of one NMAA wished for all communication from the Centre to be routed through him, rather than direct contact (for example, invitations to meetings) being sent directly to technical staff. This shows the importance of a differentiated approach for different contexts.

The Centre would benefit from a more explicit strategy to its communications with NMAAs. For example, how many people of the 200 staff working in the Afghan national centre does the Centre need to engage with in order to develop it into a high-performing national authority? Is it sufficient to engage with senior management and expect information to ‘trickle down’? If greater communication is done by email (for example, information alerts about publications) then these could easily be routinely sent to a maximal list of contacts, whereas personal communication about specific policy areas could be limited to relevant key staff in that sectoral area.

There were also indications that the GICHD could be more proactive in demonstrating to funders the active and ongoing nature of the Centre’s work.

4.2 MEETING AUDIENCE NEEDS

Each audience category (and there will be variation *within* audience groups too) has its own information needs and sources, and ability to access and absorb information from the GICHD.

Centre staff are generally good at recognising audience needs, they “have their finger on the pulse” as one interviewee put it, but this is not done through formal needs assessment and there is, it was said, internal variation with some staff better at this than others. As a result, the Centre is not consistently being effective in addressing needs in its communications. There were varying opinions about how well suited the GICHD’s publications and communications were for NMAA and field level staff for example.

This is partly down to lack of clarity about which precise audiences are being targeted at which point by which means. Clarity around the audiences for the website, both actual (through analysis of web statistics) and intended (through guidance and planning) for example seems to be lacking. The paucity of feedback, and lack of use of what information exists (such as web statistics), also means that the Centre does not have a robust and ongoing idea of what is useful and what is being used.

The Centre is very responsive to requests from national and international partners. This is a strength that was highlighted by many interviewees. But, as previously noted in the 2010 Evaluation of the Centre, the GICHD can be seen as *too responsive*, in the sense that there does not appear to be a systematic way in which the Centre strategically or proactively assesses the needs of its stakeholders (within which framework, more informed decisions about how best to respond to requests could be made).

The need for more systematic country outreach to ensure that the Centre fully understands the needs in different contexts was highlighted by a number of people

interviewed, and was also mentioned in the survey. Apart from the liaison visits of the Director, which were welcomed by stakeholders, consultations with national partners are normally led by individual departments and appear to often focus on the tools and products of that unit rather than on what the Centre as a whole can provide. The Centre would benefit from a regular organisation-wide assessment of national needs in priority countries as well as communications staff having greater exposure to and knowledge of the field and key audiences.

4.3 DIVERSITY AND GENDER

The Centre's linguistic outreach work is widely seen as a strength, and seems far more consistent and comprehensive than that undertaken by comparator organisations.

The Francophone programme was generally well regarded, and we heard of examples of its usefulness, in West Africa for example. The fact that documents in French are available on the website was welcomed.

The development of the new Arabic programme was especially highly commended, and widely seen as an important initiative. The value of the programme resides in particular in the fact that it goes beyond a 'translation service' towards offering a more active intervention aimed at supporting quality implementation of demining solutions in Arabic-speaking countries.

Most respondents took the view that the Centre should not invest resources in producing publications in Spanish (on the basis that people being targeted typically speak English or receive translation support), or that it is too late to consider this (given the progress already made in mine clearance in Spanish-speaking countries), which amounts to the same thing.

Looking beyond the languages we would characterise as 'global' (English, French, Spanish and Arabic), the common view we heard was that translation to local languages was not typically needed, with the argument being along the lines that most national staff speak English, or if necessary the national authority will translate. (But this feedback itself might simply reflect that we spoke to, and thus heard only the view of, English-speaking senior managers.)

On gender, the work that the Centre has done to ensure sensitivity in the use of language and images in publications, and to generate more substantive content (including chapters addressing gender issues, for example in mine contracting), was widely recognised and commended.

Building on this, the Centre should develop processes and approaches that integrate gender considerations into programmes at the planning and design stage - drawing on

expert input where necessary. This would help ensure that gender dimensions were fully integrated in research and into outputs.

4.4 WIDER AUDIENCES

The GICHD is well known in expert circles, and these overwhelmingly represent the Centre's primary constituency. However, a clearer and more visible outline of the organisation and its purpose could be helpful in raising the Centre's profile amongst a wider group of interested stakeholders. Websites of comparator organisations – even those primarily communicating with highly informed and knowledgeable audiences – typically do this better than the GICHD for example. As a leading international organisation service provider to the industry, the Centre arguably has a wider remit to help communicate the role and importance of the mine action sector (as a whole) in the wider context of armed violence reduction and peacebuilding (the latter is particularly important in context of donor funding trends).

5 COMMUNICATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF MISSION

5.1 SHIFTING NATURE OF THE CHALLENGES

The mine action sector has evolved significantly since the GICHD was established and the Centre has of course been a key contributor to this. Work on landmines is increasingly being situated by the international community within the broader context of armed violence reduction and post-conflict development. The Centre faces a strategic choice as to whether to remain tightly focused on its core area of technical expertise (with the likelihood that funding and the volume of work will gradually reduce), or to branch out into adjacent areas and seek to demonstrate that the GICHD has a useful added value to contribute.

It is beyond the remit of this evaluation to make a recommendation on which choice the Centre should make. But a number of views were expressed by respondents that it is important to note. Firstly, there is general support for the Centre re-positioning itself in a wider context as that was viewed by respondents as keeping pace with the times. But there is a general view that this has not always been done effectively so far. In communications terms, if the Centre is to work on broader armed violence issues then it needs to clearly state what issues it is addressing, why they are important and what added value it can bring. One interviewee suggested that, rather than seeking to justify new initiatives because of their link to mine action, it would be better to boldly state why the Centre is taking a broader approach (e.g. to help address the range of explosive

threats that communities face). In considering this extended approach, it will be important to navigate that small arms and armed violence reduction are much more political issues than mine action. This would have implications both for staffing and the approach taken by the Centre.

Whilst the Centre's contribution in these expanded areas is likely to be predicated on maintaining a consistent approach - developing evidence-based policies, based on strong technical expertise – in any new 'market', the Centre would need to review its niche (vis a vis other organisations) and added value, and ways of communicating will need to take that into account. In communications terms, it is likely that existing outputs are not that well tailored to the new groups in the wider armed violence reduction sector, with whom the Centre would need to engage. Resistance about potential 'mission creep' can be expected in some quarters, underlining the need for a well-thought through and well-communicated approach.

5.2 THE GICHD AT COUNTRY LEVEL

A number of interviewees called for a greater emphasis on fieldwork by the Centre. This would provide an opportunity to test approaches, model new ways of cross-programme working and provide a richer experience from which to draw on to inform the GICHD's work.

Communications ideally operates as a two-way function involving the Centre disseminating research and lessons, and also consulting with mine-affected countries to identify what they need for their mine action programmes. The GICHD, as noted, is commended for being highly responsive to requests for support but could ideally situate such support within the context of more systematic and strategic country engagement and discussion. Such an approach would go beyond reacting to individual requests towards taking a more mediated view of needs (in a particular country or region) and how best to address them, cross-programme. This mix of being proactive and still demand-driven would fit with GICHD's aim of trying to lead, as well as respond to, agendas and to continue to shape the sector towards greater professionalism and standardisation.

Some interviewees suggested that when staff do visit countries, they sometimes bring too narrow a technical focus and may not appreciate the nuances of the specific political context. This speaks to the importance of local knowledge, and gives emphasis to the point that communications, for an organisation like the GICHD, is not simply about experts passing on what they know, but should involve more of a dialogue and exchange - of different types of knowledge that come from having different vantage points. As part of such a dialogue-oriented approach, a potential role for the Centre was suggested in facilitating greater south-south cooperation (e.g. exchange of experiences and good practice between Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar).

The view was expressed by one interviewee that the greatest added value in mine action is from having complementary interventions in different areas happening in the same location. The Centre should in theory be well placed to deliver such joined-up approaches given the range of in-house technical expertise at its disposal, but its programme planning and delivery processes do not best facilitate this at present.

Optimally, at country level, support from the GICHD would be based on a cross-programme (i.e. organisation wide) assessment of needs, and an articulated theory of change as to how the Centre's response can help achieve improved outcomes. Communications priorities would be integral to this - what information, influencing methods and delivery channels are likely to be most successful in delivering the desired change? In this way, communications would be positioned as a strategic tool to help the Centre achieve its objectives.

One associated implication of thinking geographically as well as thematically, is that, in communication terms, it would be helpful for GICHD to give a more substantive, clearer, and more regularly-updated outline of where it is working and in what ways, with what focus, on the website and through other relevant communications channels. From a communications perspective, it would be helpful to have basic information about the scale and nature of the mine action problem in target countries, and the capacity needs of NMAAs, so that detail about interventions can be placed in context.

5.3 COMMUNICATIONS IN A WIDER CONTEXT

One critique we heard of the Centre was that it was “output, not outcome-focused”, meaning that work tends to be driven by thinking within individual programmes about activities and products, rather than by having a (cross-programme) overview of what the Centre is seeking to achieve in specific contexts and developing integrated plans to deliver against those objectives. This seems to be an area, like many others cited in the report, where the direction of travel for the Centre is already a positive one, with movement away from past atomisation. But it remains the case that experts in specific areas may - naturally - not think about wider needs or contexts, and unsurprisingly may tend to default to a particular offer of specific support in line with the principle that, as one interviewee put it, ‘if all you have to offer is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail’.

Greater coherence through planning and a clearer and more explicit sense of overall priorities would help here. In communications terms, that would in any case be important; communications about and from the Centre need to be holistic – siloes within communications can be particularly problematic, especially when audiences overlap. A number of respondents highlighted that they tend to get communications

from different departments in the Centre, rather than feeling that the Centre as a whole is communicating with them.

5.4 ASSESSING COMMUNICATIONS AND ORGANISATIONAL RESULTS

Accountability is an issue that was highlighted in interviews. The current donor focus on results in development puts pressure on GICHD to consider how it can demonstrate the impact of its work. The view was expressed that there are a lot of activities and products but that it is hard to link this with results at a global or field level. This risks jeopardising future funding and presents a programmatic as well as a communications challenge: to deliver a set of projects and programmes that link together to achieve – and can demonstrate delivery of – common outcomes.

Communications plays a central role in achieving organisational outcomes, the programme of communications contributing to achievement of sustainable change at the operational level. So it makes sense to situate the communications programme within wider organisational goals, and set out an evaluation framework that seeks to capture communications results, but also resulting outcomes, in terms of how target audiences have adapted policy and practice, and subsequent changes to the quality of performance of mine action programmes.

There is currently very little monitoring associated with the Centre’s communications, even of uptake, and less so of influence. Effectiveness of publications for example tends to be assessed anecdotally, if at all, by reference to number of requests for the publication itself, the number of follow-on training requests, web hits, etc. This could be further systematised, but what is crucially missing is attention to the difference being made. Does the communications programme contribute to achieving change, if so how? The Centre does not currently have a strong understanding of that or systems in place to monitor and evaluate results at such levels.

Discussion and analysis of the role of communications in contributing to the achievement of organisational goals can be framed within the helpful notion of communications as capacity building. Following this way of thinking, essentially the approach would entail tracking the following, and seeking evidence of the inter-relations between the different elements:

1. the GICHD’s activities and levels of engagement with target audiences
2. audiences’ reactions (feedback on training, publications, etc.)
3. subsequent influence on individuals’ understanding and knowledge
4. resultant change in organisations’ performance in line with the GICHD’s objectives
5. consequences in terms of impact on the ground

In developing such an approach, there are techniques that the Centre could consider applying, for example Outcome Mapping (in which the focus is on assessing changes in behaviour, relationships and activities amongst 'boundary partners', those with whom the Centre works directly).⁵

It is not a simple undertaking. Capacity building interventions are only one contribution to capacity, in turn capacity is only one contribution to effective performance, which is itself not always straightforward to identify. And capacity is manifested at multiple levels: individual, project/programme, organisational, and network. Given that individuals' skills and knowledge are thus one small part of the capacity picture, and that lack of individual capacity is not generally even the main constraint to performance,⁶ any review could helpfully identify the extent to which the GICHD's communications with - and support to - individuals, for example, can lead to sustainable change in the organisations with which the Centre is engaging.

Such an analysis could also be highly useful for others in the sector. How is information best absorbed by target audiences? What support is then needed to help ensure knowledge leads to practical action? And how can this best be sustained and embedded within operational organisations? The Centre is well placed to build – and share – an evidence base around the dynamics of this in the mine action context.

Communications is also key to demonstrating and articulating results, one key role for the function being to help enable the GICHD to communicate more effectively and succinctly, drawing on robust supporting evidence, the results of its work and added value the Centre provides to the sector.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Centre should:

1. Develop a Communications Strategy that places communications at the heart of the Centre's mission.
2. Ensure that the Communications Manager is appropriately involved in relevant planning processes, and has the necessary authority to give meaningful voice to the communications dimensions of the Centre's decision making.

⁵ an introduction to this methodology is available here:

http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/outcome_mapping

⁶ see for example Horton, D et al (2003): Evaluating Capacity Development. International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR), the Netherlands; International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada; and ACP-EU Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), the Netherlands, e.g. p52-54

3. Introduce more systematic feedback mechanisms for the GICHD's products and publications – including through greater use of interactive facilities, and more concerted ways of seeking and gathering audience input (through regular surveys for example).
4. Ensure that each mooted publication has an associated communications strategy at the outset that considers target audiences, and sets out the content and format, and follow-on support (e.g. training) required to influence them.
5. Develop a more flexible suite of communications product types, including issue briefs, factsheets, and sub-thematic summary documents, as well as traditional publications.
6. Revamp the website including through a greater emphasis on structuring content thematically and geographically, by increasing the facility for interactivity (e.g. through development of communities of practice), and by more clearly archiving relevant information and publications.
7. Complement – and reduce reliance on - the website and other existing channels by more proactively and consistently pushing information to audiences through the online channels (e.g. email, Facebook, twitter).
8. Build communications around the use of an organisation-wide assessment of audiences' needs that is regularly updated with input from key national and international partners.
9. Develop an organisational methodology for building the capacity of NMAAs and evaluating progress. This would provide an opportunity for inter-programme learning and could be based on a review of experiences in priority countries. Consideration could be given to the utility of Outcome Mapping as a means of assessing progress and achievements.
10. Move more consistently from an activity/product focused communications mindset towards an approach that is based on a common identification of how – through dissemination of its expertise - the Centre can support the implementation of national mine action strategies, and add value to the work of other stakeholders. As a first step, the Centre could work with national and international partners in key priority countries to develop assistance strategies based on clear theories of change.
11. Consider a more integrated approach to strategic planning in which activities directly fall under organisational objectives (rather than under programme headings). This would enable greater clarity of purpose in communications as well as more inter-programme coordination.
12. Systematically review the potential added value that the Centre can bring to work on armed violence reduction and post-conflict development, and the communications implications arising.

ANNEX A: TERMS OF REFERENCE

Evaluation of Communications within the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining

Purpose

The overall aim of the proposed evaluation is to assess whether the GICHD is providing the ***right communication products to the right audiences through the right channels at the right moment.***

The evaluation will provide recommendations to the Management Board, for review and action, to position the GICHD more effectively to meet future communications needs and challenges. The evaluation will take into account recent developments within GICHD communications, relevant trends and identify key lessons learned to increase the impact of GICHD communications efforts.

GICHD Profile

The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), an international expert organisation legally based in Switzerland as a non-profit foundation, works for the elimination of mines, explosive remnants of war and other explosive hazards, such as unsafe munitions stockpiles. The GICHD provides advice and capacity development support, undertakes applied research, disseminates knowledge and best practices and develops standards. In cooperation with its partners, the GICHD's work enables national and local authorities in affected countries to effectively and efficiently plan, coordinate, implement, monitor and evaluate safe mine action programmes, as well as to implement the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention, the Convention on Cluster Munitions and other relevant instruments of international law. The GICHD follows the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

GICHD Outreach (extract from GICHD Strategy 2012-2014)

As a knowledge hub for mine action, the GICHD fosters extended communications. Information-sharing incorporates all relevant tools, in particular *publications* and their translations, as well as the GICHD *website*. On the website, Links and Information in Mine Action (LIMA) serves as key portal for the industry. Further knowledge transfer includes organising *workshops and conferences* (biennial technology workshop, annual International Meeting of National Mine Action Programme Directors and UN Advisers etc) and initiating *linguistic outreach programmes* (based on the experience with the francophone programme).

KEY QUESTIONS

Needs assessment, strategy and impact:

1. Do audiences have a good understanding of the Centre and its communications activities?
2. Is there a comprehensive and consistent understanding of the role of communications within the GICHD management and staff?
3. Is there a coherent and consistent understanding/definition of key audiences, and how they can be reached effectively?
4. How are the key communications needs of GICHD audiences identified?
5. What processes are used to develop communications activities?

6. Are the current communication tools appropriate?
7. Are the key communications needs of GICHD audiences met?
8. Do the communications activities effectively contribute to/ meet the GICHD Strategy 2012-2014 objectives?

Activities and resources:

1. How is the creation of communications content undertaken and is this process effective?
2. What are the key methods/channels used to reach key audiences and are they the best options?
3. Are appropriate structures and resources available to achieve the communications needs of the Centre?

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

1. What information management tools/platforms are appropriate for sustainable development of GICHD communication activity?
2. What are appropriate alternative methods for reaching diverse key audiences?
3. Are gender and diversity issues mainstreamed in the preparation and implementation of communications activities?
4. How should the impact of communications activity be assessed?

Evaluation methods

- Desk survey of perceptions and expectations of audiences
- Desk study of key GICHD communications products (publications, website(s), training materials, online forums, social media, workshops and conferences, linguistic outreach programmes)
- Comparison with similar international organisations' communication practices and resources
- Interviews (remote and face-to-face where possible*) and questionnaires
 - National Directors/representatives of Mine Action Authorities
 - UN programme managers and technical advisors
 - GICHD partners – INGOs, mine action operators
 - GICHD donors, Council of Foundation, Advisory Board members
 - GICHD Staff
 - Media (Journal of Mine Action etc)
 - Conference/workshop participants

Expected output

- Preparation of Evaluation report in draft form, including recommendations on future approaches
- Presentation of draft report to GICHD Management group
- Preparation of final Evaluation Report, incorporating management response, for publication.

Duration:

Maximum of 20 working days from mid-July to end August 2012 (split between evaluation team members), including presentation to GICHD Management group.

Evaluation Team:

Evaluator(s) experienced in communications and the working context of international NGOs

ANNEX B: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

STAFF AT THE GICHD

Martial Becker, Support Director
Per Breivik , Advisor, Land Release
Kerry Brinkert, Director ISU APMBC
Daniel Eriksson Head, Information Management
Silvie Holowaty, Website Manager
Stephan Husy, Director
Anahita Kar, Communications Manager
Pehr Lodhammar, Advisor, Mechanical Systems and Contracting
Lesley Macinnes-Gillies, consultant and former Communications Manager
Rachel McKee, English Language Editor
Pascal Rapillard. Advisor, Policy and External Relations
Ted Paterson, Head, Strategic Management

EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Daniel Avila, Director, Presidential Program Anti-personnel Mines, Colombia
Havard Bach, advisor at Norwegian People's Aid
Mohammed Breikat, Director of National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation, Jordan
Arianna Calza Bini, Programme Manager of Gender & Mine Action (GMAP)
Carl Case, Director, Office of Humanitarian Mine Action, Organisation of American States
Elisabeth Decrey Warner, President, Geneva Call
Judy Grayson, Senior Advisor, UNICEF
Gustavo Laurie, Senior Liaison Officer, UNMAS
Rattana Heng, Director General, CMAC, Cambodia
David Hewitson, Director of Ritherdon Consulting Ltd
Tim Horner, UNDP
Rasmus Stuhr Jakobsen, Head of Danish Demining Group, Danish Refugee Council
Keith Krause, Director, Small Arms Survey
Benjamin Lark, Head of ERW/Mine Action Sector, ICRC
Ian Mansfield - MASG-secretary (donor coordination) and former Deputy Director & Head of Operations, GICHD
Christine Pahlman, Mine Action Coordinator, AusAID
Mohammed Sediq Rashid, Chief Operations Manager, UNMACA, Afghanistan
Rob White, Head of Operations, Mines Advisory Group
Guy Willoughby, Chief Executive, Halo Trust