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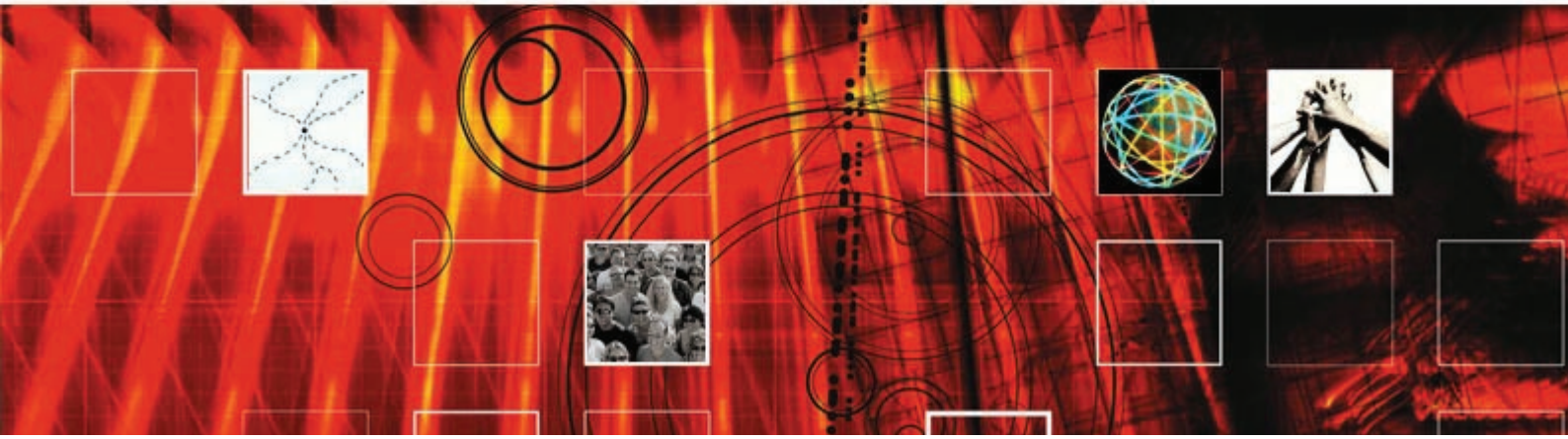
Country Response Information System

Overview of the system and its plan of establishment



CRIS

Country Response Information System

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Country Response Information System

Overview of the system and its plan of establishment

CRIS Unit
Country and Regional Support Department
UNAIDS

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
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Acronyms

CCA	Common Country Assessment
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CPA	Country Programme Adviser
CRD	Country and Regional Support Department (UNAIDS)
CRG	CRIS Reference Group
CTWG	CRIS Technical Working Group
CRIS	Country Response Information System
DFID	Department for International Development
DSMP	Departmental Strategic Management Plan (CRD, UNAIDS)
EXO	Executive Office (UNAIDS)
GAP	The Global AIDS Programme (of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
GFATM	Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
GDU	Governance, Donor and UN Relations (UNAIDS)
GRID	Global Response Information Database
IATT	Interagency Task Team
ICT	Intercountry Team
IEC	Information, education and communication
IRC	The Information Centre (UNAIDS)
IRT	The Information Technology and Systems unit (UNAIDS)
MAP	Multi-country HIV/AIDS Program (a World Bank project)
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MERG	Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group (UNAIDS)
MTCT	Mother-to-child transmission
NAC	National AIDS Councils
NSP	National Strategic Plan
PDC	Programme Development and Coordination Group (UNAIDS)
SAPA	South Asia Project on Advocacy
SIF	Strategic Information unit (UNAIDS)
SIDALAC	Iniciativa sobre SIDA para Latinoamérica y el Caribe
SIPAA	Strengthening International Partnership against AIDS in Africa (a DFID project)
SMI	Social Mobilization and Information Department (UNAIDS)
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
TGC	Theme Group Chair
UBW	Unified Budget and Workplan (UNAIDS)
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework

Executive summary

Improved information and informed analysis are critical for the development of expanded national responses to HIV/AIDS. Some countries have developed HIV/AIDS surveillance systems and countries are increasingly collecting information on resources allocated for HIV/AIDS programmes and projects.

Responding to the needs at the national and global levels for improved information and analysis, UNAIDS has embarked on an ambitious plan to establish an information system to support national AIDS responses. This document describes the historical development of the Country Response Information System (CRIS), and the related activities scheduled by UNAIDS in 2002 and 2003.

It describes the philosophy of the proposed CRIS development for policy-makers and potential CRIS users. This philosophy stems from ongoing efforts to follow a modular approach to establishing a country-level information system. The system will be housed in National AIDS Councils (or equivalents)[1], will contain national and subnational indicators, as well as programmatic information and key data pertinent to each national response.

CRIS will provide partners in the global response to HIV/AIDS with a user-friendly system consisting of an indicator database, a project/resource-tracking database, a research inventory database and other important information.

In particular, the indicator database, as the first component of the system to be operational, provides countries with a tool for reporting on national follow-up to the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS.

Commencing in October 2002, a series of training workshops facilitated by UNAIDS (see Annex B), began introducing local CRIS teams to the technology. Following the training, local CRIS teams are able to install selected components of CRIS for the NAC or the designated national CRIS host institution.

The country-level CRIS will be complemented by a Global Response Information Database (GRID). GRID will support strategic analysis, knowledge-based policy formulation and subsequent programming.

The schedule set out in this document allows for the establishment of CRIS in at least 20 countries by the end of 2002. GRID will be available in early 2003.

Finally, the plan identifies the partnerships that will support the establishment of CRIS and GRID.

[1] Throughout this document, where National AIDS Councils (NACs) are mentioned, it refers to the NAC or local equivalent.

Deliverables – CRIS Unit, UNAIDS (2002/2003)

- CRIS system operational in 20 countries by the end of 2002.
- CRIS system operational in an additional 70-90 countries by the end of 2003.
- Improved strategic information and analysis to support national responses to AIDS by early 2003.
- Core CRIS information available and accessible through the UNAIDS website by early 2003.
- Improved strategic information and analysis to support the corporate advocacy and communication strategy of UNAIDS[2] by early 2003.
- Roll-out plan developed for phase 3—enhancement to first- and second-phase countries and establishment in all other countries in 2004.

Section 1 Rationale

Advocacy for increased allocation and better use of resources is of paramount importance if all partners are to achieve the extraordinary response called for in the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, the UN System Strategy on HIV/AIDS, and National Strategic Plans on HIV/AIDS.

Successful advocacy efforts depend on reliable and timely analysis of national responses based on strong and valid data collected and updated locally. These analyses would also be strengthened through comparisons across countries, and regional and global assessments based upon best practices and technical expertise.

In recent history, there has been an increased priority, at national, regional and global levels, to establish and/or strengthen information systems responsive to the ever-increasing demands for more high-quality data and analysis. Better information systems have also been identified as vital for enhanced monitoring and evaluation of national programmes[3].

Indeed, database-supported information systems specifically for, or including, HIV/AIDS already exist, in one form or another, in many countries. The resulting information and subsequent analysis from these systems has played, and continues to play, a critical role in ensuring improved planning, re-planning and programming, and will continue to strengthen local and global actions.

Many countries are already using information systems to compile and disseminate relevant information on the HIV/AIDS epidemic. These efforts have often met local needs, but may not have allowed for comparison or analysis between countries and within regions; nor have they provided a much-needed global picture.

Many countries have not yet developed functional or adequate systems, and have requested support from UNAIDS and other agencies to establish such systems. Some have also requested support from UNAIDS to ensure that their present system can be assimilated into a standardized system—such as CRIS.

This document maps out a course for achieving these goals.

[2] Operational and Management Framework 2002, SMI, 8 March 2002.

[3] See UNAIDS Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for 2002-2003.

Background to the development of the CRIS conceptual framework

Since April 2002, the UNAIDS CRIS Unit has had discussions with key informants and stakeholders to develop the first drafts of the CRIS conceptual framework and this resulting document.

This document has been shared extensively with national, regional and global partners. Feedback received has been carefully considered and the revised document reflects those inputs.

Over recent years, several meetings and many more discussions have focused on the development of a country response information system. In September 2001, UNAIDS convened a meeting[4] to accelerate the development of such a system to an operational level. During that meeting, existing information systems were presented and assessed.

A number of key issues and recommendations for the accelerated implementation of UNAIDS-supported CRIS systems were proposed. A particular recommendation related to the importance of economy of scale and the need for the CRIS to complement existing systems.

The meeting further recommended the development of a core set of indicators, to be collected and incorporated into the CRIS system. These core indicators could be expanded over time as local competence and confidence with the system and indicator collection were developed.

Following the establishment of the CRIS Unit and the initial drafting of this document in July 2002, two consultative workshops[5] were convened. National and international partners who were working on information systems, including CRIS, reviewed and discussed the establishment of CRIS. The objectives of the meetings were:

1) to brief the participants on the development of CRIS;
2) to undertake a facilitated discussion on next steps with regard to CRIS; and
3) to obtain constructive feedback for the strengthening of the CRIS development process, with particular focus on technical aspects of roll-out.

This document reflects the recommendations made at those consultative workshops.

[4] Meeting on the implementation of CRIS, Geneva, 3-5 September 2001.

[5] 'Consultative meetings of national partners on the establishment of CRIS' were held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire and Harare, Zimbabwe, in July 2002.

Section 2 Purpose and objective of CRIS

2.1. Purpose:

To facilitate the systematic collection, storage, analysis, retrieval and dissemination of information on a country's response to HIV/AIDS.

2.2. Objective:

To develop a comprehensive and user-friendly information system for National AIDS Councils (or equivalent) that will respond to the urgent information needs of countries and their partners.

More specifically, the system will:

- *improve data collection on, and analysis of, national responses to HIV/AIDS by:*
  a. *improving local and intercountry capacity for data collection and database management, including management information systems (MIS) and/or geographical information systems (GIS)*
  b. *improving access to quantifiable indicators for more effective and efficient planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national responses to HIV/AIDS*
  c. *providing detailed, up-to-date information on the HIV/AIDS situation at country and intercountry levels*
  d. *strengthening national capacity to compile and generate key strategic information*
- *be of generic structure to help improve national programmes and thus strengthen national responses; improved information collection and subsequent analysis will add considerable value to national and global efforts*
- *facilitate information generation and exchange between countries, within the UNAIDS Secretariat, and with UNAIDS Cosponsors and other partners*
- *enhance the capacity to implement effective advocacy strategies at country, regional and global levels*

2.3. Benefits of an established CRIS at country level

There are a number of immediate benefits for countries establishing a standardized CRIS. They include:

1) ease of rapid establishment of a response information system at country level—where these do not yet exist—with improved access to data through a centralized data storage system;

2) strengthening of existing systems, with the possibility of improving systems through learning from experience and provision of technical support;

3) enhanced ability at country level to monitor and evaluate their National Strategic Plans on HIV/AIDS and national AIDS responses and ability to store data and undertake informed analysis for regular reporting on the response;

4) ability to track successes of the national response and lessons learned, resulting in more high-quality programmes and projects at national level;

5) ability to demonstrate national follow-up to the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS;

6) greater harmony of monitoring and evaluation data through greater synergy of systems;

7) improved ability to report to supporters of the national response—e.g., the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM), or the World Bank—through use of a common monitoring and evaluation platform at national level; and

8) improved capacity for informed national and global advocacy on behalf of national AIDS responses.

CRIS's clients will include:

1) NACs and national partnership forums, including the country coordinating mechanisms for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria;

2) other governmental partners, nongovernmental organizations, the corporate sector and members of civil society, including people living with HIV/AIDS;

3) funding sources, such as the GFATM and bilateral agencies, to support proposal appraisal and monitoring and evaluation;

4) donor agencies and foundations;

5) regional entities such as intergovernmental bodies; and

6) the United Nations (UN) system.

CRIS will provide NACs with an important tool that could facilitate greater information exchange throughout the national response. It uses technology to link information sources and existing database systems, as well as supporting improved collection and storage of documents and publications.

The data collected (and stored in the system) will:

1) allow NACs to demonstrate the value of their respective responses to national and international audiences;

2) provide key components of the national response with the appropriate recognition of their results;

3) allow for the sharing of lessons learned and good practices within responses and between national responses; and

4) support resource mobilization efforts.

The establishment of an effective CRIS will also become a key factor in leveraging new resources. Where a country is able to demonstrate better understanding of its responses and improved data collection around a set of core indicators, it is anticipated that loans or grants will be more readily mobilized.

The various components of the generic CRIS (described in detail on the following pages) will support tracking of projects and research, gap analysis for resource mobilization, and improved access to key materials and key partners in the response.

Furthermore, it is anticipated that lending and funding agencies will include the expansion of CRIS (after the establishment of the core system), as a core consideration for support in the form of loans or grants, or that the establishment or expansion of CRIS will make a country 'eligible' for additional funds for that purpose.

Section 3 CRIS functionality

CRIS is a strategic database-supported information system that facilitates the systematic collection, storage, retrieval and dissemination of a range of existing information. It also provides a means of storing new information.

It responds primarily to national information needs, providing precise, reliable and timely information, in a user-friendly format. This information will lead to improved analysis of local epidemics, of the necessary responses and of the impacts of both. It will also result in better national response information for regional[6] and global entities.

CRIS has a generic structure that enables countries without CRIS to quickly establish an operational system. For countries with an existing system, the generic CRIS can be easily interfaced with it.

[6] The use of the term 'regional' in this document refers to bodies at the supranational level, rather than at the subnational level.

All components of the generic CRIS will have multi-language support. The supported languages will include English, French, Spanish, Russian and Portuguese—available from the end of 2002. The user can choose one of these languages at installation. The resource file containing the language strings can be modified to accommodate additional languages.

User manuals and training materials will also be available to support non-English versions (initial translation and publication costs of these versions will be sponsored by the Government of Japan).

A design document for the development of the indicator database has been completed and is available from the CRIS Unit. It details the development strategy, the technical specifications, the database model, and database standards used. The detailed technical information from that document has not been included in this plan.

The generic CRIS will consist of several different components including:

(1) an indicator database;
(2) a project/resource-tracking database;
(3) a research inventory database; and
(4) the capacity to store additional important information (including surveillance and AIDS case reporting).

It is envisaged that later enhancements of the CRIS system will involve increased functions and demands. The evolution and further development of the system will see the expansion of both the core fields within the indicator database, and linkages with other information systems.

The need for several databases within CRIS

The chief concern in designing the CRIS structure was the functionality that would be required. Because it has to complement and leverage existing systems to support this functionality, it was decided to design and construct a modular system.

The modular structure allows for existing databases, such as project/resource-tracking databases, to be included at installation. It also expedites establishment of the system at country level.

Inclusion of systems as modules allows for design, programming, stress-testing and modifications to be completed for each module, independent of the whole system. Thus, the complete CRIS system does not need to be completed prior to the establishment of the first phase of the CRIS—the indicator database—in countries.

The first version of the* CRIS User Guide *deals with the indicator database. Subsequent versions will include relevant information on the use of the entire system, including the project/resource tracking and research inventory databases. The user guide will also be available in multiple languages.

3.1. The indicator database

The CRIS indicator database will support the collection and analysis of local indicators of the epidemic. It will consist of two distinct components: the core fields and the free fields.

The indicator database is the first component of CRIS that is available for countries. Introduced in October 2002, it is the focus of local CRIS team training in the first-phase countries.

As the first component of CRIS, the indicator database allows users of the system to gain confidence with the technology, prior to the establishment of the complete system. The phased establishment of CRIS, at country level, also allows for the rapid identification and correction of problems with the system and its databases.

It is anticipated that there will be some technological problems with the establishment of the first phase. The indicator database will have been stress-tested prior to launch, however this may not identify all 'bugs' in the system. The UNAIDS CRIS Unit will provide technical support to ensure that these difficulties are dealt with in a timely manner.

In subsequent training of new and existing local CRIS teams, beginning in early 2003, enhancements to the system, such as the project/resource tracking database and the research inventory database, will be included.

3.1.1. *The core fields*

The core fields have predetermined definitions installed with the database. These definitions correspond to the indicators for measuring follow-up to the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment—i.e., information on the HIV/AIDS situation and the response in-country.

The core indicator fields—the 'Black Box'—houses approximately 25 key strategic fields. A feature of the system is that additional core indicator fields can be added to the indicator database over time. Indicator definition for any new core indicators will be imported via a system enhancement.

Once the system is fully operational at national level, the collection of a standardized core of indicators will allow for enhanced local analysis, thus providing a better picture of the status of the national response.

The system is designed for: easy expansion of the overall system at national level; strengthened analysis of the data contained within CRIS; and comparability of the core fields across countries and regions.

3.1.2. *The free fields*

A feature of the CRIS indicator database is its ability to hold customized 'free' fields. Each national CRIS can be adapted at the country level by the host institution to store additional information[7] via these free fields.

It is recommended that this process of adding new indicators to the CRIS indicator database be overseen by the National CRIS Reference Group (where one exists) or the National Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group.

These free fields offer national programmes the opportunity to further customize CRIS at country level to meet local needs. A national CRIS indicator database will thus have the core fields as a component, along with additional national, subnational or local indicators.

[7] Countries are encouraged to collect additional indicators to monitor and evaluate their national responses; examples are clearly defined in the National AIDS Programmes: A guide to monitoring and evaluation, UNAIDS, Geneva, June 2000.

The CRIS indicator database has the capacity to house all HIV/AIDS-related indicator data collected by all partners within the national response. Indicators from other database systems can be imported into, and stored in, the indicator database's free fields.

New fields within the indicator database will be added via a selection menu. The user will be led through the process of generating new fields with customizable generic screens.

An excerpt from

GUIDELINES ON CONSTRUCTION OF CORE INDICATORS
Monitoring the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

UNAIDS/02.49E (English original, August 2002)

At the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS, held on 25–27 June 2001, governments from over 180 countries committed themselves to a comprehensive programme of international and national action to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic by adopting the Declaration of Commitment (DoC) on HIV/AIDS (*Resolution A/RES/S-26/2)*. The DoC established a number of goals for the achievement of specific quantified and time-bound targets, including reductions in HIV infection among infants and young adults; improvements in HIV/AIDS education, health care and treatment; and improvements in orphan support.

The DoC also included a pledge, on the part of the United Nations General Assembly, that it would itself devote at least one full day per annum to reviewing the progress achieved in realizing the goals established. To facilitate this ongoing review process, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and its Cosponsors have developed a set of core indicators that permit monitoring of measurable aspects of the various international and national actions, national programme outcomes, and national impact objectives envisaged in the DoC. Information obtained on these indicators will also be incorporated into reports and publications produced for broader dissemination and debate.

3.1.3. *Additional indicators*

Another important innovation of the indicator database is its ability to support the collection of indicators relating to particular thematic areas, such as human rights. These additional fields would be added to the core CRIS database architecture. This could be done on a country-by-country or regional basis.

Specific indicators to monitor implementation of the Abuja Declaration are being included in the versions of CRIS provided to African countries.

Piloting indicator collection at country level, such as the AIDS care indicators currently being developed by UNAIDS, WHO and Family Health International (FHI), can be done through the addition of these indicators to the core indicator system.

3.1.4. *Other indicator systems*

The CRIS indicator database is designed to be AIDS-specific, but it complements existing systems. For example, the addition of poverty-monitoring indicators to the core CRIS fields would not be considered at this stage, as it is felt that poverty-monitoring tools should be strengthened at country level to reflect the HIV/AIDS situation. Some countries may decide to add some poverty- and HIV/AIDS-related indicators using the 'free fields' facility.

However, the system is designed to allow for the transfer of information between the various databases within CRIS and other established databases—e.g., the UNICEF-supported ChildInfo systems.

Thus, as previously stated, the CRIS indicator database will offer NACs the opportunity to centrally house all HIV/AIDS-related indicators being collected. This will provide them with the opportunity to undertake better analysis, as well as policy and programme development.

3.2. Project/resource-tracking database compatibility

The UNAIDS CRIS Unit has met with many organizations and individuals that have already developed or are developing project/resource-tracking databases to track resources and activities being undertaken, using local indicators. Many systems[8] have been reviewed to determine their compatibility and ability to function as a generic project/resource-tracking database for the CRIS system.

The generic CRIS structure allows for existing project/resource-tracking databases to be 'plugged in' when the system is installed. An existing database could also be integrated into the generic CRIS facility after initial installation of the system.

For those countries without a project/resource-tracking database, the generic CRIS project/resource-tracking database will be installed. This will be available in early 2003 as the first enhancement to the basic CRIS (initially only the CRIS indicator database will be available).

3.2.1. *About the generic model*

The generic project/resource-tracking database will support improved national planning, resource mobilization/allocation, intervention targeting, intervention evaluation, analysis of a country's success in implementing its own National Strategic Plan (NSP), and analysis of its efforts and compliance with the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and other regional or global commitments.

It will be a complementary database to the CRIS indicator database.

The CRIS host institution (described in detail in Section 5) will be able to use the database to analyse funding and programme gaps by any combination of time frame, geographic area, target population, type of project and organization. In addition, the data will be geographically coded to allow for analysis against other data, such as census data, school attendance data, health data, transportation data and agricultural data.

This database will be an extremely powerful and flexible report and analysis tool. The reports that analyse the information in the database are designed so that they can be created using any combination of the following criteria:

1) Subnational functional level, i.e. province or district
2) Executing/implementing organization or type of that organization (government ministry, provincial ministry, UN agency, NGO, etc.)
3) Resource provider (donor)
4) Planned or actual start and/or end dates for projects

[8] These include the system supporting the website of the National AIDS Commission of Malawi (www.aidsmalawi.org), the Mozambique CRIS of the Conselho Nacional De Combate Ao HIV/SIDA (CNCS), and the 'in-development' project/resource-tracking database of the National AIDS Authority of Cambodia. Other systems that have been reviewed include: CRIS Argentina and CRIS Zambia.

5) Project budget range
6) Whether the project is fully or under-funded
7) Whether projects have actually begun
8) Target populations' gender, age group, occupation and/or ethnicity
9) A variety of activity descriptions or keywords that more fully describe projects
10) How a project fulfills the goals in the National Strategic Plan.

The database's reports can be sorted according to a number of criteria that are unique to each report. While more reports can be programmed as the need arises, the reports that the database will be able to produce in either digital format or hard copy include:

1) A full report on an individual project
2) All organizations implementing HIV projects
3) HIV projects by location
4) Projects undertaken by an executing/implementing organization
5) Funds and technical support committed by resource provider, executing/implementing organization or project
6) Responses in relation to a particular target group
7) Responses in relation to a particular keyword or type of activity
8) Responses in relation to a particular subnational level—e.g., province or district
9) Responses in relation to the strategic objectives of an NSP
10) Activities by age group or gender in relation to the NSP.

This generic project/resource-tracking database will allow for the financial tracking of projects and programmes, thus facilitating improved monitoring and evaluation.

Please note that, similarly to the indicator database, the project/resource-tracking database will support the inclusion of subnational data on local responses to HIV/AIDS, either via links described below, or directly into the database.

3.3. The CRIS research inventory database

During regional consultations convened by UNAIDS in Africa in July 2002 to discuss the CRIS conceptual framework with national partners, the need for improved knowledge based on HIV/AIDS-related research findings was highlighted. It was felt that comprehensive knowledge about research being conducted in-country and access to research findings would support the development of stronger National Strategic Plans and inform their effective implementation.

A research inventory database was identified by participants as a key component of the generic CRIS structure whereby countries will establish their information systems.

In response, a research inventory database will be a component of CRIS at country level. It will allow for the compilation of information on all HIV/AIDS-related research being undertaken at country level. This research mapping will facilitate identification and contact with key researchers in-country to ensure that analysis undertaken in relation to information within CRIS is informed by local research findings.

The goal of the research inventory database is to enhance collaboration among decision-makers and programme planners, researchers, research institutions and funding agencies in order to strengthen developing-country research capacity and enhance the role of research in informing responses to the epidemic.

Greater availability of this information will improve knowledge-based policy formulation and subsequent programming within national AIDS responses, which may also benefit from access to researchers and research findings from other countries through similar mechanisms.

The inclusion of a research inventory database will enable countries to track research related to HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The software for the database will be available as part of the CRIS enhancement scheduled for early 2003.

3.4. Links and other country-specific information, including HIV surveillance and AIDS case reporting

Other information contained within CRIS includes links to other information sources[9], and key contacts or documents.

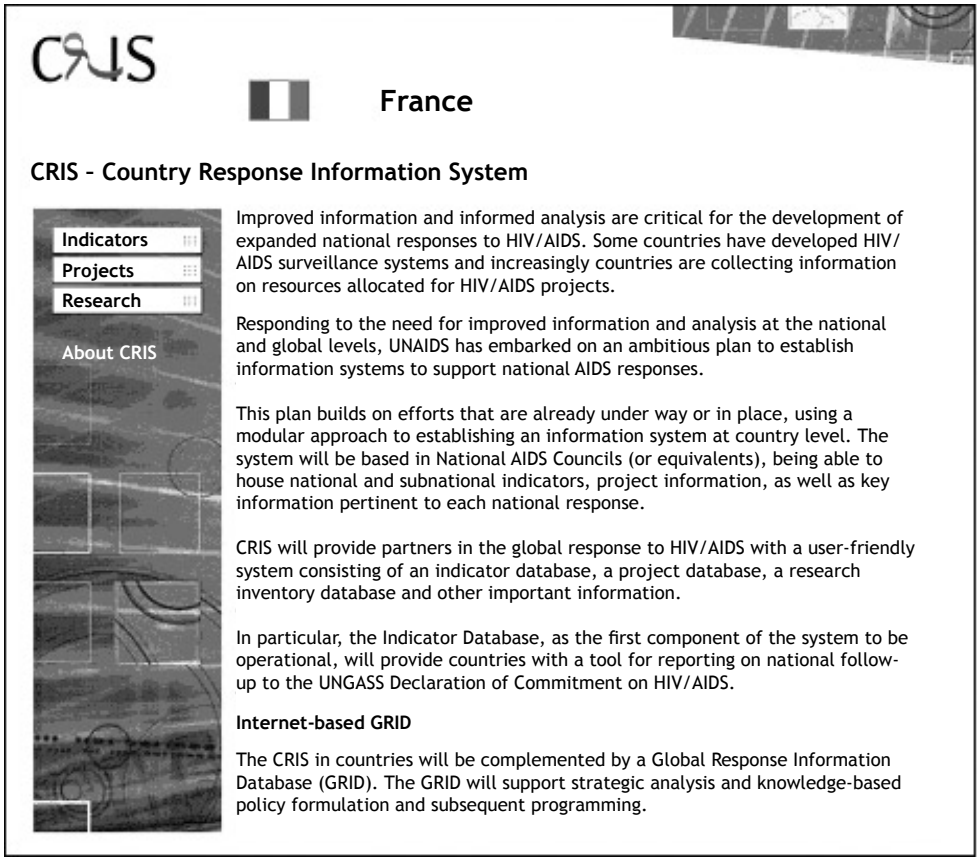
Additional information may relate to the CRIS host institution or their key partners. These may be linked according to the requirements of the CRIS host institution.

This section of CRIS also allows for inclusion of AIDS case reporting as well as HIV surveillance data that may not be captured via the indicator database.

The generic CRIS can interface with the information systems of all partners, including national partners (government and nongovernmental), UN agencies, bilateral agencies, and other international organizations involved in the response to HIV/AIDS.

3.5. The CRIS user interface

The design of the CRIS system is such that the individual host institution will be able to retain the generic 'look' of CRIS, or 're-skin' the system to reflect the host institution or country.



[9] CRIS also allows for linking, at country level, with data from other information systems or surveys. Another example of such information is the AIDS Programme Indicator Survey (a household and health facility survey), to be conducted by USAID in collaboration with national governments.

Section 4 Collection and analysis of the information contained within CRIS

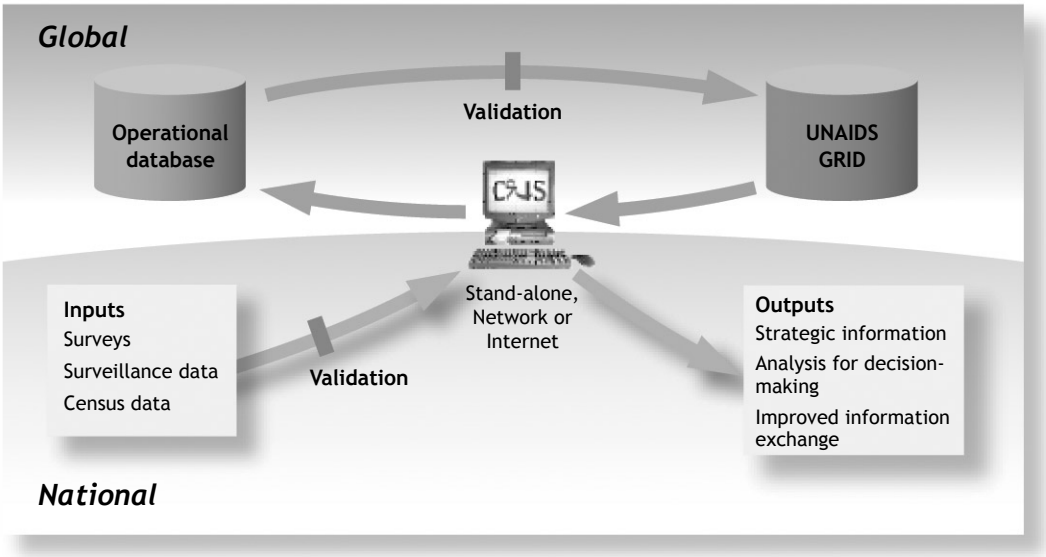
The quality of the analysis generated from CRIS (and GRID) will be determined by the quality of information fed into it.

Indicator collection and analysis will require significant capacity at national and subnational levels. Basing action upon low-quality analysis could lead to inappropriate policy development and programming decisions.

The UNAIDS Secretariat is currently conceptualizing a strategy for development of this capacity. Any strategy would involve national and provincial governments, with the United Nations system and civil society providing appropriate resources, including technical support, for these efforts.

The good-quality information needed to populate the databases of CRIS includes data on the sexual behaviour of young people, school attendance of orphans, workplace programmes in large corporations, availability of antiretroviral therapy, and risk reduction among injecting drug users.

Figure 1. Data flows



An important aspect of the collection, storage, retrieval and analysis of data via CRIS will be the validation processes. Firstly, local validation should occur for all data being posted on CRIS. This local validation process could form part of the national monitoring and evaluation plan and is proposed as a key activity of a national CRIS or monitoring and evaluation reference group.

Countries are encouraged to provide the core indicators (UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS indicators) of the indicator database, to the UNAIDS Secretariat, following their national validation process.

The core indicators should be accompanied by a narrative report[10] highlighting successes, as well as constraints and future national plans of action to improve performance, especially in areas where data indicate national target shortfalls.

[10] UNAIDS strongly recommends the convening of a national workshop and/or a broad consultation forum to discuss the major findings of the national report containing the core indicators, prior to the report being submitted to UNAIDS.

The core indicators, when received by the UNAIDS monitoring and evaluation unit, will undergo a secondary validation process. The unit will undertake this process in partnership with the Social Mobilization and Information Department (SMI) of UNAIDS, prior to posting of the information on GRID.

The UNAIDS *Guidelines on construction of core indicators, Monitoring the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS* provides 'detailed specification of the indicators, on the information required and the basis of their construction, and on their interpretation. These guidelines aim to maximize the validity, internal consistency and uniformity across countries and over time of the indicator estimates obtained, and to ensure consistency in the types of data employed and in the methods of calculation employed.'

Assistance vis-à-vis the core indicators can be sought from the Evaluation Unit of the UNAIDS Secretariat at UNGASSindicators@unaids.org

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Meanwhile, several agencies have indicated to the CRIS Unit that they will support capacity development of data collection to facilitate the roll-out of CRIS.

The Global AIDS Programme (GAP) of **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** will initially identify a number of priority countries receiving support from GAP. These countries will benefit from a focus on improved data collection at the national and subnational levels. The model developed will be useful for other funding partners and countries.

The South Asia Project on Advocacy (SAPA) (funded by The Department for International Development (DFID), through UNAIDS) will also benefit from increased focus on data collection and subsequent analysis. SAPA is working with Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and will develop guidelines for synthesizing data and analytical processes vis-à-vis second-generation surveillance.

The Department for International Development (DFID), via its support to the International Partnership against AIDS in Africa (IPAA), will strengthen CRIS and the associated data collection in the four countries where the project is operating: Burundi, Ethiopia, Ghana and Rwanda.

CIDA is supporting the strengthening of CRIS systems, building upon initial support to establish the information system for the National AIDS Commission of Malawi.

Discussions with other potential CRIS partners are ongoing.

Section 5 Establishing CRIS at national level

The national CRIS[11] will be hosted locally, allowing for local leadership to oversee data collection and review the information collected.

It is proposed that CRIS be established at country level by the NAC with support from the United Nations system. UNAIDS Country Programme Advisers (CPAs) or Programme Coordinators, other partners (see analysis section above), and other technical staff of the UN system will be available to support data collection and validation. Where there is no UNAIDS CPA present in-country, the UNAIDS intercountry CPA or UNAIDS Intercountry Team (ICT) will be able to support this ongoing process.

The physical location of CRIS will be determined through an internal review at country level. However, the UNAIDS CRIS Unit recommends that the national CRIS system be located in the NAC offices. Analysis of the technological needs for installation or strengthening of CRIS will be carried out by the UNAIDS CRIS Unit as part of the operational process.

Data collection

Indicator data

It is envisaged that data collection, for the indicator database, will be undertaken on a continuous basis, with individual fields being updated at least every six months. The collected data will be validated according to the agreed mechanism determined at country level, prior to the exportation of the core field indicators to the UNAIDS GRID.

It is proposed that the validation process be a monitoring and evaluation activity carried out by NAC, supported by the UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS.

Countries will be encouraged to share the core fields of CRIS with the UNAIDS Secretariat so that all countries' core fields can be replicated on a central database (GRID). This will facilitate data analysis and country comparability. Following data update and validation, the core information from national CRIS systems will be published on the web, via GRID.

Policies relating to national sovereignty of data and use of the data in the public domain will be developed by UNAIDS to protect national interests vis-à-vis information available via CRIS and GRID.

Programmatic data (database available in early 2003)

The collection of data to support the tracking of resources and projects should be a continuous exercise. The project/resource-tracking database will provide the National AIDS Council with a tool to collect programmatic information on the national response.

This information will include details of who is funding which activities, where, and targeting which populations and how.

Initially, capacity development efforts for the use and maintenance of the project/resource-tracking database will focus on the national level. As capacity develops, particularly at subnational level, programmatic data will be increasingly collected at all levels.

[11] The software provided by the UNAIDS CRIS Unit enables countries to make operable a multi-database information system. Training is provided to develop local national capacity, while ongoing technical support from the CRIS Unit or UNAIDS Intercountry Team will be provided.

Research data (database available in early 2003)

Following the availability of the CRIS research inventory database, countries will be encouraged to undertake, with the designated research institution partner for this activity, a research 'stocktaking'. During stocktaking, the research agenda can be compared to the NSP, using tools provided by the system. This information will be housed in CRIS and shared with UNAIDS and other partners.

In support of national efforts to develop a comprehensive picture of research being undertaken nationwide, UNAIDS will work with global research funding agencies to update global and national information, as awards for each funding cycle are announced.

The* CRIS User Guide *will be updated and provided to the national host institution, along with system upgrades. These revised guides will detail procedures for loading system enhancements as well as the processes recommended for the collection of the necessary data.

The CRIS host institution

The location—either permanent or temporary—of CRIS will be a decision made at country level by the relevant authorities. The CRIS system may have a 'temporary' home until a permanent one is available. In such a situation, this will be noted and acknowledged by the national CRIS host institution and the UNAIDS CRIS Unit. A schedule for the transfer of CRIS to its permanent home will be agreed by both parties.

It is proposed that the following procedure be followed to determine the location of CRIS, and the timing for the establishment of the system in a particular country.

1) The UNAIDS CRIS Unit will communicate to the Chair of the UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS that a particular country has expressed interest in establishing CRIS and that the following information is required:
    a. proposed location of CRIS
    b. whether this is a permanent or temporary location
    c. the key contact person that the CRIS Unit should deal with in subsequent discussions
2) The Theme Group Chair (TGC) will communicate with NAC to identify the required information.
3) The UNAIDS CRIS Unit will subsequently correspond with the nominated institution, informing the TGC, the UNAIDS CPA, and UNAIDS departments (as appropriate).

The principles for determining the 'home' of CRIS are the following:

- that it be *negotiated* at country level;
- that the process lead to enhanced national ownership of CRIS;
- that the process consider local technical capacity as well as human resource capacity; and
- that CRIS may have a 'temporary' home.

Installation

CRIS is installed on a computer within the identified CRIS host institution (as determined by the process described above). Installation is performed via an installation Wizard.

During the installation process, the user is able to name the country for which this system is being established. That country's name then automatically appears on all screens within CRIS and its databases.

The installer is also given the option to select the CRIS components they wish to install. The installation process automatically installs the indicator database and the research inventory database. However, the user can decide whether to install the generic project/resource-tracking database (described in section 5).

Section 6 Technical aspects of CRIS

Review of existing information systems

In designing CRIS, the UNAIDS CRIS Unit considered the following criteria for information systems:

- Do they take advantage of locally-supportable mainstream technology?
- Are they simple and do they support critical functionality?
- Is there interoperability with internal and external systems?
- Can they accommodate the existing UNAIDS indicator-verification process?
- Can the information systems manage both local, core and Cosponsor indicators?
- Do they incorporate future system functionality?
- Is there a local Internet migration strategy?
- Do they support an indicator harmonization process?
- Are they compatible with existing systems?

The indicator database of the CRIS system will function as a clearing house and warehouse not only for its own data but also for data from other existing systems. Transmission formats for ASCII and Access databases will be defined to support data interchange with external systems. The national CRIS system will be able to transmit both indicator definitions and data easily.

Several systems were reviewed during the design phase of CRIS to determine if they could be adapted for use by UNAIDS as the generic CRIS system. CDC's EpiInfo, WHO's Health Mapper and Global Atlas, and UNICEF's ChildInfo systems were considered *vis-à-vis* functionality and technology.

These systems excel in their functionality for these purposes—e.g., statistical analysis, GIS capability, and indicator reporting, all of which are relevant for CRIS. But while these mature applications excel at these functions, they do not appear to exchange data with other systems easily, nor do they provide a compatibility with use on the Internet.

The national CRIS data structures require optimization to support the expected queries, utilizing a dimensional model for the database. In some cases, the underlying data structures of the systems reviewed did not appear to be able to support a high volume of queries on longitudinal data, having been designed as relational data entry systems.

Technical requirements for CRIS

The workstation used for CRIS should have the following specifications:

Hardware requirements	
Resource	**Requirement**
Computer:	Intel or compatible
Processor:	Pentium 166 min
Display:	800 x 600 (graphics)
Software requirements	
Microsoft Office 2000 (only for data validation)	
OS	**Memory**
Win 2000 server	128 MB
Win NT4 server (SP5 minimum)	32 MB
Win 2000 Professional	64 MB
Win NT4 Workstation (4SPS minimum)	32 MB
Database requirement	
Database size:	44 MB of free hard disk space
System platform	
Programming languages	HTML, ASP, VBScript, VB, CSS
Web server	IIS 4.0
Web browser	MS Internet Explorer 4.0 and above

Section 7 CRIS—a common platform for monitoring and evaluation

CRIS provides a system for improved monitoring and evaluation, and offers an opportunity to consolidate a common understanding of the challenges posed by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, to stimulate better data gathering and analysis by countries for decision-making, and to generate greater synergy with regard to reporting requirements.

It is anticipated that CRIS will serve as a common platform at country level for data collection (particularly monitoring- and evaluation-related data collection) and thus reduce demands on countries to meet local and international monitoring and evaluation requirements.

During the consultative meetings in Abidjan and Harare in July 2002, participants stressed the importance of countries being able to use a single system for the collection and storage of monitoring and evaluation data. The proposed CRIS was endorsed for this purpose.

The feature within the indicator database that facilitates the addition of free fields means that this system can be used as the common platform for all agencies (including funding agencies) working with NAC. Indeed, local indicators for programmes from various UN agencies and other bilateral agencies can be stored in, and retrieved easily from, this database.

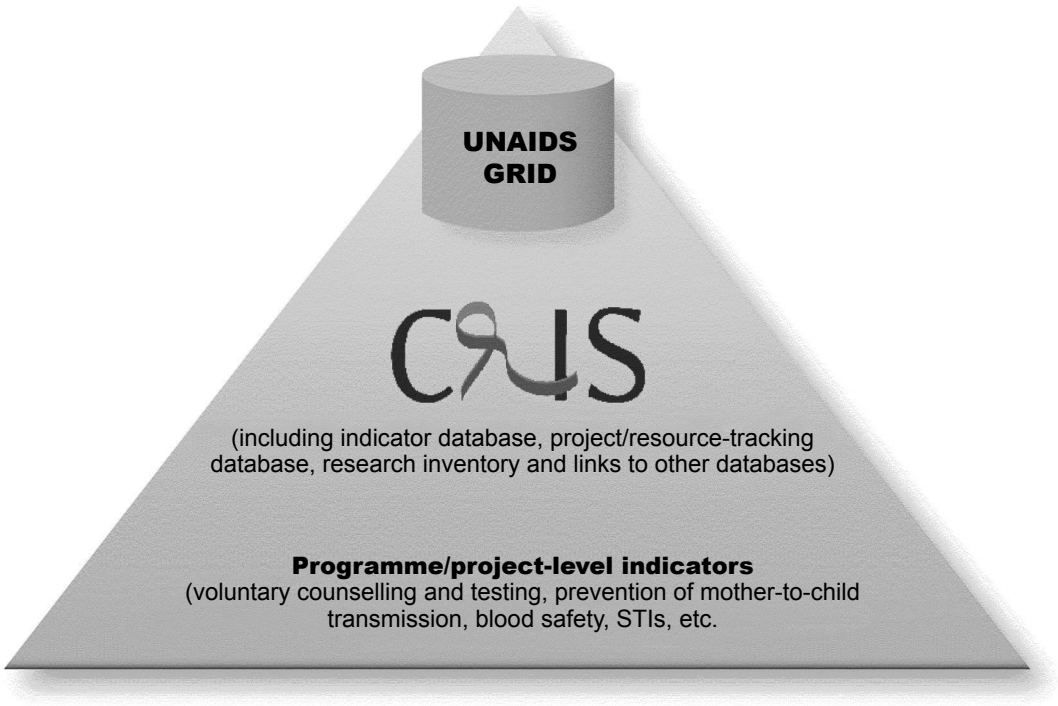
Section 8 The Global Response Information Database

To complement CRIS at national level, UNAIDS in Geneva will establish a Global Response Information Database (GRID)[12], whereby core information[13] from the national CRIS can be stored collectively. GRID (see Figure 2) will also provide a referral point to national CRIS systems for further and more detailed information about national epidemics, the responses being undertaken and the impacts of these upon the respective country.

Following discussions with national and international partners, it has become apparent that the hosting of core information centrally will support improved information exchange and comparison. The hosting of this information will provide enhanced comparability of national responses. GRID will also provide access to this information, via the Internet, for all partners.

Therefore, as well as national CRIS systems being housed locally, selected information/ data from CRIS from all countries will be housed centrally on GRID, by the UNAIDS Secretariat. GRID will be constructed so that when data are updated at the national level in CRIS, these changes will be reflected on the global site on a regular basis. (It is anticipated that, in future enhancements, this will occur automatically.)

Figure 2. The GRID system



GRID will allow for data searches across countries. It will also maximize links with other information systems of the UN system and other strategic partners.

[12] Discussions are ongoing to determine the type of information system at regional level that would complement the GRID and CRIS systems.

[13] Countries will retain the right not to share this information. Hosting of the information on GRID will be determined by national policies relating to sovereignty and privacy.

Components of GRID

GRID will have several components. Firstly, there will be the individual country pages accessed from the UNAIDS homepage.

It is proposed that the country-specific pages contain the core information indicator databases and the research inventory database from each of the national CRIS systems. Note that additional non-core information from the indicator database and the project/resource-tracking database will not be hosted on GRID.

Associated with the country pages on GRID, will be links from each of the country-specific information screens to national websites (where these exist).

Initial analysis capability on GRID will include basic reports, including the ability to group according to any combination of regions. Pivot table functionality[14] is planned to give greater interactivity to data exploration.

Project/resource tracking

Composite information from the project/resource-tracking database will provide the GRID with an overview of resources available to and expended by national AIDS responses. This information will complement financial information available from funding agencies.

Analytical tools will enable GRID users to review resource information alongside other information including indicators and research findings.

The research inventory database (on GRID)

Information from each country's research inventory database will be fed into GRID to create a global data clearing house/warehouse that will include the latest national, multi-country and global research completed, being undertaken, and funded.

It is anticipated that access to timely information in the research inventory database at the GRID level will provide research-sponsoring bodies with a 'real-time' and detailed picture of HIV/AIDS-related research efforts in developing countries. This will facilitate identification of potential key partners for multi-site research endeavours.

National CRIS systems will feed country-level information into the GRID research inventory database at global level on a regular basis. At the same time, information from global research funding agencies will be updated, onto the GRID, as the awards for each funding cycle are announced.

This collaboration between the UNAIDS CRIS unit and major research institutions and research funders will ensure that a comprehensive picture of HIV/AIDS-related research is maintained. UNAIDS, working with key partners, will review the available information to identify possible gaps in relation to current research and programmatic priorities. This information will be readily available to NACs and others partners in this activity.

[14] Pivot table functionality is a tool for creating customized reports, which enables users to select and subset categories of data. It reduces the need to create pre-defined reports that may not meet all users' needs.

Section 9 Roadmap for the future

The UNAIDS CRIS Unit will focus on establishing CRIS systems in countries as a matter of urgency. Where countries already have response information systems in place, the CRIS Unit will look for opportunities to support intercountry collaboration and technical exchange to strengthen all systems—both established and new.

Following the establishment or scale-up of CRIS in the first-phase countries (to the end of 2002), CRIS will be strategically expanded during the second phase over a period of 12-18 months. The second phase will be supported by country feedback, lessons learned from the first phase and review by the CRIS Technical Working Group (CTWG—see Section 10).

It is anticipated that the CTWG will undertake a regular review on the use by national programmes of the 'free' fields within the indicator database. Where national programmes have consistently included particular fields or where there is a consistency of types of information, then a critical review will be undertaken to proceed with the strategic expansion of the core CRIS fields within the CRIS indicator database.

When fully operational, CRIS will provide countries with management information that can be electronically accessed, both locally and globally, and that is maintained with relative ease. CRIS will provide data for management, including monitoring and evaluation, advocacy and empowerment of national responses.

The CRIS indicator database will be constructed so that the core fields' structure cannot be modified by individual countries. This will be necessary to prevent a loss of comparability of data across countries and regions.

There will remain potential problems with regard to data validation from the country level. The CRIS Unit will continue to explore opportunities for collaboration with the World Bank, USAID, CDC/GAP and other bilateral agencies to support data collection and validation efforts at country level.

The role of the UNAIDS ICTs and the regional offices of UN agencies and bilateral agencies in supporting data validation and enhanced data entry at the country level will be critical to ensuring good-quality data collection and subsequent analysis via the CRIS system. It is anticipated that all agencies working collaboratively in the strengthening of monitoring and evaluation efforts, such as the World Bank, USAID and CDC, will support this data-validation process.

CRIS communication strategy/plan

To support local ownership and 'buy-in' to CRIS at the country and regional levels, it is proposed that the UNAIDS CRIS Unit, in collaboration with the UNAIDS ICTs, implement a communication strategy/plan to inform UNAIDS country and intercountry offices, UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS and national and international partners about CRIS.

The objective of the communication strategy/plan will be to improve understanding of CRIS at country and regional levels of governments, as well as by UN system personnel and other partners.

This communication plan will work to inform partners of the concept of the core CRIS and the expanded CRIS. It will also focus on future directions of CRIS and the importance of national partnerships in ensuring good quality of data and, thus, analysis. Lastly, the communication strategy will stress the importance of international partnerships to ensure the expansion and roll-out of the core CRIS to meet national needs for reporting, monitoring and evaluation.

Cosponsor focal points will be briefed on the development and conceptualization of CRIS. It will also be vital that feedback be obtained from National AIDS Programmes at all stages of CRIS's development.

An important element of the CRIS training workshops (detailed below) for the first phase will be the provision of briefings on CRIS to key national partners, including the UN system.

Key messages will include:

- the important role that CRIS will play in reporting national progress in meeting the commitments of the UNGASS Declaration; and
- the ability to improve monitoring and evaluation to better implement an expanded response to HIV/AIDS, supported by such mechanisms as the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

An Intranet page on CRIS was posted in July 2002 to inform UNAIDS staff of the philosophy of CRIS and the planned implementation of CRIS globally. The CRIS Unit will also meet with members of the ICTs, UNAIDS CPAs and national partners, as opportunities arise.

Section 10 Activities and implementation schedule

The following activities will be completed under the supervision of the UNAIDS CRIS Unit in collaboration with other units within the UNAIDS Secretariat, Cosponsor organizations, National AIDS Programmes and other interested parties:

a. Establishment of an 'in-house' UNAIDS CRIS reference group consisting of representatives from the UNAIDS Country and Regional Support Department (CRD) (including ICT representation), the Programme Development and Coordination Group (PDC) and SMI, ***June 2002***

b. Feedback from countries and from the Cosponsors on the draft CRIS concept paper, ***established September 2002***

c. Mapping of existing information systems

   i. Stocktaking of UNAIDS in-house information systems, existing and planned, throughout the organization, ***completed August 2002***
   ii. Rapid global assessment of the status of CRIS development[15], ***completed August 2002***
   iii. Cataloguing of all ongoing and planned monitoring and evaluation programmes—e.g., USAID- or CDC-supported—***completed July 2002***

   (Identification of key contact persons will occur in each of these exercises, to ensure the development of improved information systems.)

d. Posting of the CRIS page/corner on the UNAIDS Intranet, ***achieved July 2002***

e. Identification of the 'first-phase' CRIS countries, ***completed July 2002***

f. A design document on the technical specifications of the CRIS indicator database, ***completed August 2002***

[15] This will involve both systems already referred to as CRIS, as well as the information systems that have evolved within countries.

g. Development of a communication strategy on CRIS, to ensure that national responses, including UN Theme Groups and UNAIDS CPAs, are well briefed on CRIS, its role and functions. The communication strategy will also focus on intercountry mechanisms, such as the ICTs, ***achieved September 2002***

h. Development of the software for the generic CRIS system. This will be web-based database software. The generic CRIS will have multi-language capability.

   i. Indicator database ***developed September 2002***
   ii. Project/resource-tracking database ***by early 2003***
   iii. Research inventory database ***by early 2003***

i. Development of initial guidelines on the use of CRIS (end-user documentation is to be developed, preferably as an on-line feature), by ***October 2002***.

j. Development of Q&A on CRIS, ***October 2002***

k. Establishment of CRIS systems in first-phase countries: a series of training workshops, ***October - December 2002***

   i. Training of users
   ii. Establishment of in-country and/or intercountry maintenance/technical support
   iii. Establishment of CRIS systems in first-phase countries (based on an understanding of existing CRIS systems at country levels)

l. Establishment of GRID, ***end January 2003***

m. Review by the expanded CTWG, of the system prior to further expansion, ***by February 2003***

n. Database management—both at country and global levels. This will involve the maintenance of the database system in UNAIDS in Geneva as well as supporting local databases: ***ongoing***

o. Provision[16] of maintenance and technical support, at the global and country levels: ***ongoing***

p. Support to dissemination and use of CRIS information and analysis: ***ongoing***

q. Formal review and analysis of the first phase of CRIS, including confirmation of core CRIS indicators and methodology, ***by February 2003***

r. Establishment of CRIS systems in second-phase countries: a series of training workshops, ***January - December 2003***

   i. Training of users
   ii. Establishment of in-country and/or intercountry maintenance/ technical support
   iii. Establishment of CRIS systems in second-phase countries (based on an understanding of existing CRIS systems at country levels)

s. Finalization and publication of the CRIS manual of operations (to be in multiple languages), ***by December 2003***.

[16] Note that countries will be encouraged to access local resources for maintenance and support. This will include UNAIDS Programme Acceleration Funds (PAFs).

Section 11 Identification of first-phase countries

For the first phase of CRIS implementation, only countries from Africa, Asia and Central America/the Caribbean were selected. Countries from other regions of the world will be included as soon as possible in the second phase in 2003.

Critical to the process of training countries from these regions is the availability of the software and training materials in Spanish, Portuguese and Russian. This is expected by early 2003.

11.1. Criteria for selection

Criteria for the selection of first-phase countries for CRIS were proposed during the meeting of September 2001. The primary criteria are:

- political commitment to ensure maintenance and sustainability (government and relevant stakeholders, including donors)
- functional and multisectoral NAC with NSP in place and operational
- readiness of the country to go ahead with the process in terms of institutional and IT capacity, availability of local resources, and accessibility of data
- commitment of country resources to the implementation of CRIS
- apparent capacity of the country to complete the first phase within the timelines of the workplan.

Additional criteria proposed by the CRIS Unit

- Principal language used: for the first-phase countries, only the English, and later the French, versions of the software; user guides and training materials will be available
- Countries receiving support from the World Bank Multi-country HIV/AIDS Program (MAP) facility
- Countries receiving support from the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
- Priority countries for support through GAP/CDC, the World Bank monitoring and evaluation programme, or placement of USAID monitoring and evaluation advisers
- Inclusion in AIDS programme indicator survey (USAID to collect baseline data in 20 countries by end of 2002)
- Inclusion in the UNAIDS/USAID AIDS Programme Effort Index (API) survey: 60-80 countries, beginning in 2002
- Countries where country profiles are being developed by the AIDS Policy Research Center, University of California San Francisco (USAID-supported)
- Countries receiving support via DFID's Strengthening International Partnership against AIDS in Africa (SIPAA) Project—i.e., Burundi, Ethiopia, Ghana and Rwanda.

11.2. Recommendations for action by first-phase countries

- Generic CRIS established within a designated national entity—the CRIS host institution
- All first-phase countries should collect a core set of indicators
- First-phase countries may select additional indicators, depending on their interests and needs
- Ensure information-sharing among first-phase countries

11.3. First-phase countries[17]

UNAIDS region	Country		CDC GAP	CPA present
Africa	1.	Botswana		Yes
	2.	Burundi		No
	3.	Cameroon		Yes
	4.	Chad		No
	5.	Côte d'Ivoire		Yes
	6.	Ethiopia	Yes	Yes
	7.	Ghana*		Yes
	8.	Kenya	Yes	Yes
	9.	Madagascar		Yes
	10.	Malawi*	Yes	JPO
	11.	Mali*		Yes
	12.	Mozambique	Yes	Yes
	13.	Namibia		Yes
	14.	Nigeria	Yes	Yes
	15.	Senegal		No
	16.	South Africa	Yes	Yes
	17.	Unit. Rep. of Tanzania		Yes
	18.	Uganda	Yes	Yes
	19.	Zambia	Yes	Yes
	20.	Zimbabwe	Yes	Yes
Asia	1.	China*	Yes	Yes
	2.	Cambodia #	Yes	Yes
	3.	India#	Yes	Yes
	4.	Indonesia		Yes
	5.	Philippines		Yes
	6.	Thailand	Yes	Yes
	7.	Vietnam		Yes
Central America/ Caribbean	1.	St Kitts-et-Nevis		ICPA
	2.	Belize		No
	3.	Barbados		ICPA
	4.	Guyana	Yes	Adv.
	5.	Jamaica		ICPA
	6.	Trinidad and Tobago		ICPA

JPO = Junior Professional Officer
ICPA = Intercountry Programme Adviser

* Countries identified as priority countries for intensified UN system support on HIV/AIDS, 2002-2003; UNAIDS & UNDG, April 2002.

The International AIDS Alliance will support the implementation of the Frontiers Project in four countries: Cambodia, Ecuador, India and Madagascar. There will be a significant component on monitoring and evaluation in this project.

[17] Note: it is anticipated that not all first-phase countries will have operational systems by the end of 2002.

11.4. Second-phase countries

The following training workshops will be scheduled, starting January 2003:

1) Eastern Europe (Russian)
2) South Asia
3) South America
4) North Africa and the Middle East
5) Africa (English and French workshops, as necessary)
6) India (national workshop, including all states)
7) China (national workshop, including all provinces)

Section 12 Key personnel and organizations

NACs

All members of the national AIDS responses will be involved in CRIS, particularly in the provision of data for the national system. It is anticipated that, where they exist, NACs will be the focus and/or host of CRIS at country level, overseeing data collection and undertaking data validation, as well as working with partners to ensure good-quality analysis of the data collected.

Where these structures are not in place or they lack required resources or infrastructure, another institution, either national or international, can be designated as the 'temporary' home of CRIS.

UNAIDS

CRIS Unit

The recently established CRIS Unit in the Country and Regional Support Department of UNAIDS, in partnership with NACs and UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS, is responsible for the timely implementation of CRIS. The CRIS Unit will facilitate the work of the CRD in ensuring that the timelines as set out in this 'planning document' are met.

The CRIS Unit, funded through extra-budgetary resources for the biennium 2002-2003, will be staffed by the team leader and a programme development adviser.

It will work with national CRIS host institutions, providing software, training, and technical backup and support.

Working with key personnel from CRD (particularly the ICTs), and in collaboration with SMI, the CRIS Unit will support the training of personnel at intercountry and country levels. It is envisaged that some training may be contracted out, if necessary.

Working with the UNAIDS CRD geographical divisions and the ICTs, it will identify priority countries for the scale-up of CRIS, and support the identification of key personnel to be responsible for the system at country level, as well as others to be included in training and ongoing support.

Country and Regional Support Department (CRD)

CRD, particularly through the work of UNAIDS country-based staff and ICTs, will have principal responsibility for supporting NACs to collect and locally validate the core CRIS indicator

data. It is anticipated that UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS and other key partners will support national responses to improve and strategically expand the indicator database within CRIS, as well as its links to other information systems.

Referring to the CRD Departmental Strategic Management Plan (DSMP), the key role and responsibility for CPAs will be to monitor and analyse country situations and responses, including inputs into, and support for, CRIS (taken from the DSMP, 2002). CPAs will need to be briefed and/or trained on the use of CRIS and how to fulfill these responsibilities.

Social Mobilization and Information Department (SMI)

The CRIS Unit and SMI have determined the technological requirements for CRIS at national level.

The Information Technology and Systems (IRT) unit of SMI will also support the determination of IT needs for the system at the global level—i.e., GRID. The establishment of CRIS at the national level will require the close cooperation of CRD and SMI, to ensure the effective use of IT resources at the country level.

IRT will ensure compatibility of GRID with existing UNAIDS systems, as well as the effective integration of the GRID into all other UNAIDS reporting systems and web-based databases. IRT will play an important role in the future technological development of CRIS.

SMI will also ensure that GRID will link with existing and planned information systems through hyperlinks. An example of such a link will be the linking of country GRID pages on the Internet with relevant EpiFact pages http://www.unaids.org/hivaidsinfo/statistics/fact_sheets/index.html, as well as the country response briefs http://www.unaids.org/nationalresponse/.

The Strategic Information Unit (SIF) will play an important technical review role in the further development of indicators and analysis of data collected.

An action plan for improved analysis of data contained within the national CRIS and GRID will be required. This plan should include the investment requirements at all levels to ensure sufficient national capacity for data collection and analysis.

The strategic information and analysis derived from CRIS should act as a catalyst for renewed national and global advocacy programmes to build upon the current momentum for expanded national and global responses to HIV/AIDS.

The UNAIDS Information Centre (IRC) publishes and distributes reports based on GRID. It will also support the publication of training documents for local CRIS teams.

There will be a strong link between GRID and the UNAIDS expanded information repository built on SharePoint.

Executive Office (EXO)

The CRIS Unit will work closely with the Evaluation Unit (EVA) within EXO, ensuring that indicators determined by the monitoring and evaluation unit and the UNAIDS Secretariat are contained within the core fields of the CRIS indicator database.

Training workshops of local CRIS teams, which started in October 2002, will be jointly hosted by the CRIS Unit and EVA. Training will include both the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment indicators and CRIS.

In partnership with the Governance, Donor and UN Relations (GDU) or EXO, CRIS will provide better data and analysis for policy formulation, policy advice and improved technical dialogue with external partners, including Cosponsors.

Reference/working groups

CRIS Reference Group (global level)

It has been proposed that the UNAIDS CRIS Unit establish a CRIS Reference Group (CRG). The proposed CRG will provide a strategic and technical review of the CRIS implementation.

The following draft terms of reference have been developed for the CRG:

- To advise the UNAIDS CRIS Unit on the technical and managerial aspects of CRIS, including technological and human capacity requirements
- To oversee the development of a CRIS expansion and strengthening plan, including reviewing local indicators collected via CRIS and make recommendations to UNAIDS for expansion of core indicators
- To mobilize resources for global CRIS expansion

It is envisaged that this group, convened by the CRIS unit of UNAIDS, would meet on a virtual basis or face to face to review progress and the road ahead.

The CTWG will pay close attention to indicators being developed by the various Interagency Task Teams (IATTs) and the MERG working group on the development of care and support indicators, with a view to inclusion, as appropriate. Other indicator developments, such as that required for monitoring and evaluation of bilateral agency programmes, should be considered. It is hoped that these agencies can use the CRIS framework for monitoring and evaluation at country level.

National CRIS reference groups (country level)

It is strongly recommended that each country establish a CRIS reference group to oversee the establishment of CRIS, and/or the expansion and enhancement of existing information systems. This reference group could be a subgroup of a national monitoring and evaluation working group, where these have been established.

Terms of reference for such national reference groups could contain the following suggestions:

- development of a local CRIS operational plan
- development of local indicators
- review of data collected
- analysis of the information contained within CRIS
- resource mobilization for local CRIS expansion

The establishment of CRIS regional reference groups is being considered for the various geographical regions to address unique challenges, such as language, connectivity, or capacity issues that may face the establishment and expansion of the CRIS system. These groups could be supported by UNAIDS Intercountry Teams, and include members of local CRIS teams.

UNAIDS Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group (MERG)

MERG will continue to provide guidance with regard to the core indicators identified via national AIDS responses, to help fulfill national and international commitments.

UNAIDS Cosponsors

UNAIDS Cosponsors have provided vital inputs into the development of the CRIS conceptual framework through critical review, comments and recommendations.

The UNAIDS CRIS Unit, through discussions and meetings with the Cosponsors, has worked to ensure compatibility across systems developed or planned by Cosponsors.

It is anticipated that Cosponsors and other partners will also play a significant role in scaling up CRIS. They will be closely consulted on system refinement, and on the geographical as well as institutional expansion of the system.

The Cosponsors will play a critical role in data collection and validation at national level. Already, they serve an important function as conveners of forums where critical data are discussed. This role will take on an even greater importance as Cosponsors provide venues for discussion of data, indicators, collection and reporting.

Cosponsors will be invited to join the CTWG. It is anticipated that the national-level information systems of all Cosponsors can link together to form part of the expanded national CRIS. Additionally, CRIS will strengthen reporting systems at country level by linking with these existing systems. The CRIS indicator database will provide a common platform for the storage of all HIV/AIDS-related indicators, including those of UN agencies.

Examples of information systems that will form the expanded CRIS, at country level, include WHO's Health Map and UNICEF's ChildInfo systems.

UN agencies are critical as partners with national governments in preparing reports on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and their progress in implementing the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. This role will be supported via CRIS and its indicator database.

The data collected through CRIS will also provide strategic data for the development of UN Common Country Assessments (CCAs) and UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs).

Section 13 Budget and logistical support

13.1. Activity funding

The CRIS Unit has obtained funds from the UNAIDS core budget, as well from the Government of Japan and the National Institutes of Health.

Activities supported include:

- support to key countries to further expand pilot activities
- provision of hardware and logistical support to country offices and ICTs
- consultations with the UNAIDS Technical Working Group
- 10 training workshops
- production of CRIS manual
- software development
- training
- database support and maintenance
- secretarial support

13.2. Budget for staff

Staff costs for two professional staff are covered by the UNAIDS Secretariat core budget. The Norwegian Government is supporting a Junior Professional Officer to be based in the CRIS Unit.

13.3. UNAIDS Unified Budget and Workplan (UBW)

Each of the geographical divisions within CRD has allocated some of its budget from the 2002-2003 UBW for 'integration of HIV/AIDS into mainstream planning and development efforts'. These funds could be available for joint funding with the CRIS unit for CRIS activities at country level.

13.4. Additional resources

Additional resources are required for expansion of the systems and their capacities, as well as capacity development for data collection and analysis.

Future enhancements of CRIS and GRID will ensure that they meet the challenges of providing strategic information for strengthened and informed advocacy, leading to stronger policy formulation and improved and expanded global and national responses.

Annex A. Core fields within the CRIS indicator database: proposed indicators

UNAIDS has developed indicators for measuring progress in implementing the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS[18]. They are indicators that can also measure performance of national AIDS responses in the implementation of NSPs.

These indicators are sufficiently comprehensive to provide an adequate picture of progress achieved, yet simple enough to be measured in all countries on an annual basis. Importantly, they build on the indicators already measured by countries, although it is recognized that not all indicators will be applicable to all countries. As described in this paper, some countries may report on additional indicators relevant to their specific situations.

The proposed indicators, based on the work of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit of the UNAIDS Secretariat[19], are:

National commitment and action indicators

Indicator 1. Amount of national funds spent by governments on HIV/AIDS

Indicator 2. National Composite Policy Index (see box below for details)

Details of the National Composite Policy Index

Strategy development:

1) Country has developed multisectoral strategies to combat HIV/AIDS
2) Country has integrated HIV/AIDS into its general development plans
3) Country has a functional national multisectoral HIV/AIDS management/ coordination body
4) Country has a functional national HIV/AIDS body that promotes interaction between the government, the private sector and civil society
5) Country has a functional HIV/AIDS body that assists in the coordination of civil society organizations.
6) Country has evaluated the impact of HIV/AIDS on its socioeconomic status for planning purposes
7) Country has a strategy that addresses HIV/AIDS in its national uniformed services (including armed forces and civil defence forces)

Prevention

1) Country has a general policy or strategy to promote information, education and communication (IEC) on HIV/AIDS
2) Country has a policy or strategy promoting reproductive and sexual health education for young people

[18] Monitoring the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment, Guidelines on Construction of Core UNGASS Declaration of Commitment Indicators, UNAIDS, Geneva, August 2002.

[19] Indicators developed to monitor the operationalization, at country level, of the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS.

3) Country has a policy or strategy that promotes IEC and other health interventions for groups with high or increasing rates of HIV infection
4) Country has a policy or strategy that promotes IEC and other health interventions for cross-border migrants
5) Country has a policy or strategy, which includes vulnerable populations, to expand access to essential commodities
6) Country has a policy or strategy to reduce mother-to-child HIV transmission

Human rights

1) Country has laws and regulations that protect against discrimination people living with HIV/AIDS
2) Country has laws and regulations that protect against discrimination groups of people identified as being especially vulnerable to HIV/AIDS
3) Country has a policy to ensure equal access for men and women to prevention and care, with emphasis on vulnerable populations
4) Country has a policy to ensure that HIV/AIDS research protocols, including those concerning human subjects, are reviewed and approved by an ethics committee

Care and support

1) Country has a policy or strategy to promote comprehensive HIV/AIDS care and support, with emphasis on vulnerable groups
2) Country has a policy or strategy to ensure or improve access to HIV/AIDS-related medicines, with emphasis on vulnerable groups
3) Country has a policy or strategy to address the additional needs of orphans and other vulnerable children.

National programme and behavioural indicators

Life-skills-based HIV/AIDS education in schools

Indicator 1. Percentage of schools with teachers who have been trained in life-skills-based HIV/AIDS education and who have taught it during the last academic year

Additional indicator. Percentage of primary and secondary schools where life-skills-based education is taught

Workplace HIV/AIDS control

Indicator 2. Percentage of large enterprises/companies that have HIV/AIDS workplace policies and programmes

Sexually transmitted infections: comprehensive case management

Indicator 3. Percentage of patients with STIs at health-care facilities who are appropriately diagnosed, treated and counselled

Additional indicator. Percentage of public STI clinics where voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) services for HIV are provided and/or referred to other facilities

Prevention of mother-to-child transmission (MTCT): antiretroviral prophylaxis

Indicator 4. Percentage of HIV-infected pregnant women receiving a complete course of antiretroviral prophylaxis to reduce the risk of MTCT

Additional indicator. Percentage of public antenatal clinic attendees using clinics where voluntary counselling and testing services for HIV are provided and/or referred to other facilities

HIV treatment: antiretroviral combination therapy

Indicator 5. Percentage of people with advanced HIV infection receiving antiretroviral therapy

Additional indicator. Percentage of health facilities with the capacity to deliver appropriate care to people living with HIV/AIDS

Injecting drug users: safe injecting and sexual practices

Indicator 6. Percentage of injecting drug users (IDUs) who have adopted behaviours that reduce transmission of HIV—i.e., who both use condoms and avoid sharing injecting equipment

Young people's knowledge about HIV prevention

Indicator 7. Percentage of young people aged 15-24 who correctly identify ways of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV and who reject major misconceptions about HIV transmission

Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target: 90% by 2005; 95% by 2010

Indicator 8. Percentage of young people aged 15-24 reporting the use of a condom during sexual intercourse with a non-regular sexual partner

Additional indicator. Median age at first sex
Additional indicator. Higher-risk sex in the last year
Additional indicator. Condom use during last commercial sex
Additional indicator. Condom use during last anal sex between men

Orphans' school attendance

Indicator 9. Ratio of current school attendance of orphans to that of non-orphans aged 10-14

Additional indicator. Percentage of children less than 15 years old who are orphans

Impact assessment

Indicator 1. Percentage of young people aged 15-24 who are HIV-infected

MDG target: 25% in the most affected countries by 2005; 25% reduction globally by 2010

Or:

Alternative Indicator 1. HIV prevalence among sex workers and their clients, injecting drug users, men having sex with men

Indicator 2. Percentage of HIV-infected infants born to HIV-infected mothers

MDG target: 20% reduction by 2005; 50% reduction by 2010.

Annex B. Schedule of training workshops for first-phase countries

Workshop 1 (English), 16-18 October, Lusaka, Zambia (3 days)

1) Botswana
2) Malawi
3) Mozambique
4) Namibia
5) South Africa
6) Zimbabwe
7) Zambia
8) (plus a representative from the CRIS Madagascar project as an observer)

Workshop 2 (English), 29 October–1 November, Bangkok, Thailand (4 days)

1) Cambodia
2) China
3) India
4) Indonesia
5) Myanmar
6) Philippines
7) Thailand
8) Vietnam

Workshop 3 (English), 6-8 November, Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania (3 days)

1) Ethiopia
2) Ghana
3) Kenya
4) Nigeria
5) Uganda
6) United Republic of Tanzania

Workshop 4 (French), February 2003, Dakar, Senegal (3 days)

1) Burundi
2) Cameroon
3) Chad
4) Côte d'Ivoire
5) Mali
6) Senegal

Workshop 5 (English), 11-14 March 2003, Port of Spain, Trinidad (4 Days)

1) Barbados
2) Belize
3) Guyana
4) Jamaica
5) St Kitts and Nevis
6) Trinidad and Tobago

Annex C. Workplan for the implementation of CRIS 2002-2003

Objectives:

1. To support and improve the response to HIV/AIDS at country level by providing relevant, precise, reliable and timely information on the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the response to it, at country regional and global levels
2. To monitor progress and timely feedback about successes and failures as these components are essential for an improved response to HIV/AIDS

Products	Activities	Indicators	Strategic partnerships and alliances[20]	Timeline
a. Concept paper on the implementation of CRIS developed	• Desk review of meetings to date • Discussions with interim Reference Group within UNAIDS	Agreement reached on the implementation plan for CRIS	SMI, PDC, Cosponsors	June – Sept 2002
b. In-house CRIS Reference Group established	• Meeting of the UNAIDS Reference Group	Reference Group has met and agreed on the core CRIS indicators and the first-phase countries	Representatives from CRD (including ICT representation), PDC and SMI	June 2002
c. Rapid assessment completed	• Rapid assessment of CRIS development globally • Stocktaking of in-house information systems • Global assessment of CRIS systems • Catalogue of M&E programmes	Improved understanding of the status of CRIS development globally, including individual country efforts	NACs, CPAs, TGs, CDC, USAID, SIDALAC, Cosponsors, ICTs,	By June 2002
d. Communication strategy/plan	Development of a communication strategy on CRIS, to ensure national responses including UN Theme Groups and UNAIDS CPAs, are well briefed on CRIS, its role and functions. The communication strategy will also focus on intercountry mechanisms such as the ICTs	Improved understanding within the UNAIDS Secretariat and in the field on the philosophy of CRIS, and its implementation schedule	NACs, CPAs, TGs, ICTs, UNAIDS Secretariat, Cosponsors	By September 2002
e. First-phase CRIS countries identified	To complete the identification of the first-phase CRIS countries	20 countries for the first phase of CRIS implementation have been identified and approved	Reference Group	By July 2002

[20] The CRIS Unit will work closely with all members of CRD throughout this project. Special mention is made of ICTs on occasion to highlight specific contributions.

Products	Activities	Indicators	Strategic partnerships and alliances[20]	Timeline
f. Pilot CRIS software developed	Development of the pilot CRIS software for data collection	Web-based CRIS software developed	SMI, ICTs	By September 2002
g. Review of CRIS via the expanded CRIS Reference Group	Formal review of the proposed process undertaken with national partners	Concept paper is finalized and distributed widely among partners	Expanded Reference Group	By September 2002
h. CRIS guidelines	Development of initial guidelines on the use of CRIS	Guidelines completed and distributed widely	Reference Group	By September 2002
i. CRIS Q&A	Develop a set of Q&A for CRIS users	Improved understanding of CRIS and the process forward	Reference Group	By September 2002
j. Establishment of CRIS systems in first-phase countries	• Training of users • Establishment of in-country and/or intercountry maintenance and/or technical support • Establishment of CRIS systems in first-phase countries (based upon an understanding of existing CRIS systems at country levels)	Training workshops completed Cohort of trained support staff CRIS systems established in first-phase countries	ICTs, CPAs, NAPs, Cosponsors	October – December 2002
k. Review by the expanded CRIS Reference Group of the system prior to expansion		Agreement reached re: continued expansion of CRIS globally	Expanded Reference Group	November 2002
l. Database management, both at country and global levels. This will involve the maintenance of the database system at UNAIDS, Geneva, as well as supporting local databases			SMI, PDC, ICTs	Ongoing
m. Provision of maintenance and technical support, at the global and country levels	Ongoing technical support via ICTs and SMI	CRIS systems operational at global and country levels	SMI, ICT	Ongoing

Products	Activities	Indicators	Strategic partnerships and alliances[20]	Timeline
n. Formal review and analysis of first phase of CRIS implementation	Workshop to be convened to review progress of CRIS	Review completed resulting in confirmation of core CRIS indicators and methodology to continue implementation	Expanded Reference Group	By February 2003
o. CRIS Manual of Operations	Finalization and publishing of the CRIS Manual of Operations	CRIS Manual available to field based users in a multitude of languages	SMI, ICT, Cosponsors	By December 2003
p. Scale out to second-phase countries: completion of the training workshops	Scale up activities, including training workshops	CRIS operational in 40-50 countries	Expanded Reference Group	By December 2003

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) brings together eight UN agencies in a common effort to fight the epidemic: the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Bank.

UNAIDS, as a cosponsored programme, unites the responses to the epidemic of its eight cosponsoring organizations and supplements these efforts with special initiatives. Its purpose is to lead and assist an expansion of the international response to HIV/AIDS on all fronts. UNAIDS works with a broad range of partners—governmental and nongovernmental, business, scientific and lay—to share knowledge, skills and best practices across boundaries.

Produced with environment-friendly materials

Good-quality information and informed analysis are critical for the development of expanded national responses to HIV/AIDS. Responding to the need for such information and analysis at the national and global levels, UNAIDS is developing the Country Response Information System (CRIS).

This document describes the historical development of CRIS, related activities scheduled by UNAIDS in 2002 and 2003, and the benefits of the proposed system for policy-makers and other potential users.

CRIS will provide partners in the global response to HIV/AIDS with a user-friendly system consisting of an indicator database, a project/resource-tracking database, a research inventory database, and other important information.

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

UNAIDS

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ILO•UNESCO•WHO•WORLD BANK

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