

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
Terms of Reference
Evaluation of ReliefWeb (18-01-2006)

1. Background

ReliefWeb aims to be the world's leading on-line gateway to information on humanitarian emergencies and disasters. In addition to providing 24 hour updates on all ongoing emergency situations, including documents, maps and contribution tables, ReliefWeb is also a major repository of humanitarian policy documents, and provides professional resources such as training, vacancies and contact directories. Designed specifically to assist the international humanitarian community in effective delivery of emergency assistance, it strives to provide timely, reliable and relevant information as events unfold, while ensuring that "forgotten emergencies" and countries of concern are also represented.

ReliefWeb was launched in October 1996 by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) as a service to the humanitarian community at-large. While the concept of an information clearinghouse for humanitarian information evolved from a broad consensus in the early 1990s, the Great Lakes crisis highlighted the need for a centralized repository of humanitarian information to enable decision makers in the field and at headquarters to take informed decisions.

Recognizing the importance of time-critical and reliable humanitarian information before and during emergencies, the UN General Assembly endorsed the creation of ReliefWeb in 1997 Resolution 51/194 (See Annex 2.i) encouraging humanitarian information exchange by governments, relief agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In 2003 Resolution 57/153 (See Annex 2. ii), the General Assembly reiterated the importance of information sharing in emergencies through ReliefWeb.

ReliefWeb usage has grown steadily since its inception. In the first year of operations, the site received just over one million hits. By 2002, ReliefWeb was receiving 1 million hits per week, and by 2005, shortly after the South Asia Tsunami disaster, the site received an average of 3 million hits per day. Email services started in 2001, increased to 45,000 subscribers in 2003, and to over 70,000 in 2005.

The project maintains three offices in three different time zones (New York, Geneva, and Kobe) to update the web site around the clock. The total budget for the project is USD 2 million (2005), the bulk of which is supported by voluntary contributions by donors.

Mindful of the growing information overload in today's cyber world, ReliefWeb recently went through a two-year long user-centred redesign in order to address the continuing needs of target audiences to find necessary and relevant information as quickly as possible. The new site was officially launched at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (18-22 January 2005) in Kobe, Japan.

With ReliefWeb approaching its 10-year anniversary and with the 2005 design platform operational for over six months, OCHA decided it was a timely opportunity to review ReliefWeb's past and current performance as well as future challenges.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation is to i) assess whether ReliefWeb meets the needs of the target audience¹ in an efficient and effective manner and in line with its mandate; ii) provide accountability to donors, OCHA management and users; iii) provide clear recommendations and lessons learned in order to help determine the future direction of the project and its products and services.

3. Scope and Key Issues

The evaluation will review the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, coherence and sustainability of the ReliefWeb information system.² The evaluation will look at ReliefWeb as a whole and its current products and services, taking into account their development over the last 10 years. In particular, it will seek to obtain an understanding of the usefulness and usability to the site's target group of humanitarian professionals and decision makers, including donors, UN and non-governmental agencies, and governments.

The key issues listed below (and in Annex I) should be addressed during the evaluation. Questions related to each issue are for reference purposes only and may serve as a basis for reformulations by the evaluation team to more closely meet the purposes of the evaluation.

3.1 Mandate, Institutional Role and Partnerships:

Does the current version of ReliefWeb fulfill its mandate (see Annex II.i-ii) and its vision? Is the mission statement still suitable? What are ReliefWeb's relations (and overlap if any) with other information providers within the humanitarian community (HICs, OCHA Online and external providers)? Is ReliefWeb effectively used by other OCHA offices and does it bring value-added to OCHA's mission?

3.2 Credibility, Trust, Independence:

To what extent has ReliefWeb been able to protect its editorial independency? What is the level of trust in and credibility of ReliefWeb? Is there a need for changes in ReliefWeb's principles and standards?

3.3 Impact, Content and Quality:

Has ReliefWeb been able to effectively and efficiently provide timely, relevant and high quality information to its target groups? What has been the impact of ReliefWeb in assisting the international humanitarian community in effective delivery of emergency assistance and how can it further assist the humanitarian community? Do organizations feel compelled to submit information to the site?

3.4 Usership and Usability:

¹ **Target Audience:** the international humanitarian community, including 1) UN agency personnel (desk officers, humanitarian affairs officers, humanitarian/resident coordinators, field workers and senior managers); 2) NGO personnel (desk officers, field workers and senior managers); 3) Government officials (mission and HQ humanitarian focal points, disaster management officers, desk officers in operational agencies such as USAID).

² The main DAC evaluation criteria, as laid out in the DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance (www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation).

Do ReliefWeb's information architecture, interaction design and visual design meet target audience expectations and needs? What changes should be made to improve target audience experience? What gaps exist in information and analysis which may make target audiences' decision making more efficient?

3.5 Products and Services (See Annex II.iii):

How well do ReliefWeb products and services meet target audience needs? Are there any products or services that could be added or removed? What is the value-added of the current products and services?

3.6 Future and Sustainability:

Is there scope for ReliefWeb to be further consolidated, expanded, or organizationally realigned? Is ReliefWeb's funding base sustainable and what other funding options could be drawn on? Are ReliefWeb locations appropriate and do they provide adequate coverage of emergencies and disasters around the world? Are the costs of running the ReliefWeb in line with the outputs and impact? What is the status and prospect of the server infrastructure, information technology and support used by ReliefWeb?

4. Methodology

The evaluation method will be designed by the consultant team in close cooperation with the client. As part of the selection process, the short-listed team-leader candidates will be requested to submit a 'Note of Approach'. Among other things this note will provide an outline of the methodological approach envisaged. It is suggested that the consultants apply a participatory approach to developing the recommendations. This could be done through a workshop with relevant staff (ReliefWeb, FTS, AIMB, etc), where the consultants present the data analysis and findings and jointly develop recommendations with the participants. It is anticipated that the evaluation will be undertaken in three parts:

- i.** A first phase including briefings in New York and Geneva, a literature review, the full development of an evaluation design and detailed work plan, the drafting of interview questions, web and email surveys, and conduct of initial interviews. During this period the consultant team will submit an Inception Report detailing the approach and work plan.
- ii.** A second phase of data collection, including the conduct of in-depth interviews, usability tests, focus groups and surveys of the various stakeholder groups. This phase would include a field visit (for example, to Sri Lanka).
- iii.** A third phase of data analysis (surveys, interviews, etc.) and cross-validation; follow-up interviews, consultation and triangulation on initial findings; workshop on findings and development of recommendations; report writing.

Consultants shall follow the norms and standards for evaluation established by the United Nations Evaluation Group (the two documents are available from the website of the OCHA Evaluation and Studies Unit: <http://ochaonline.un.org/esu>).

5. Indicative Schedule

The evaluation is to start ultimo January, 2006, and will run over a period of approximately 14 weeks.

Task	Consultant A & B
i. Desk Study, survey design and initial interviews. New York and Geneva. ii. 25%	Consultant A – 10 days Consultant B – 10 days A total of 20 working days.
ii. Data collection, in depth interviews, focus groups, etc. (incl. field trip)	Consultant A – 20 days Consultant B – 10 days A total of 30 working days
iii. Data analysis, draft report, workshop, etc.	Consultant A – 15 days Consultant B – 5 days A total of 20 working days
Finalization of report; Debriefing: New York	Consultant A – 8 days Consultant B – 2 days A total of 10 working days
Total # of days	Consultant A – 53 days Consultant B – 27 days A total of 80 working days

6. Team Composition

The team will consist of two consultants with the following profiles:

Consultant A will act as team leader and should have strong analytical skills; the ability to clearly synthesize and present findings and draw practical conclusions; a proven track record in managing and conducting evaluations; fluency in English including excellent writing skills; sound experience with humanitarian assistance (including field experience) and editorial policy issues; in-depth familiarity with existing humanitarian issues, including information management issues.

Consultant B will act in a technical role using experience with information systems, the web publishing media, database technologies, and with expertise in devising, executing, analyzing and presenting surveys and interviews.

Both consultants should have the capacity to work collaboratively with multiple stakeholders. Previous work experience with the UN would be helpful.

7. Management Arrangements

7.1 The team will report to OCHA's Evaluation and Studies Unit (ESU).

7.2 OCHA's Evaluation and Studies Unit will assign an evaluation manager to oversee the conduct of the evaluation. His/her responsibilities are to: 1) provide guidance and institutional

support to the team, especially on issues of methodology; 2) facilitate the team's access to specific information or expertise needed to perform the assessment; 3) monitor and assess the quality of the evaluation and its processes; 4) help organize and design the final learning workshop; 5) make recommendations to management on the acceptance of the final report and disseminate the final report; 6) ensure that a management response is given to the final report and subsequent follow up happens, and 7) ensure final travel authorization, booking of tickets and arrangements for processing and disbursement of all payments (including remuneration and Daily Subsistence Allowance) are made.

7.3 ReliefWeb will 1) ensure that all stakeholders are kept informed (possibly through the establishment of a core learning group); 2) provide technical support to the evaluation team; 3) assist in gathering all relevant background information, and 4) setting up all relevant appointments including coordinating/organizing the field visit of the team.

9. Reporting Requirements

An **inception report** outlining the proposed method, key issues and potential key informants for the evaluation, will be required. A format for the inception report will be provided by the OCHA Evaluation and Studies Unit.

The final output of the consultancy will be an **evaluation report**, which shall contain the elements specified in the document on standards for evaluation (pp.17-23) developed by the United Nations Evaluation Group (available at: <http://ochaonline.un.org/esu>). The report shall contain a short executive summary of up to 2,000 words and a main text of no more than 15,000 words, both including clear recommendations. Annexes should include a list of all persons interviewed, a bibliography, a description of the method used, a summary of survey results as well as all other relevant material.

The quality of the evaluation report will be judged according to the UNEG Evaluation Standards and the ALNAP Quality Proforma (www.alnap.org/pdfs/QualityProforma05.pdf). The evaluation reports will also be submitted to ALNAP for inclusion in the regular meta evaluation process that rates the quality of evaluation reports.

The final report will be publicly available through Relief Web and OCHA Online

The draft report is due on 1 May 2006 and final report on 15 May 2006.

All copyrights will remain the property of OCHA.

10. Payments

The consultant will be paid in three installments: 20 per cent of the payment upon acceptance of the inception report and 40 per cent of the payment upon submission of the draft report. The remaining 40 percent will be paid upon acceptance of the final report. OCHA reserves the right to reduce the final payment should the report not be fully satisfactory or should the submission experience significant delays within the control of the consultants.

11. Estimated Budget

The funds are to be allocated from ReliefWeb budget / ECHO thematic funding. (The positions are subject to funding).

12. Use of Results

Evaluation results will be used primarily by OCHA to improve services provided by ReliefWeb. To this end, ESU will ensure that a management response (through a Management Response Matrix) will be developed with clearly stipulated actions proposed for each recommendation, the timeline envisioned and the responsible unit.

ANNEX I

i. Mandate, Institutional Role and Partnerships:

Does the current version of ReliefWeb fulfill its mandate as stated in 1997 Resolution 51/194 and 2003 Resolution 57/153 (See Annexe II.i-ii)? Does ReliefWeb help improve coordination of humanitarian relief? How could it do a better job at fulfilling its mandate? What is the institutional role of ReliefWeb and what are its relationships within OCHA? What is the perception by users with regard to the influences over the presentation, architecture and content on the site and is the site considered independent and representative of the totality of the humanitarian community? To what extent does ReliefWeb overlap (or not overlap) with HICs and OCHA Online and other information providers? Is ReliefWeb effectively used by other OCHA offices, in particular in the field? What relationships have been built regarding information-sharing and advocacy with information providers and widely within the humanitarian community? What is its value added to other OCHA services?. Does ReliefWeb bring value-added to the mandate and mission of OCHA?

ii. Regional and Thematic Dimensions:

Is ReliefWeb able to portray appropriately a regional perspective of humanitarian situations? What is the degree to which ReliefWeb is supporting early-warning efforts through coverage of countries of concern and forgotten emergencies? Does ReliefWeb adequately cover key policy issues? How effective is ReliefWeb in raising awareness of key issues?

iii. Credibility, Trust, Independence:

Do users perceive ReliefWeb as an independent service? To what extent has ReliefWeb been able to protect an independent viewpoint within the UN and external to the UN? Is there a perception among users that what is seen on ReliefWeb is based on principles and standards? What would users say are those principles and standards? Is there a need for additional principles or standards?

iv. Impact, Content and Quality:

Has ReliefWeb been able to effectively provide timely and relevant information to decision makers, humanitarian workers and the people they are trying to help? What has been the impact of ReliefWeb according to its main users/target groups? How well do ReliefWeb products and services meet user needs? What are users perceptions of the quality of information found through the site? What are users perceptions of the quality of information they submit themselves? How do users see the role of ReliefWeb in relation to ensuring the high quality standards in humanitarian information? Is it perceived that ReliefWeb has reached a critical mass and do organizations feel compelled to submit information to the site?

v. Usership and Usability:

Do ReliefWeb's information architecture, interaction design and visual design meet user objectives? What changes should be made to improve user experience? Is the text on the site easy to read? Do users prefer full text of a document or HTML links or PDF? How many clicks are users ready to make to find what they are looking for? How long will users wait to download a page into a browser window? How do users find submission of documents and maps for publication on the site? How do users find the arrangement of complex emergencies and natural disasters? How do users find the arrangement of Countries of Concern? Are users able to understand the languages used on the site? Do users want to see a greater number of documents in other languages? Considering that ReliefWeb attempts to be a neutral information broker, what are the user perceptions of the quality of available information with respect to the ability to make informed decisions? What gaps exist, in information, analysis, and other derived products which may make decision making easier and more efficient? How can information better serve the needs and help improve the quality and efficiency of humanitarian assistance?

vi. Products and Services (See Annex II.iii.a-e):

Which ReliefWeb products and services are users aware of? What is the perception by users regarding the quality of ReliefWeb products? Are all of ReliefWeb's services relevant to the user community? Do users perceive that information on ReliefWeb is accessible, accurate and reliable? Are there any products that are not as successful or are there any products that could be added? What is the value-added of current products? Is ReliefWeb technology in line with state-of-the-art information technology? What is the satisfaction level of the ReliefWeb user experience?

vii. Future and Sustainability:

Is there scope for ReliefWeb to be further consolidated, expanded or, alternatively merged with other information services? Should ReliefWeb remain a UN information service or become independent? What is the status of ReliefWeb's funding base and is it sustainable? Is ReliefWeb adequately staffed, funded and managed? With its current staffing arrangements is ReliefWeb capable of meeting its planning and delivery objectives? What is ReliefWeb's capacity to expand and beyond its current three-office system? Is there a potential for ReliefWeb to reduce reliance on donor funding? What other options of funding could be drawn on? What is the status of the information technology and support used by ReliefWeb? What is the status of ReliefWeb's server infrastructure? Are ReliefWeb locations appropriate and provide adequate coverage of emergencies and disasters around the world? Does ReliefWeb provide value for money? Are the costs of running the ReliefWeb in line with the outputs and impact? How does ReliefWeb's cost effectiveness measure against other similar systems such as Alertnet?

ANNEX II

i. Excerpt from Resolution 51/194/13:

“The General Assembly...requests the Secretary-General to further develop Reliefweb as the global humanitarian information system for the dissemination of reliable and timely information on emergencies and natural disasters, and encourages all Governments, the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and other relevant organizations, including non-governmental organizations, to support Reliefweb and actively participate in the Reliefweb information exchange, through the Department of Humanitarian Affairs”.

ii. Excerpt from Resolution 57/153/10:

“Commends the Emergency Relief Coordinator and his staff for their activities in emergency information management, and stresses that there is a need for national authorities, relief agencies and other relevant actors to continue to improve the sharing of relevant information related to natural disasters and complex emergencies, including on disaster response and mitigation, and to take full advantage of United Nations emergency information services, such as ReliefWeb and the Integrated Regional Information Network”.

iii. Site Sections, Features, Services, Communities:

a). *Site Sections*

1) Latest Updates 2) Map Centre 3) Financial Tracking 4) Policy documents 5) Vacancies 6) Training 7) Contact Directory 8) Communities of Practice 9) Country and Emergency hub pages 10) Emergency Archives 11) Who's working pages 12) Regional pages 13) Sectoral information

b). *Site Features*

1) My ReliefWeb 2) Filter Tool 3) Search 4) Advanced Search 5) Country downloads

c). *Subscription Services*

1) Email, 2) RSS

d). *Communities*

1) HIN

iv. ReliefWeb's information providers:

UN and IO, Governments, News and Media, NGOs, Academic and Research, Others (corporates and rebel groups etc.)