

THE COMPUTERWORLD HONORS PROGRAM

CASE STUDY



LOCATION:
Ottawa, Canada

YEAR:
2006

STATUS:
Laureate

CATEGORY:
*Government and Non-Profit
Organizations*

NOMINATING COMPANY:
Open Text

ORGANIZATION:

CARE/Dunia Soko

PROJECT NAME:

Emergency Response Portal

Summary

At any given time private and public aid agencies are called upon to respond quickly to “events” arising from armed conflict, environmental and/or natural disasters. The effectiveness of emergency response in general is directly related to pre-planning. Our unique approach to emergency planning is based on a seemingly obvious observation: that emergencies follow the same life cycle as any other project. The real challenge in an emergency is to compress the project life cycle to the smallest time frame so help can reach the needy as soon as possible. Compressing that time frame is directly related to being able to communicate and share information effectively across time zones and between people who are separated geographically by great distances. Using OpenText’s Livelink knowledge management and collaboration platform, GDG enhanced its web-based application called GYST so that it can be used to manage the complete project life cycle of emergency projects.

Introductory Overview

Snowball is the name of the initiative that will enhance the functioning of the GDG’s GYST Executive Information System so that it can be used to manage emergency situations. The first enhancement to GYST is the development of a module called the Consolidated Early Warning System (CEWS) that is an electronic risk analysis service provided by GDG in cooperation with the Country Indicators for Foreign Policy Centre at Carleton University. The purpose of CEWS is to anticipate possible emergency “Hot Spots”.

During the emergency response stage, GYST/Snowball’s project management systems are used by emergency managers to oversee the project life cycle from different perspectives: financial, administrative, human resource and effectiveness/lessons learned. By providing knowledge management and collaboration features offered by Opentext’s Livelink platform, emergency staff that are separated by space and time can work together efficiently in order to deliver assistance quickly. The information from the field is received by GYST/Snowball via a system that does not rely on a constant Internet connection.

Project partner CARE will implement the GYST/Snowball for their operations in Indonesia.



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GYST/Snowball is currently being used by humanitarian assistance organizations such as CARE, World Vision, Christian Children's Fund and Forum of Federations. The emergency-related enhancements to GYST/Snowball will slowly be introduced to the other humanitarian assistance organizations besides CARE.

Benefits

The advantage to emergency workers is to have a consolidated view of emergency projects as well as a way of collaborating online in order to compress the project development cycle to more quickly deliver assistance to the needy.

As mentioned above, if one takes the perspective that emergency management involves a project life cycle similar to other sectors, then the solutions developed with GYST/Snowball are applicable to a wide range of activities other than emergency response.

The Importance of Technology

The technology provided by third parties like OpenText was crucial since it allowed GDG to concentrate on 'modelling' the process of emergency management. For example, Livelink comes with various collaboration features which GDG customized. GDG concentrated on identifying at which stage in emergency project management collaboration was the most crucial. As it turned out the Proposal Writing stage was deemed crucial as it was the point at which finances would be freed up for emergency projects. Proposal writing also required the collaboration of many people from different countries. Using OpenText's product, we were therefore able to create an RFP Center for GYST/Snowball.

Originality

We were able to identify appropriate technical solutions for our diverse user group. One group of GYST/Snowball users are in areas where Internet connections may be intermittent. At the same time, the information needs of those users who do have high-speed connections were also met. We met diverse user needs by combining technologies like Geographic Information System, Knowledge and Document Management into a single, one-stop solution (i.e. GYST/Snowball).

The introduction of a Consolidated Early Warning Service in addition to the standard project management tools is the original aspect of this solution. The service essentially takes information collected in the field and 'pushes' the information to trained analysts who identify potential "Hot Spots". Analyzed information is then available to GYST/Snowball users.

Success

For the past two years CARE uses GYST/Snowball to report on all projects (emergency and non-emergency) for the thousands of projects in 80 countries that it manages.

"Project Officers are empowered to input their own data resulting in a better alignment of resources and on-time reporting to all stakeholders."

Kevin McCort, Chief of Staff CARE Canada



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“GYST is a necessary tool for anyone interested in eliminating cost overruns and disallowed costs due, for example, to a lack of compliance with donor rules”.

Glen Rajack, VP Finance CARE

So far, three of the ‘Big Five’ International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) have adopted GYST/Snowball: Christian Children’s Fund, World Vision International and CARE. Over the next five years, GDG’s goal is to encourage adoption of GYST/Snowball to the rest of the “Big Five”: Save the Children and Catholic Relief Services.

Difficulty

- The business process of an organization delivering humanitarian assistance is complex. From a financial perspective, many donors both private and public will fund many of the same programs with completely different criteria for reporting costs. Sometimes aid will come in-kind (i.e. food) and needs to be turned into cash (i.e. monetization of food aid) Human resource managers have to deal with local HR rules, yet have to maintain a standard pay and compensation package for the whole organization.

- Cultural and geographic barriers (INGOs will operate in dozens of countries) hinder implementation of the software. Varying degrees of sophistication with computers in a multilingual environment is especially noteworthy.

- Varying levels of technology in the countries in which the INGOs operate, specifically connection to the Internet, hinders the ability of being able to provide an “end-to-end” solution.

Barrier was introducing users to the concept of a comprehensive project life-cycle management process.