



ActivityInfo

REACH

Informing
more effective
humanitarian action

Case Study

CAR Rapid Response Mechanism:

The use of ActivityInfo by
the REACH Initiative in the
Central African Republic



Executive Summary

With ActivityInfo, REACH in the CAR decreased the time needed for data entry significantly. The monthly process of data entry turned into a weekly process as its complexity was eliminated and there was no need for IT management.

REACH is an initiative offering support through information management, mapping, assessment and research to humanitarians.

Working within a lot of Clusters, REACH is currently cooperating with UNICEF in the coordination of the country-wide Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) in the Central African Republic (CAR). RRM is in place when there are population displacements and the response needs to be quick in emergency situations.

The need for quick data entry, a centralized viewing of data in a comprehensive and flexible way, and for the elimination of IT management requirements were met by ActivityInfo for REACH in the Central African Republic.

Employing the features of ActivityInfo and with a quick training of their users, REACH in the CAR decreased the time needed for data entry significantly. The monthly process of data entry turned into a weekly process as its complexity was eliminated.

Moreover, accessing the databases even when connectivity is unavailable thanks to the offline mode of ActivityInfo facilitated the activities of REACH in the CAR when partners were in the field.

Mrs. Anne Leschallier de Lisle, Information Management Officer and GIS Officer in the RRM programme of REACH in the CAR facilitated this Case Study and shared valuable insights on how ActivityInfo is used as a centralized repository of information to simplify the management of data flow and make data collection quicker.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

2

What is the REACH Initiative?

4

Working in a challenging environment results in challenging tasks.

5

Tackling challenges with ActivityInfo

6

Conclusion

8

What is ActivityInfo?

9

What is the REACH

Initiative?

REACH was first deployed in the CAR in April 2012 to support the recently re-activated UNHCR-led Shelter Cluster. In late 2013, following the Level 3 crisis declaration in the CAR, REACH was mobilized again to facilitate a shelter sector assessment in Bangui. Since March 2015, together with UNICEF they support the country-wide RRM.

REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT, its sister-organisation ACTED, and the United Nations Operational Satellite Applications programme (UNOSAT).

It was created in 2010 to facilitate the development of information tools and products that enhance the humanitarian community's decision-making and planning capacity.

All REACH activities are conducted in support of and within the framework of inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH was created in response to two critical gaps in the humanitarian system: gaps between the supply and demand of humanitarian information in emergencies and limited understanding of crisis-affected communities and their settlements.

REACH was first deployed in the Central African Republic in April 2012 to support the recently re-activated UNHCR-led Shelter Cluster in the development of a country strategy. In late 2013, following the Level 3 crisis declaration in the CAR, REACH was mobilized again to facilitate a shelter sector assessment in Bangui, where half of the identified 830,000 IDPs were reported staying.

Since the beginning of March 2015, REACH supports the coordination of the country-wide Rapid Response Mechanism, together with UNICEF.

With partners such as ACTION CONTRE LA FAIM, SOLIDARITES INTERNATIONAL, ACTED and ESPERANCE, REACH together with UNICEF cover many prefectures in the Central African Republic setting up an early warning system and sending out humanitarian alerts.

Working in a challenging environment results in challenging tasks

People working in REACH confront challenging duties on a daily basis. To support the coordination of the country-wide RRM, together with UNICEF, they have to be very quick in reporting and very efficient in decision-making.

Information management, report generation and dissemination comprise a significant part of the day-to-day tasks of an Information Management Officer.

These tasks require large databases and servers management, defined processes, mapping tools and constant monitoring to ensure that everything works correctly and is shared with everyone involved.

In addition, partners and team coordination is essential to keep them updated on the latest developments of each activity in a timely manner.

Given the fact that many team members or partners work in the field collecting data, Internet connectivity becomes an issue to address as well.

Some of the daily challenges of Information Management officers include managing large databases and servers, defining processes and mapping tools and constantly monitoring developments to ensure that everything works correctly and is shared with everyone involved.

Tackling challenges with ActivityInfo

One of the immediate results of using ActivityInfo was that access to crucial, centralized information, such as numbers, became quick and easy for all partners. This ensured transparency and satisfying levels of communication within the Clusters. Without ActivityInfo, data updates would only be done monthly.

REACH in the Central African Republic started using ActivityInfo in February, 2016.

The Rapid Response Mechanism partners use ActivityInfo to keep their data up-to-date allowing all stakeholders to be on the same page.

They make sure that data is always correctly updated and this proves crucial for the coordination of their activities and the launch of alerts on emerging conflicts.

ActivityInfo is used for handling several databases. The main indicators of each activity are recorded and analyzed resulting in monthly performance dashboards.

Mrs Anne Leschallier de Lisle, Information Management Officer and GIS Officer in the RRM programme of the REACH Initiative in the Central African Republic, explains:

“Each Form allows us to monitor and follow the main indicators of each activity and this allows us to analyze these activities.

It allows us to quickly grasp the main indicators for each activity and to know the number of alerts that we did in a particular region, etc. It’s really what enables us to make our monthly dashboards, to keep track of our achievement

versus our targets, to see what each of our partners is doing in their activity zone and to make comparisons between years as well.”

One of the immediate results of using ActivityInfo was that access to crucial, centralized information, such as numbers, became quick and easy for all partners. This ensured transparency and satisfying levels of communication within the Clusters.

“We do updates on a weekly basis. Without ActivityInfo, the same updates would only be done monthly”, points out Mrs. Leschallier de Lisle.

Additionally, using ActivityInfo allowed the coordinators of the Rapid Response Mechanism programme to save on human and financial resources as they lacked an IT team dedicated to the management of their databases.

Instead of spending resources on server management, they used ActivityInfo to manage their databases.

“I think it was a great idea to have databases on a server that we don’t have to manage because we don’t have the skills to manage the server. [...] We don’t have an IT team to manage these databases, so the fact that you are doing it, allows

“We don’t have an IT team to manage these databases, so the fact that ActivityInfo is doing it, allows us to save on human resources as well as on financial resources.”

us to save on human resources as well as on financial resources”, explains Mrs. Leschallier de Lisle.

A main obstacle that REACH in the Central African Republic tackled with ActivityInfo was the lack of online connectivity especially for the partners who work in the most remote areas of the country.

As ActivityInfo offers offline availability, users can synchronize their data and keep up-to-date, even when an Internet connection is not available.

“The main benefit for me is to have access to the databases online and working offline. That is really good.”, notes Mrs. Leschallier de Lisle.

As for the time required to get used to using ActivityInfo, according to the Mrs Leschallier, a new user needs just a limited amount of training time.

“ActivityInfo is a tool that is very easy to use. I only provide training if people are not used to work with computers but it usually goes very quickly. [...]

Explaining the Rapid Response Mechanism is something different than explaining ActivityInfo so of course it takes a longer time.

But explaining only ActivityInfo, it is really simple. I would say for our use which is updating data, it takes around fifteen minutes or something like that to get used to it. It is really simple and intuitive” explains Mrs. Anne Leschallier de Lisle.

Conclusion

“If I didn’t have ActivityInfo it would have taken me weeks to get all my data and to do the analyses. Without ActivityInfo, it would be really complicated. I think I wouldn’t be able to work correctly, or work at all.”

All in all, ActivityInfo worked for the REACH Initiative in the Central African Republic as a tool that made data collection possible for everyone working both online and offline.

Also, information management became centralized and is handled in a quick, comprehensible and holistic way allowing all the people involved to focus on what really matters, that is their mission and vision; making humanitarian action more effective.

“For me, ActivityInfo is my centralised repository. It’s my reference point. Personally, I couldn’t work correctly without ActivityInfo. That would simply be impossible.

We have a whole procedure, a whole chain of information flow that makes me count on ActivityInfo. If I didn’t have ActivityInfo it would have taken me weeks to get all my data and to do the analyses.

Without ActivityInfo, it would be really complicated. I think I wouldn’t be able to work correctly, or work at all.”, concludes Mrs. Anne Leschallier de Lisle, Information Management Officer and GIS Officer in the RRM programme of REACH in the Central African Republic.

What is ActivityInfo?



ActivityInfo is a service provided by BeDataDriven B.V., a private company based in The Hague in the Netherlands.

It is a software application for data collection and reporting which is accessible over the internet.

Due to its design, it is particularly well-suited for reporting on activities which are geographically dispersed and which are performed by multiple partner organizations.

ActivityInfo builds on the company's 10 years of research and practical experience developing information management systems for humanitarian and development projects.

Originally developed for UNICEF's emergency programme in the eastern DRC, ActivityInfo has evolved into a mature project and is now used daily by hundreds of organizations working in humanitarian relief, reconstruction, and development assistance worldwide.

You can sign up and try ActivityInfo at:

<https://www.activityinfo.org/signUp>

If you want to invite more than 10 users and get personal support, you can subscribe to one of our plans by sending us an email at: info@activityinfo.org