Case Study

DRC Emergency Response:

The creation of ActivityInfo as a solution to the reporting requirements of UNICEF during the Emergency Response in 2013

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

SYRIAN CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN

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HELMET SAFETY PROGRAM MONITORING

HRP FOR IDP, RETURNEES, HOST COMMUNITIES

WASH CLUSTER

PROTECTION CASE TRACKING & CASE MANAGEMENT

RAPID RESPONSE MECHANISM

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BUDGET TRANSPARENCY

REFUGEE AND MIGRANT RESPONSE PLAN

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CYCLONE PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE

Executive Summary

Instead of collecting multiple Excel files from partners and compiling them to a Master Excel, UNICEF in the DRC could quickly access the partners' information in ActivityInfo and export whichever data was needed for donors reporting.

In this Case Study we take a look at the creation and use of ActivityInfo during the Democratic Republic of Congo Emergency in 2013.

ActivityInfo was created as a solution to the increasing demand on coordinating partners reporting. We also explore how ActivityInfo became the tool of choice for the coordination of the Clusters in the DRC, back in 2013.

In 2013, UNICEF in the DRC was running an operation that was covering multiple sectors with many interventions and activities. The organization was responsible for the coordination of the reporting of many partners in multiple provinces. The need for more efficient handling of data of such complexity resulted in the creation of an online system, meant to be easy to use and quick to deploy. Also, more frequent reporting was needed to improve real-time response.

Soon, more partners participating in the Clusters started using ActivityInfo to report on activities. This made the responsibility of reporting on the entire volume of humanitarian activities easier to bear for UNICEF in the DRC.

As a result, instead of collecting multiple Excel files from partners and compiling them to a Master Excel, UNICEF in the DRC could quickly access the partners' information in ActivityInfo and export whichever data was needed for donors reporting.

Another opportunity that UNICEF in the DRC saw in the tool was that partner organizations could use the tool to report on their own activities too or to build information products about their work. Moreover, they introduced the use of the ActivityInfo reports in their coordination meetings creating a more structured approach on who did what, when.

Finally, ActivityInfo assisted in understanding better the RRMP programme in two ways. Firstly, it helped in understanding what the assistance delivered to each province was. Secondly, it enabled a deeper level of analysis on the assistance delivered.

Steven Michel, UNICEF Emergency Specialist in the DRC in 2013 gave an interview to the Technical Director and founder of ActivityInfo, Alex Bertram which has been turned into this Case Study.

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UNICEF and Clusters in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2013

> **UNICEF in the DRC was running a very large operation which covered the WASH, the Nutrition and the NFI/Emergency Shelters out of the 9 established Clusters in the country as well as interventions with multiple activities.**

The Democratic Republic of the Congo was one of the pilot countries for the "Clusters" creation back in 2006.

In 2013, UNICEF was leading the WASH, the Nutrition and the NFI/Emergency Shelters out of the 9 established Clusters in the DRC.

Also the Rapid Response to Population Movement (RRMP) Programme was in place and acted as the operational link for UNICEF and the Clusters. The RRMP acted as an instrument for the Humanitarian Coordinators, who with rapid needs assessments, supplied integrated assistance to vulnerable displaced populations.

UNICEF in the DRC was running a very large operation which covered the aforementioned Clusters as well as interventions with multiple activities. There were many partners working together, covering many provinces of the country.

UNICEF's Emergency Section was responsible for the aggregation of the data and the results of the activities delivered by every partner of the Clusters.

Having an overview of the reported data was imperative due to the organization's own reporting requirements and also due to the reporting required towards OCHA and the donors community.

Challenges in reporting on aggregated data led to the creation of an online system

The information management process becomes a challenge for the leading organization when there are many partners cooperating and reporting on activities which are dispersed in different provinces.

UNICEF in the DRC often needed to put together Excel sheets sent by partners in order to have an overview of the development of the programme.

This proved to be cumbersome at times, especially when the format of the report that each partner used was different.

"**Not only was it a large operation, across multiple partners and multiple provinces, it covered multiple sectors, with interventions around Non Food Items distribution, Water and Sanitation – with multiple activities – spring and well construction; Education – rehabilitation of classrooms, building materials, it was always difficult to provide overall information about the scope of programme**", describes Steven Michel, UNICEF Emergency Specialist in the DRC.

In addition to this, there was the need for more frequent reporting since that was the only way to know what was happening in almost real-time in all these locations.

The need to address these issues along with the willingness to improve the emergency response led to the creation of the first version of what is today ActivityInfo.

"**So we said 'we have to be able to do better than this', and working with BeDataDriven we developed this online system which was meant to be quite easy to use, a few minutes of time but also linked into mapping, you could show exactly where the interventions were taking place**", narrates Steven Michel.

So, ActivityInfo became the tool for reporting on the entire volume of the activities of UNICEF's Emergency Programmes in the DRC.

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From UNICEF in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Clusters

> "In the past I would have sent an email to every organisation that does Non-Food Items, every provincial Cluster, asking them to complete an Excel table, people then filled it in and returned it and then we had had to compile it into a master Excel file. Today, it is a matter of going right to ActivityInfo."

In 2013, UNICEF was leading the WASH, the Nutrition and the NFI/Emergency Shelters Cluster in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

To make the collection of data from partners easier, the organization asked the Clusters actors with which there was a contractual relationship to use ActivityInfo for reporting.

Soon, the Education Cluster, the NFI Cluster and parts of the WASH Cluster had picked up ActivityInfo to help UNICEF in the DRC meet the reporting requirements set by OCHA and the donors community.

To assist their transition to the tool, UNICEF in the Democratic Republic of the Congo used their own ActivityInfo reporting format as a shared platform that the other Cluster actors could also use to report on.

The result was that when there was a review request by OCHA, UNICEF in the DRC didn't have to go through the tedious process of gathering Excel sheets and compiling them into a Master Excel file.

Instead, they just extracted the data that the partners had already submitted and based on a pre-set report with all the needed variables, the report to OCHA was completed quickly and easily.

Steven Michel, from the Emergency Response in UNICEF in the DRC, explains,

"**So when OCHA wants a mid-term review of humanitarian action plan, in the past I would have sent an email to every organisation that does Non-Food Items, every provincial Cluster, asking them to complete an Excel table, fill it in with information on families, returnees, host families, items in kits, cash vouchers etc.**

People then filled it in and returned it and then we had had to compile it into a master Excel file that provided the data we had to give to OCHA for the reports.

Today, it is a matter of going right to ActivityInfo."

As for the rest of the Clusters, the level of the reporting requirements was the same as that in the Clusters where UNICEF was leading. So, ActivityInfo became a tool to consider as a solution. This was also because the tool allowed them to track the volume of assistance and to go into more detailed levels of analysis as well.

"**Now ActivityInfo has moved beyond being a UNICEF tool for our own programme, and it has gone out to the Clusters, ActivityInfo is something a lot**

of other Clusters have looked at and would like to adopt, because they have the same requirements, they have OCHA coming to them and their own organisational requirements, not only volume of assistance but the type of assistance and location of assistance that their own programme delivers, but also of the entire humanitarian community", adds Steven Michel.

UNICEF in the DRC saw more opportunities in the tool. Cluster actors and partner organizations could use the tool to report on their own activities too. Also, they could use it to build information products about their own work out of the information gathered in the system.

"**They can do their own data analysis of their own interventions using ActivityInfo, they can do their own mapping**", points out Steven Michel.

Also, UNICEF in the DRC introduced the use of the reports produced in ActivityInfo in their coordination meetings creating thus a more structured approach on who did what, when.

"**I would really like to see the provincial coordinators come to the meeting with an ActivityInfo report from the previous month – and the coordinator can say 'last month's activities where these', 'xyz did this', almost generate a dynamic where if it is not recorded in ActivityInfo, for us, it did not happen**", explains Steven Michel.

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ActivityInfo and the Rapid Response to Population Movement Programme

> "A second example, that I find very helpful and that would be impossible without ActivityInfo is detailed analysis."

Finally, the use of ActivityInfo assisted in understanding better the Rapid Response to Population Movement (RRMP) programme.

More specifically, it helped understand what the assistance delivered represented in the provinces. Also, it helped in understanding various contexts. Steven Michel gives the following example:

"**In one province, people were saying there were lots of other actors doing Non-food Items, so we as RRMP could drop our response to a lower level next year.**

I was curious about that, I kept hearing it but I hadn't run the numbers. When I looked into ActivityInfo, which includes the volumes both for RRMP and all the other actors, this impression of all the other actors was just not the case, most of the actors were based in a neighbouring area, and we were one of the only games in town, in this province.

It just helped to have the numbers for planning, to correct the false impression and demonstrate why we shouldn't cut back on our assistance to the province."

In addition to this, the adoption of ActivityInfo assisted UNICEF in the DRC to get to a deeper level of analysis using the data gathered. This detailed analysis allowed for a more efficient evaluation of the progress of the programme. It also served as a means for reconsideration of overestimated goals.

"**A second example, that I find very helpful and that would be impossible without ActivityInfo is detailed analysis.**

We have different programming components of Non-food Items that we try to promote like Female Hygiene Kits, so we might specify that we want a certain item in 50% of the kits.

It helps me to measure 'are we getting there?'- are we at 30% or 50%? Are we low? Do we need to push more? Is 50% too ambitious?

I could not do this level of analysis without ActivityInfo", adds Steven Michel.

Conclusion

The creation of ActivityInfo came as a result of the pushing need for an easy and quick-to-deploy online reporting system.

There was the need for a system where all partners could report on their activities so that the leading organization, in this case UNICEF in the DRC, could then easily get aggregated data out of the individual partner reports.

Quickly enough, from a UNICEF tool, ActivityInfo turned out to be a tool to assist the reporting needs of the Clusters and their operational link, the RRMP programme.

ActivityInfo provided the means to get an overview of the overall situation from above and at the same time allowed the organization to dive into the very last details of a reported activity.

For this, ActivityInfo ended up being described as a tool that "**goes beyond reporting**", a characterization given by Steven Michel,UNICEF Emergency
Specialist in the DRC in his concluding remark.

You can read the whole interview with Steven Michel on our blog post.

ActivityInfo provided the means to get an overview of the overall situation at high level and at the same time allowed the organization to dive into the very last details of a reported activity.

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What is ActivityInfo?

BE DATA
DRIVEN

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 hunderds of organizations working in humanitarian relief, reconstruction, and development assistance worldwide.

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