

# FORCED MIGRATION review

Issue 38  
October 2011

## THE technology ISSUE



The effects of changes in technology – particularly in communications technology – on displaced people and those who work with them are unevenly understood and appreciated. Inside we look at some of the changes and their implications...

**Plus articles on:** Migrant deaths at sea, fleeing from Cairo, language training for refugees, refugees after the Japanese earthquake, a strategy for urban areas, partner violence, transitional justice in Kenya, and local integration.



## From the editors

“New technologies are changing the environment in which we work, creating risks that we must not ignore while bringing opportunities for both displaced people and those who work on their behalf.” As UNHCR Deputy High Commissioner Alex Aleinikoff points out in the Foreword to this issue, we need to get used to the idea that modern technologies are reaching and affecting not only researchers and agencies but even the displaced and uprooted themselves. This issue of FMR is full of examples of how this is true. In fact it may be the agencies which – despite their own use of technology – need to catch up with the importance of technology in the lives of displaced people. Technology can have a transformative effect for displaced people and for their relationships to governments, the agencies, the diaspora and each other.

The articles in this issue cover much of what we hoped they would when we put out the call for articles – the positive and the negative aspects of the spread of technologies; the increased accountability, and the increased scope for controlling displaced people; the opening up through the internet of possibilities beyond the traditional confines of life as a displaced person, and the risks and dangers that that brings; and the potential in technological advances for assistance and protection programmes.

We are less happy about the fact that there was almost nothing in the articles that we received that dealt either explicitly or implicitly with gender issues in technology and communications and their impacts on people.

Unusually, we have included several pages of very short articles – ‘technology bytes’. Out of the large number of articles submitted for this issue, some contained specific ideas or facts that we felt were valuable but that did not need longer explanations to put them in context.

As ever, we hope that this issue of FMR will open up this subject for you, as it has done for us. In that spirit, please Tweet about it or re-Tweet our announcement, ‘like’ our Facebook page, add a link on Delicious, text people you know...

This issue also contains a range of articles on other aspects of the experiences of and responses to forced migration in a variety of circumstances – in Japan, in cities, at sea, in Egypt, and more.

We are very grateful to Paul Currión and Linda Leung for their help and advice on the theme of this issue, and to our Advisory Board for their reviews, advice and support.

We would also like to thank those agencies that have generously provided funding for this particular issue: AusAID, DfID, Oxfam Australia, Stephanie and Hunter Hunt/The Hunt Institute for Engineering and Humanity, UNHCR Division of Programme Support and Management, UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service, and the University of Queensland.

**New!** An expanded contents listing – FMR#38 – is available in print and online at [www.fmreview.org/technology/FMR38listing.pdf](http://www.fmreview.org/technology/FMR38listing.pdf)

The whole issue is online in a variety of formats, including audio, at [www.fmreview.org/technology/](http://www.fmreview.org/technology/) All issues of FMR are freely available online and searchable. We encourage you to post online or reproduce FMR articles but please acknowledge the source, provide the original url and do let us know.

- FMR 39 will include a feature on **being young and out of place** and will come out in early 2012. See [www.fmreview.org/young-and-out-of-place/](http://www.fmreview.org/young-and-out-of-place/)
- FMR 40 will include a feature on **fragile states**. See [www.fmreview.org/fragilestates/](http://www.fmreview.org/fragilestates/)

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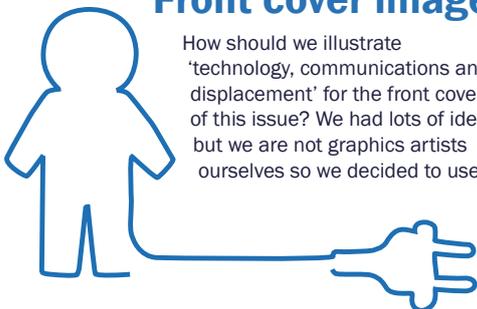
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With our best wishes

Marion Couldrey and Maurice Herson  
Editors, *Forced Migration Review*

## Front cover image

How should we illustrate ‘technology, communications and displacement’ for the front cover of this issue? We had lots of ideas but we are not graphics artists ourselves so we decided to use



a version of ‘crowdsourcing’ to ask for help. We asked some of the authors if they knew anyone... they put the word out and we got a stream of designs and enthusiasm back at very short notice. The students on a graphics course at the University of Medellín in Colombia took it up en masse.

Out of all the designs we received, we chose one idea for the front cover, took another graphic for the back cover – and have put another selection

on our website [www.fmreview.org/technology/](http://www.fmreview.org/technology/) Thanks to all of those who contributed their time and creativity – we hope that you and our other readers are able to guess how much pleasure we got from the response to our call for designs, and how much you made us think!

Front cover: design by Andrea Ramírez Pérez ([lapeliandrea10b@gmail.com](mailto:lapeliandrea10b@gmail.com)), student of Graphic Communication and Advertising at the University of Medellín, Colombia.

## Forced Migration Review

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### New way to support FMR

If you find FMR useful and would like to support it, please consider making a donation online at [www.giving.ox.ac.uk/fmr](http://www.giving.ox.ac.uk/fmr)

Ten years ago we used to charge subscriptions for FMR – £15/\$23 for an individual, £25/\$39 for an institution. It proved unwieldy and costly to manage so we dropped it. New technology means that we can now offer this option simply and at

no cost to FMR. (All bank charges are absorbed by the University of Oxford.)

You can pay by credit or debit card, on a one-off or regular basis, in any currency. And you can choose to support a specific issue of FMR or our core costs.

FMR is funded entirely by donations and grants. We can't tell you

how many hygiene-kits/tents/schoolbooks for displaced people your donation will mean because it's not like that with a magazine that promotes the protection of and assistance to refugees and displaced people. What it **will** do is help keep the magazine going so that it can continue to support the principles and actions that we are all committed to.

# Foreword

T Alexander Aleinikoff

Rows of huts, spread out over a dry and dusty terrain. Tented warehouses, containing food, blankets, shelter materials and tools. A makeshift marketplace, where basic items such as batteries, buckets, soap and second-hand clothes are sold. And hand-powered pumps surrounded by a throng of people (most of them women) waiting to collect their family's water supply.

Superficially at least, today's refugee camps do not appear significantly different from those that existed 30 or 40 years ago. Modernisation seems to have passed them by. But upon a closer look, it becomes apparent that things are changing.

Today, refugees and IDPs in the poorest of countries often have access to a mobile phone and are able to watch satellite TV.

Internet cafés have sprung up in some settlements, the hardware purchased by refugee entrepreneurs or donated by humanitarian organisations such as UNHCR. And aid agencies themselves are increasingly making use of advanced technology: geographic information systems, Skype, biometric databases and Google Earth, to give just a few examples.

The importance of technology is even more pronounced in urban settings, where a growing proportion of the world's forced migrants are to be found. In some cities, UNHCR now communicates with its clients by text message and provides them with financial assistance through ATM cards. Telephone hotlines enable urban refugees to report protection incidents as soon as they take place, while those who are

not satisfied with the services that UNHCR provides can make use of an online complaints facility.

As these examples indicate, technology is increasingly significant in the life of refugees and the agencies that support them. I am therefore delighted that *Forced Migration Review* has chosen to dedicate its current issue to this important theme. New technologies are changing the environment in which we work, creating risks that we must not ignore while bringing opportunities for both displaced people and those who work on their behalf.

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# Citizen initiatives in Haiti

Imogen Wall

**The 2010 earthquake in Haiti ushered in a new era for the role and power of technology and communication systems in disaster response – especially for how local responders used them.**

The response to the Haiti earthquake was particularly characterised by the first-time involvement of technology actors such as Ushahidi<sup>1</sup> and Crisismappers<sup>2</sup> who capitalised on the widespread ownership and use of phones in Haiti as well as the ability to involve the diaspora through web platforms and social media.

For Haitians, the use of technology as a response tool was perhaps less surprising than for international responders. Although they live in the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, 80-90% of Haitians own

mobile phones. As a result, they were already comfortable with information exchange and access via SMS and call centres. The ability of widespread phone ownership to facilitate phone-ins and dialogue with audiences has also long been recognised by Haiti's radio community, by far the most popular and widespread form of mass media in the country.

## Radio One

At the moment of the quake on 12 January 2010, music producer and Radio One DJ Carel Pedre got out of his car that he had been driving

through Port-au-Prince at the time and began taking pictures of collapsed buildings around him on his Blackberry. He uploaded them to his Twitter feed and Facebook page as he began running through the rubble to see if his home and his daughter were safe. Within minutes, responses began to pour in: shock, sympathy – and pleas for Carel's help in finding loved ones. Carel found his daughter safe, returned to the radio studio, turned on the microphone and began to talk. As he did, people began arriving at the studio desperate to make announcements that they were alive. Carel and his team realised they had the power to connect people – and began to develop a family reunification system. Carel Pedre was just one of many Haitians after 12 January who used their technological and communications expertise to generate local information systems.

Radio One was one of several stations that found themselves managing ad hoc reunification but it was especially influential because it broadcasts

Three main models were employed by international responders in the early days:

1) 'blast' SMS (indiscriminate messaging to all subscribers); 2) subscription-based information systems such as the Thomson Reuters Foundation's Emergency Information Service; and 3) systems that asked Haitians to provide information about their needs (Ushahidi – an interactive mapping tool). Collectively the latter two systems became meshed together and known as Project 4636, after the text shortcode that survivors could use to access the service.

nationwide and online, and because Carel himself is a well-known broadcaster with an established presence on Twitter and Facebook. He and his team developed a system using the tools Haitians were using to contact them: social media, radio and face-to-face contact. Teams of producers took messages from those arriving at the station, and monitored four computers logged into Carel's Facebook page, reading messages and cataloguing requests. Requests and names were logged and given each morning to the station's motorbike courier, who traced as many as he could. When he returned each day the verified information was uploaded to Facebook and also broadcast live. By meshing Facebook, Twitter, live broadcasting and on-the-ground reporting, Carel and his colleagues created a responsive,

technology company Solutions. After talking to community leaders who were trying to organise a response, his staff developed the idea of an online platform to map needs and where people could get help (none of them had heard of 'crowdsourcing' – see box opposite).

Staff drew on past experience working with USAID in mapping health systems to establish their system – called 'Noula', from the Creole 'nou la' for 'we are there' – for mapping needs and sources of assistance in their locality. They opted for a call-based system rather than SMS, judging – rightly, it appeared – that people preferred to talk to a person. The team worked from the garden outside the office as people were too frightened to go indoors, handling

Crowdsourcing is the act of outsourcing tasks, traditionally performed by an employee or contractor, to an undefined, large group of people or community (a 'crowd'), through an open call.

had little capacity to respond. International organisations, meanwhile, were interested but unable to engage. As Kurt explains, "I did a number of presentations for international teams. They got it, but I felt our project was seen as in competition with platforms like the UN's OneResponse although it was actually very different. There were also assumptions made because I came from a business context. People thought, oh, you are a software company so they assume you want business even though we explained we were a citizen initiative."

Properly supported, a project like Noula could have deeply influenced the aid world though it only gained traction several months afterwards through the Ushahidi partnership. Noula staff, for example, noticed elementary errors in UN data. "In the list of camps you could clearly see typing errors and duplications – I knew because I knew the places. For me it was obvious." Noula also received many calls from earthquake survivors living with host families across the country, most asking how they could access assistance where they were. This presented a vital – and missed – opportunity to map displacement and use this data to decentralise the response, thus preventing the drift of survivors back to congested Port-au-Prince.

Over a year after the earthquake, it is impossible to count how many people were helped by these systems but the level of response and the clear demand from the population for someone to speak to and to express their views were evident in the number of people queuing for hours outside radio stations and the number of calls to Noula.

Both Noula and Radio One reported that many callers or visitors to their studio simply wanted to tell their story and to feel that someone was listening to them; for them the process of being able to communicate



Radyo Kwa Wouj is a live 1-hour radio show broadcast twice weekly across Haiti on national networks. Topics include cholera, hurricane preparedness, shelter, first aid, etc. This show involved Jude Celorge, a Haitian Red Cross first aider, Lydia Prophete, who works in the Haitian Red Cross communications team, and Jean Maire Gesner, Communications Manager with the Haitian Red Cross and co-presenter of the weekly show.

effective, locally based and Creole-speaking family reunification system that supported an audience across Haiti and the Haitian diaspora in reconnecting with friends and family – with no external assistance.

#### 'Nou la'

A different use of technology for response was developed a short distance away by the team of Kurt Jean Charles, director of

25,000 calls over the next six months with no promotional work and quickly generating maps of community concerns and needs (analysable for trends over time) and local capacity to respond.

Recognising the need to connect with those who were meeting people's needs, Kurt reached out to local government and international organisations. The local government

was as significant as whether their question was answered or their issue dealt with. infoasaid did two months of research in Haiti, capturing and analysing best practice in communication.<sup>3</sup> Overall for Haitians one of the clear themes emerging from the research was the need to be listened to; even with SMS systems people expect a response.

### Going international

A major challenge in understanding the Haitian perspective is most organisations' lack of analysis of the survivor perspective. All available evidence suggests that when it comes to communications between responders and the affected community, disaster survivors are actually far more comfortable with technology-based information systems than humanitarians are. Humanitarians tend to have a poorer understanding of such systems and view them with considerable scepticism.

Some international organisations in Haiti began introducing technology as a communications tool in a more sophisticated fashion, notably the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) which pioneered a relationship with local phone company Voila and its

parent company Trilogy to develop SMS systems that target recipients by their geographic allocation, giving scope for far more nuance than blast SMS. They also established a Red Cross Information Line providing advice on cholera and on hurricane response. The line received 130,000 calls during the cholera epidemic and 400,000 about the hurricane season. IFRC also went into partnership with Noula on a pilot helpline for residents of a camp with acute shelter needs.

Pioneering this has not been straightforward for the IFRC. Staff found that developing key messages in 140 characters was difficult, but outsourcing the call centre to Noula, a service that the IFRC did not have the capacity to run alone, proved worthwhile. Incoming data has helped identify cases where beneficiaries feel their vulnerability has been wrongly assessed, allowing the IFRC team to follow up.

The growing technological capacity within Haiti has also already led to Haitians supporting other responses. The Haitian Open Street Map team, supported and developed by IOM, has provided technical mapping support to the emergency responses in Libya and Japan. In Libya, when the UN for the first time formally requested assistance from Crisismappers to map areas out of reach to humanitarians, the Haitian team was one of the only dedicated full-time crismapping teams in the world. Working with international partners, they worked to translate satellite imagery into functioning maps for use in the response.

### Conclusions

The experience of local people in Haiti carries important lessons for those considering how to work with technology to gather and share information in disasters.

While methods may be highly technical, communication as a process is deeply rooted in local culture. The IFRC found that the key to good beneficiary communications was understanding that

people interact with technology in different ways in different contexts.

While technology experts in disaster-affected countries have a unique set of skills and need to be involved in discussions at the international level, the Haiti case suggests that innovation in use of technology and social media is being driven primarily at field level by 'beneficiaries'; more understanding of how they are using these tools is essential.

Ways must be found to support and connect with indigenous systems. Although Noula and Ushahidi – very similar systems – did connect eventually, it took months. Connections between local media family reunification and services run by international responders never did occur in any meaningful way.

Thus the key lesson of Haiti for international responders is that for information and communications systems to deliver, they must engage local populations and their technical capacity as equal partners, and they must understand and connect with existing systems before developing new ones. Crucially, for survivors the process of accessing information and being listened to matters as much as the content. Local leadership on all this is key on many levels beyond mere delivery of information. As Kurt from Noula puts it, "We wanted to show that we could take some responsibility to change things at our own level, at a Haitian level. The more we can take responsibility for our situation, the more we can communicate and negotiate with the aid world."

Imogen Wall (imogenwall@hotmail.com) is a researcher at infoasaid. Sharon Reader (sharon.reader@ifrc.org), IFRC Beneficiary Communications Delegate in Haiti, also contributed to this article.

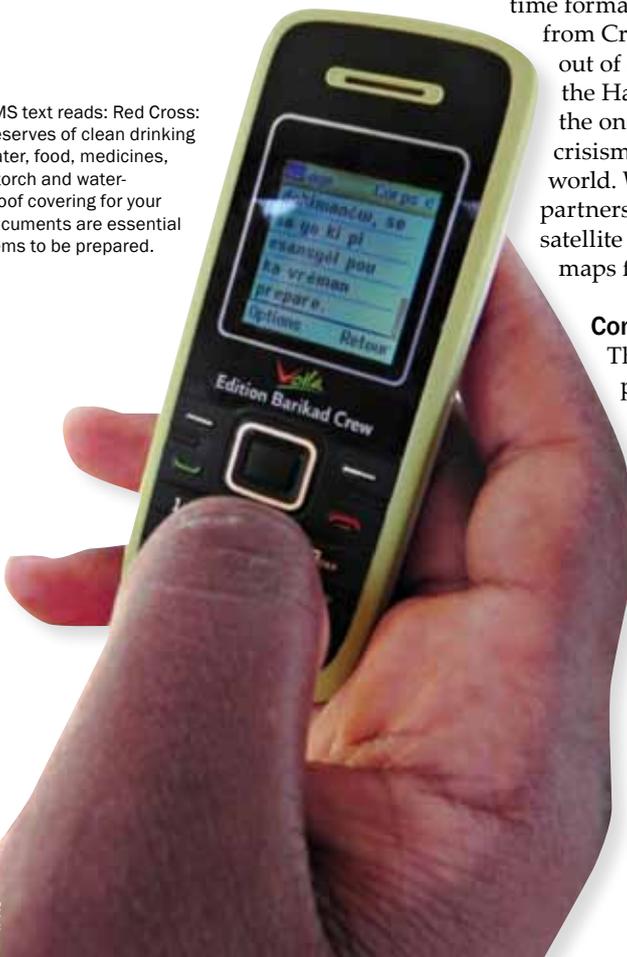
The data and perspectives here are the result of two months of research in Haiti for the infoasaid project (<http://infoasaid.org/>).

1. [www.ushahidi.com/](http://www.ushahidi.com/)  
See also article by Galya Ruffer pp20-21.

2. [www.crisismappers.net](http://www.crisismappers.net)

3. infoasaid is a joint project between the BBC World Service Trust and Internews, funded by DfID, which works to improve how aid organisations communicate with disaster-affected communities in emergency response. See box p37.

SMS text reads: Red Cross: Reserves of clean drinking water, food, medicines, a torch and water-proof covering for your documents are essential items to be prepared.



# Disaster Response 2.0

Jeffrey Villaveces

**The traditional disaster response community is only now beginning to assimilate the vast changes that new technologies could bring for information management in their field.**

The use of new communications tools and platforms can be woven in with traditional sources of information and while new tools such as crisis mapping and crowdsourcing have yet to be used to their full potential in emergency scenarios, inroads are being made.

Sound Information Management (IM) practices form the foundation for decision-making and coordination processes when the international community engages in disaster relief. In 2007, the original Humanitarian Reform framework was expanded to include IM, with the issuance by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee of the 'Operational Guidelines on Information Management Responsibilities between OCHA and the Clusters'.<sup>1</sup> OCHA usually establishes an Information Management Working Group (IMWG) following the onset of a new emergency. Typical IM products include maps, a 'Who does What Where' (3W) database, contact lists, agendas and 'gaps analysis', and the success of any such inter-cluster information system depends on prior agreement among members of the group, with the designation of dedicated IM focal points per Cluster to ensure the participation of all members of the humanitarian community.

A complex emergency scenario for disaster relief is among the most challenging for IM professionals, presenting physical dangers for information providers and demanding active management of information. Reports on casualties, the presence of unexploded ordnance, instances of gender-based violence and recruitment of minors, and other infractions of International Humanitarian Law require specific documentation for the purpose of providing reports to the UN Security Council and to guide response.

The principles which guide all humanitarian action require that

humanitarian responders take no part in the hostilities under any circumstances. In practice, this means that the use of new communication technologies in emergencies – and their uses in new ways – must specifically avoid crossing the line from monitoring the humanitarian consequences of conflict-related events to entering into what could be perceived as military reconnaissance. While it is very important, for example, to monitor attacks on a hospital or medical mission, it is unacceptable to monitor the troop movements of any participant in the conflict, even if these participants are alleged to have committed IHL infractions. IM tasks to document violations of human rights similarly must be divorced from humanitarian response.

Even taking all this into account, there is still a huge amount of information potentially available which has the potential to save lives when placed in the hands of the humanitarian community. Both mass media and social media often provide actionable information on conflict-related events, giving an overview of threats to the protection of civilians. Twitter in particular is enabling direct contacts with remote areas to communicate the development of events which merit humanitarian action and reporting to the UN Security Council. Such media allow the attribution and verification of information – something that a single agency, such as OCHA, or even a coalition of actors through the IMWG, would find difficult to do.

## Security challenges

In a complex emergency there are security challenges for both traditional responders and the affected people who may have access to social media to report their situation and their needs. Communications monitoring by one or more of the belligerents in the conflict is a potential threat; even when the principles of neutrality and

impartiality may be being respected, a person in a conflict zone may nonetheless be viewed with suspicion if it becomes known that he or she is actively reporting the local situation to the international community.

Humanitarian responders – viewed as foreign elements and relatively easy targets – have increasingly become targets of belligerents. The already active use of radio, email and even texting in some cases means that the use of such platforms represents little additional risk to responders but the construction of a system that allows anonymity for information contributors would substantially increase the safety and reliability of information sources. This requires the careful documentation of Twitter 'handles' (usernames) and other identifiers from persons on the ground but not their inclusion in the on-line platform. As for deliberate misinformation, it is not necessary to know the exact name of anyone within the network to build a clear profile of the quality of information that an information source is providing, and it can be surprisingly easy to isolate and exclude them over a period of time should they submit verifiably false information.

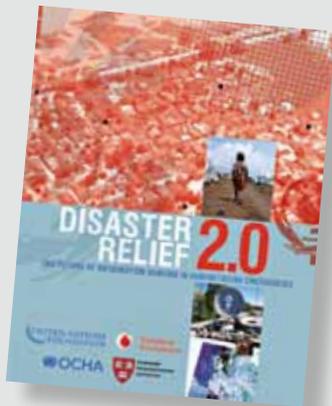
## Filling the information gap

Recent emergencies have seen the involvement of a large number of information managers who are relatively new to the field of disaster response yet whose goodwill and technical know-how offer an opportunity to harvest a host of information sources never before available. The publication of the *Disaster Relief 2.0* study in 2011<sup>2</sup> – focusing on the response to the Haiti earthquake – marks an important attempt to take advantage of this opportunity.

*Disaster Relief 2.0* analysed the potential of new technologies to improve decision making, providing recommendations for the more systematic incorporation of these tools into OCHA's process of information management – for use within the wider UN system, as well as among national and

The earthquake that struck Haiti in January 2010 “created a chasm between what the international community knew about Haiti prior to the quake and the reality that faced them in the quake’s aftermath. The race to fill this information gap – to assess the damage and plan a response – is a dynamic familiar to seasoned responders to major sudden onset emergencies. ...For the first time, members of the community affected by the disaster issued pleas for help using social media and mobile technologies. Around the world, thousands of ordinary citizens mobilised to aggregate, translate and plot these pleas on maps and to organise technical efforts to support the disaster response.”

*Disaster Relief 2.0*<sup>2</sup>



international NGOs. Its findings and recommendations have been taken on board in a several recent initiatives which in turn offer lessons for future application.

### Case Study 1: Cesar Department in Colombia

In November 2009, officials in the department of Cesar in Colombia asked UNDP to provide technical assistance in building an information system for the Governor’s Peace Advisor’s Office. Through its new information system (designed by OCHA), the department of Cesar sought to stimulate the contribution of protection information, with a focus on infractions of IHL, for use by the National Commission for Reconciliation and Reparation, the Ombudsman’s Office, the Peace Advisor’s Office, the Catholic Church and the UN system.

Information contributors required anonymity, and the system design

specifically avoided any inclusion of personal identifying information. In order to reduce the likelihood of having messages geo-located (a very real concern), SIM cards had to be purchased and assigned to various community organisations. Messages had to be composed by the sender prior to inserting the SIM card; the message was sent as soon as the cell phone was activated and then the SIM card was removed. While this did not ensure anonymity or guarantee that messages could not be traced, it did reduce the risk. In cases such as communications regarding death threats, forced displacement, massacres or the forcible recruitment of minors, being identified as an informant can make the communicator a target. Once received, the information was channelled to an Ushahidi platform on a server in Bogotá.<sup>3</sup>

This system allowed confidence to build regarding information being sent, as action was seen to be taken towards protecting the community affected by the events while preserving the anonymity of individual contributors. However, difficulties in contracting a suitable administrator responsible for information processing and presentation meant that it was impossible to create an effective network engaging the disaster-affected communities – indispensable for the long-term success of such a system. The absence of these important elements, plus the recent introduction of laws in Colombia forbidding the anonymity of cell-phone communication, led to the eventual demise of the Cesar information system.

### Case Study 2: Libya Crisis Map

Libya Crisis Map (LCM) was the first crisis-mapping exercise specifically requested by the international humanitarian community of the crisis mapping community, and as such is an important source of lessons for both groups of actors.

OCHA Geneva made the initial request in February 2011 when it became clear that the situation in Libya was likely to demand a humanitarian response, directing its request to the Stand-by Task Force (SBTF), a volunteer group focused on crisis mapping.<sup>4</sup> What

was particular about the dynamics of the humanitarian response to the Libyan situation was that the humanitarian community was forced to work from the borders for several months; in cases such as Haiti and Chile, humanitarian action had begun immediately following the event. This lack of humanitarian access to the areas of crisis makes it more likely that non-traditional sources must be engaged in order to build an initial overview of the humanitarian situation.

Utilising a validation system developed in a recent earthquake simulation, about 70 on-line volunteers were grouped into teams to gather, validate, geo-reference and eventually analyse information, to be presented in reports to decision makers. The level of productivity of this all-volunteer effort was truly impressive. LCM gathered and processed a huge volume of information on the Libya crisis, allowing the construction of trends and a better understanding of the dynamics of the conflict and the emergency. However, the challenges faced by LCM were also multiple.

With changes of management of LCM as the crisis became prolonged, it was important to provide continuity in the on-line volunteer group, while at the same time directly engaging staff of the now growing OCHA Libya operation arriving on the ground and producing the standard set of IM products. Information categorisation was adjusted in order not only to classify events in connection with IHL infractions and violations of UN resolutions but also to allow visualisation of event information alongside standardised needs evaluations and 3W (Who does What Where) information – with the end-goal being to facilitate on-line and real-time humanitarian gaps analysis. However, the initial classification system may have been intuitive for information providers but it proved less useful for decision makers. Changing this system proved terribly difficult, due to the costs in terms of re-classifying earlier entered information and to the rapid adoption by volunteers of the earlier classification system. Given the rigours of the classification process, it may be advisable to assign



Libya Crisis Map (<http://libyacrisismap.net/>), indicating mass displacement events.

an expert to this particular task, in lieu of depending on volunteers.

Engagement with the Information Management Working Group – clearly vital to the platform’s success – was not nearly as frequent as was needed, and updates to 3W and other important information were often delayed. While there were important successes in delivering useful bulletins to OCHA New York and the inclusion of context information in OCHA Libya situation reports, and actors in the field such as WFP provided

positive feedback, in general the information produced by the platform did not reach the full array of humanitarian actors positioning themselves to enter Libya. Therein lies the full breadth of challenges to LCM and probably all potential Disaster Response 2.0 IM responses in the future: the need to bridge a divide not only between one actor and another but also between the virtual world – which holds untold potential in IM support – and actors in the field who frequently have their attention focused anywhere but on the internet.

## Conclusion

Disaster Relief 2.0 represents a new vision for IM and improving decision making. Given the varied challenges presented by different disaster scenarios, the strategy for each should be carefully planned in order to take advantage of the opportunities that new technologies and a relatively untapped worldwide IM community present for traditional disaster responders. Security concerns must be resolved, with a common understanding of what the expectations on the part of victims should be, as well as the potential risks of reporting on humanitarian situations. A well-implemented Disaster Relief 2.0 response has the potential to save many lives, mobilise international interest and resources, and improve the effective allocation of limited resources.

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1. <http://tinyurl.com/IASC-IMguidance2007>

2. *Disaster Relief 2.0: The Future of Information Sharing in Humanitarian Emergencies*, commissioned by the UN Foundation & Vodafone Foundation Partnership with OCHA, and with the authorship of Harvard Humanitarian Initiative [www.unfoundation.org/assets/pdf/disaster-relief-20-report.pdf](http://www.unfoundation.org/assets/pdf/disaster-relief-20-report.pdf)

3. See article by Galya Ruffer pp20-21.

4. Established at the International Crisis Mappers Conference, November 2010 <http://crisismappers.net/>

# The only constant is change

Mariko Hall

**Advances in information and communications technology are offering new solutions to a range of operational challenges experienced in the field. But can the humanitarian community’s providers of telecommunications services keep up with the pace of change – and the pace of demand?**

Emergency responders rely on IT and telecommunications for numerous aspects of their operations, from reporting, coordination and communication, to ensuring the security and safety of staff in the field. Because of this, it is essential that IT emergency responders are among the first on the ground in a disaster situation to set up these essential networks. As lead agency for the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster<sup>1</sup> (ETC), set up as part of the 2005 Humanitarian Reform initiative), the UN World Food

Programme (WFP) is responsible for providing IT and telecommunications services from the onset of a disaster response, working closely with a range of partners including UNICEF, UNHCR, UN OCHA, Télécoms Sans Frontières, World Vision International, Ericsson Response and the Government of Luxembourg.

Back in 1994, during the Great Lakes emergency, WFP set up the first regional technical support unit in Kampala, Uganda, to assist relief workers. At this time, WFP also

pioneered the first mobile messaging system within the humanitarian community, enabling emails to be sent and received through HF (high frequency) radios. In 2004, when the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami killed over 227,000 people and displaced more than 1.7 million, the Cluster Approach had not yet been formalised so each organisation was responsible for its own IT arrangements. The benefits of operating in collaboration with other agencies, however, were obvious and sectors had already begun to loosely organise themselves, with WFP assuming responsibility for security telecommunications by establishing a network of 24/7 radio rooms. The technology available

to the humanitarian community, as well as expectations, had already increased significantly since the Great Lakes response.

Now, voice, data and security telecommunications services are provided by the ETC in emergency operations. Voice services include wired and wireless phone calls from a central location using satellite terminals. Data services include wireless internet access points, also using satellite terminals, as well as printing facilities. Best efforts are also made to link individual organisations operating in remote locations to the central site. In terms of security communications, the ETC also establishes and maintains VHF (very high frequency) radio networks to cover the operational area, as well as other related services including training of IT and telecommunications staff.

### Catalysts for change

Humanitarian emergencies are becoming increasingly complex in regard to the number of people who need assistance and the physical size of the areas affected. Both of these factors require a greater number of aid workers to be deployed to assist in the response. More personnel operating on the ground means increased demands on the networks and infrastructure established by the ETC; this in turn means greater bandwidth requirements. And because the physical distribution area for relief supplies is also expanding, the ETC must ensure that wider areas too are adequately covered by security telecommunications services.

To support the IT needs of emergency responders, WFP has developed what is called a 'fly-away kit' – small and light enough to travel with the responder on a commercial flight, yet containing all the equipment necessary to set up a functional office, including satellite phone, laptop and satellite terminal to enable communications to be established immediately upon arrival.

Coordination between the huge number of humanitarian organisations operating in emergencies



Port-au-Prince, Haiti

can present a challenge for the ETC. Following the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, for example, there was an estimated 1,300 NGOs operating across the country, many of which could have benefited more from ETC services. ETC NGO Coordinator positions (hosted by NGOs) have since been established to encourage and sustain collaboration between UN agencies, NGOs and the ETC.

With a considerable increase in recent years in the number of humanitarian workers killed in the line of duty, it is more important now than ever before that additional measures be taken to monitor the security and safety of staff in the field. This has also been a major catalyst for change in IT and telecommunications systems. Vehicle and commodity tracking mechanisms have been developed as well as other tools which allow the physical position of individual aid workers to be located on mapping applications.

The expectations of aid workers themselves are evolving in parallel with technological advances. Despite operating in some of the most remote places on earth, there is increasing demand for high-level IT services. Aid workers arriving at emergency situations expect Wi-Fi connectivity for their smartphones and handheld devices; wireless connectivity to laptop computers is no longer sufficient. The photo and video capabilities of these new devices place further pressure

on bandwidth requirements. In the same way, teleconferencing facilities – increasingly used by the humanitarian community for coordinating activities – are now expected to provide video functions, not just voice.

The ETC complies with IT and telecommunications laws and regulations stipulated by host countries. Because technologies deployed in emergencies are becoming increasingly advanced, however, use of equipment or certain applications may be restricted in countries in which they are needed. In such situations the ETC will negotiate with governmental bodies, on behalf of the humanitarian community, for more flexible arrangements.

In the face of these changes, the ETC is constantly evolving, and new tools and technologies continue to be developed and piloted.

Digital radio, for example, is being piloted in the Philippines as a potential substitute for the old analogue radios. The key advantage of digital over analogue radio is that all sites are linked to each other. When travelling across a country, the transition between radio frequencies using the digital system is much the same as the 'roaming' facility on a mobile phone; the operator does not need to manually change channels according to coverage

area. Digital radios also contain GPS (Global Positioning System), enabling tracking on map-based platforms, and have the capability to send text messages. All these functions contribute to enhanced security for aid workers in the field.

An initial partnership for humanitarian emergency response has been established between the Government of Luxembourg and WFP in its position as lead of the ETC. Together these partners are working on the design and roll-out of a new solution called 'emergency.lu'.<sup>2</sup> This new approach will include prepositioned satellite bandwidth to cope with the increasing demands of the response community. A further key element will be a new version of the fly-away kit with 'voice over internet protocol' (VoIP) technology enabling voice calls to be provided at lower cost. By early 2012, these new

kits will be prepositioned across the globe for deployment in emergencies.

Corporate organisations, in particular those within the IT and telecommunications fields, are increasingly participating in the development of new solutions as part of their corporate and social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Ericsson Response,<sup>3</sup> for example, has been working closely with the ETC in the design and development of 'WIDER' (Wireless LAN in Disaster and Emergency Response), a mechanism designed to enable humanitarian workers to access the internet from any suitable device in any emergency-affected area. Functioning in a similar way to Wi-Fi registration procedures at a hotel, for example, WIDER will allow the ETC to better manage access to the network, addressing the challenge of increased bandwidth requirements,

and ensuring users are provided with the best services possible.

The last decade has witnessed unprecedented growth in IT and telecommunications in terms of both technology available and services provided in the field. While advances in these areas have enabled new solutions to be applied in emergency response operations, they have also placed greater demands on the ETC to provide more robust services for tools that were not even available in the past.

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1. <http://ictemergency.wfp.org/web/ictrepr/emergency-telecommunications-cluster>

2. <http://emergency.lu> See article by Antoine Bertout, Marc du Bourcy and Mohammad Faisal on p17.

3. A CSR initiative of telecommunications equipment and services provider Ericsson [www.ericsson.com/article/ericsson-response\\_20100329133348](http://www.ericsson.com/article/ericsson-response_20100329133348)

## Technology in aid of learning for isolated refugees

Petra Dankova and Clotilde Giner

**The lack of higher education opportunities for refugees, many of whom flee before being able to complete their education, is a widely acknowledged problem.**

Taking advantage of new computer technologies and improved internet connectivity across Africa, the Jesuit Refugee Service's initiative Jesuit Commons-Higher Education at the Margins (JC-HEM) has since 2010 piloted access to tertiary education in refugee settings, linking university teachers in the US with students in refugee camps in Kakuma in Kenya and Dzaleka in Malawi.<sup>1</sup> JC-HEM enables refugees to study, in English, for a Diploma in Liberal Studies via the internet.

Approximately 30 students a year enrol in each of these online learning programmes. The principle is simple: volunteer university teaching staff from several Jesuit universities in the US act as instructors for the students, providing online advice to help with coursework and grading assignments. The American system of credits gets around the problem

of 'permanent temporariness' that refugees face. For every eight-week course, students get credits that can be transferred to other universities.

### The technology

Each site is equipped with a computer lab and internet connectivity, and supported by a resident IT officer (drawn from the programme's staff) and a refugee IT assistant. It is a daily challenge to ensure smooth operation without power cuts due to technical problems or breakages but initial procurement of computer equipment included purchase of spare units in order to help deal with this reality.

In Kakuma a reliable internet connection is provided by WiMAX<sup>2</sup> from a local Kenyan provider; this is cheaper than satellite, previously the only solution available in such remote locations. Kakuma refugee camp is located in a semi-

arid area of north-western Kenya, approximately 95km south of the Sudanese border. Temperatures range from 30 to 40 degrees Celsius and dust storms are common. To protect the equipment, computer labs need glass windows (uncommon by local standards) and air conditioners to regulate the temperature in the computer and server rooms.

"This always reminds me that I am still in the camp where things cannot be totally changed overnight."  
(Maurice, 35-year-old student in Dzaleka, from DRC)

In Dzaleka a system of solar panels was installed to provide a constant renewable energy supply but this was unfortunately damaged by a power surge. Without local technical expertise on solar power, the damaged piece had to be sent to South Africa for repairs and the programme had no reliable source of electricity for more than two months.



Organisations interested in setting up a similar programme should be aware of the investment required by online learning initiatives. Modern computers and secure buildings, a constant supply of electricity and fast internet are all essential requirements, as is appropriate technical expertise in country.

"The lack of access to the internet has confined refugees to the Neolithic age while the rest of the world lives in the internet era." (Paul, 45-year-old student in Dzaleka, from Rwanda)

In Dzaleka a small internet cafe with 12 computers is meant to cater for the needs of more than 14,000 refugees. Some are lucky enough to have an internet-enabled mobile phone but calling from a mobile phone is very expensive and the network is also slow and frequently not available.

Required readings and videotaped lectures are downloaded to a local server during low traffic times, mostly at night. Students can also search the internet or use Regis University's online library for research, and communicate with their teachers. Because there are no scheduled lecture times and students can access study materials at their convenience, students have more flexibility and are better able to juggle their academic responsibilities with volunteer work within the camp, their family duties and the often all-consuming effort of daily life in a refugee camp.

### Learning

The majority of students in the programme had rarely used computers or the internet regularly before enrolling for the online Diploma. Despite a 'bridge course' at the beginning of the programme designed to give students basic computer skills while also improving their English language and academic writing skills, the learning curve for students during the course of the diploma was particularly steep. Students have had to familiarise themselves with online interfaces; their difficulties highlighted the need for an on-site tutor. The experiences so far show the importance of gaining solid computer skills before embarking on teaching of other content.

"I found myself in trouble using [these programmes] at first. I didn't know where to find my feedback, where to write an email or where to send my work. Those kind of things needed someone to be there and show me where to click." (Jean-Marc, 23-year-old student in Dzaleka, from DRC)

JC-HEM students only had experience of face-to-face teaching before joining the programme. Incoming students were concerned about whether this was 'real' education and how relationships could be built without physical interaction. Surprisingly, after the first few months of instruction, feedback indicated that one of the most valued features of the experience so far was the ability to build relationships online both with the teachers and other students.

"I am surprised that I feel I know some of these people from the internet better than I know my neighbours in the community." (Yusuf, 24-year-old Somali Diploma student in Kakuma)

Students all praise their online instructors for "making a real effort to understand difficulties students may be having with their work". From the experience of the first cohort, it seems that it is important to exchange information, photographs and videos to help both students and teachers understand each other's environment.

After these first courses, it has become obvious that it is not only the students who benefit. Some of the teachers observed that teaching the refugees has changed their way of looking at certain texts and topics and has challenged them to adapt the curriculum to the particular experiences and learning interests of refugee students, who draw on life experiences which are very different from students who typically enrol on such online programmes in the US. Teachers reported that these experiences will influence the way they teach their American students too.

### Future programmes

Students in Dzaleka report increased self-esteem and energy levels, and also that "use of the internet

allowed us to increase our status in refugee society" (Joel, 40-year-old Rwandese student in Dzaleka). An over-arching feature of the JC-HEM programme is the focus on using education to benefit both the students and their communities. As explained by Vincent, 31-year-old Congolese student in Dzaleka, "This education remains a great opportunity for me to help and assist different people from different communities." Those involved in the programme are currently looking at ways to enable students to give something back to the community, such as tutoring secondary school students and helping computer students to use the internet.

Online higher education programmes aim to empower refugees who have been placed at the margins by virtue of their exile. It is therefore crucial to ensure that refugee women take part fully in online learning initiatives. Only two students out of 30 in Dzaleka and seven out of 35 in Kakuma currently enrolled in the Diploma programme are women. For the next intake, programme staff are working to reach more women; getting more women involved in higher education programmes requires assuring access to crèche services for young mothers, as well as organising awareness-raising events targeting women.

The use of technology to bring tertiary education to refugee camps is not a solution to protracted refugee situations but is nevertheless a welcome tool to assist refugees in continued education and development of their human potential in exile.

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1. A similar programme for urban refugees is underway in Aleppo in Syria.

2. WiMAX (Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access) is a wireless broadband access technology that provides fixed and mobile internet access.

# Early warning of mass atrocity crimes

Phoebe Wynn-Pope

**The use of new technologies for early warning systems can help reduce people's vulnerability to mass violence.**

Ever since Boutros Boutros Ghali's *An Agenda for Peace*<sup>1</sup> report almost 20 years ago, there have been calls at the UN and elsewhere for improved early warning mechanisms for both natural disasters and complex emergencies. Early warning to help prevent mass atrocity crimes has received less attention, despite the obvious links to humanitarian issues such as civil disturbance, conflict and resultant (often mass) displacement.

Oxfam Australia held a conference on 'Early Warning for Protection' in Cambodia in November 2010 in partnership with AusAID, the Asia-Pacific Centre for R2P and the International Coalition for R2P. The conference brought together technology specialists, UN actors and civil society to discuss how technology, combined with effective programmes on the ground, can help to reduce the vulnerability of communities to mass violence.

Forms of new technology have created new opportunities for community-based information gathering and early warning. Platforms such as Ushahidi<sup>2</sup> and OpenStreetMap<sup>3</sup> – 'crowd-sourced crisis-mapping tools' – are revolutionising the way crisis information can be gathered and made available.<sup>4</sup>

Such systems open up opportunities for affected populations themselves to inform one another, government authorities and the wider world about what is happening to them. For example, the Uwiano Platform for Peace<sup>5</sup> in Kenya used Ushahidi to monitor and respond to violence during the Kenyan referendum held on 4 August 2010. The programme included online tools and features for tracking, reporting and retrieving evidence of hate speech, incitement and other forms of violence or incitement to

violence through text, images, voice messages and videos. Incoming messages were mapped through geo-location technology. The information gathered enabled Uwiano to notify police, authorities and communities when there were outbreaks of violence; recipients of the information could then make appropriate responses – either through avoidance or intervention.

## Constraints and risks

The potential of new technologies such as crisis mapping to enhance humanitarian response when displacement is occurring was tested in 2011 in Libya.<sup>6</sup> Although methods of effectively integrating these maps into humanitarian response are still being developed, the possibilities for improved humanitarian needs assessment are evident. The potential of crowd-sourced crisis mapping is, however, tempered by some constraints and risks that should be considered.

First, while the use of technology-based systems in repressive environments or where access is constrained looks immediately attractive, it should be remembered that technology is never truly secure and those making reports may be put at risk. Strategies for protecting the anonymity and security of people engaging with such technology-based systems and ensuring an awareness of the risks is critical.

A related issue is the concern some humanitarian actors hold about the potential protection risks of open source crisis mapping. For example, the risk reports submitted by affected populations or volunteer crisis mappers may include the exact locations of groups at risk of attack – thereby potentially putting them at further risk of being targeted. Sharing the humanitarian community's knowledge about the

management of protection-sensitive information with the crisis-mapping community would be useful.

Third, while technology-based systems will be appropriate in countries with widespread internet connectivity like Egypt and Kenya, in countries like Timor-Leste they will have minimal application due to lack of internet coverage outside the capital. Even in countries that do have high levels of connectivity, vulnerable groups such as internally displaced people will often be excluded from accessing the technology.

Finally, online systems are inherently vulnerable. In early 2011 governments in North Africa shut down social networking, and in August Wi-Fi connectivity for passengers on San Francisco's transport system was disabled in the context of threatened social unrest. Governments, other actors and natural disasters can all shut down communications channels – making online systems less workable or possibly useless. Purely technology-based solutions to early warning may in some cases be insufficient; offline backup mechanisms would then need to be in place.

The *Disaster Relief 2.0* report, which explored the contribution made by international 'Volunteer and Technical Communities' (VTCs) to information gathering and disaster response in Haiti, found that there was limited formal or informal interface between the work done by the VTCs and the humanitarian coordination system.<sup>7</sup> While OCHA's engagement with the Standby Task Force in Libya is a promising development, there is much work to be done to develop effective coordination mechanisms between different actors in order to facilitate improved humanitarian response.

## From warning to protection

Transforming early warning into effective and timely protective action

is a complicated process fraught with several significant challenges. One of these is the abundance of information about complex phenomena combined with limited knowledge and understanding of what the information means. How to accurately predict patterns of behaviour that will result in systematic violence requires highly sophisticated contextual analysis. Other challenges include issues around when to warn, false alarms leading to future alerts being neglected, and failure to warn leading to lack of preventive action. The need to find ways to enhance local capacity to warn and

be warned was also a key focus of the November conference.

Despite these issues it is clear that community-designed and driven technology-based early warning projects, such as Uwiano, are having a significant impact. They demonstrate the potential of new technologies to empower communities to raise the alarm about threats that they face. In order to fulfil this potential, more work is needed to bring various technical communities together with humanitarian responders and affected communities themselves to improve practices and mitigate risks.

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Further outcomes from the conference and speaker presentations can be accessed at [www.oxfam.org.au/earlywarning](http://www.oxfam.org.au/earlywarning).

1. *An Agenda for Peace Report of the Secretary General* (UN Doc A/47/277-S/24111) 17 June 1992.
2. [www.ushahidi.com](http://www.ushahidi.com) See also article by Galya Ruffer on pp20-21.
3. [www.openstreetmap.org](http://www.openstreetmap.org)
4. For example, [Mapkibera.org/wiki](http://Mapkibera.org/wiki) uses OpenStreetMap to map Kibera, the largest slum in Kenya housing one million people.
5. See [www.comminit.com/en/node/323372](http://www.comminit.com/en/node/323372)
6. See article by Jeffrey Villaveces pp7-9.
7. [www.unfoundation.org/assets/pdf/disaster-relief-20-report.pdf](http://www.unfoundation.org/assets/pdf/disaster-relief-20-report.pdf)

## Access to information – inclusive or exclusive?

Gill Price and Linda Richardson

**Do new technologies increase access to information and knowledge for all – or are they deepening a technological divide?**

Under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, access to information and freedom of expression are recognised human rights. Yet, in times of disaster, affected populations and displaced people in particular often have no formal avenues to seek or obtain information, to share their knowledge or to raise their concerns or complaints.

Over recent years there has been considerable emphasis on improving access to information to facilitate international humanitarian coordination and to guide relief and response efforts, such as OCHA's One Response<sup>1</sup> and, previously, humanitarian info web portals, the WFP-led Humanitarian Emergency Platform,<sup>2</sup> IOM's Humanitarian Call Centres, InterNews projects such as infoasaid,<sup>3</sup> a range of SMS applications such as FrontLineSMS<sup>4</sup> and over 500 Emergency

Management Group pages on Facebook.

However, there is often inadequate focus on addressing the information needs of national and local actors and disaster-affected populations and on accessing information and tacit knowledge held by the local population.

Findings from the 2006 Tsunami Evaluation Coalition<sup>5</sup> highlighted the need to ensure that affected populations – particularly women and marginalised groups – have full access to information in order to facilitate their inclusion. They also emphasised the importance of building on and developing national capacities for information sharing. Lessons from the devastating earthquake in Haiti five years later are similar,<sup>6</sup> as are those of



Burmese refugees at Umpium refugee camp, Thailand.

the 2010 evaluation of the Cluster Approach,<sup>7</sup> which also emphasises the importance of adopting context-sensitive communication strategies and appropriate technologies in doing so. A 2008 publication by the Communication Initiative Network called *Left in the Dark* concluded that effective information and communication exchange with affected populations is among the least understood and most complex challenges facing the humanitarian sector in the 21st century.<sup>8</sup>

New initiatives, both international and national, are trying to facilitate better and more appropriate communication and inclusion of disaster-affected populations. Schemes such as Ushahidi in Haiti<sup>9</sup> or Google's People Finder in Pakistan and Japan aim to facilitate the exchange of information within disaster-affected communities and with humanitarian actors. The Communication to Disaster Affected Communities programmes established in 2010 following the earthquake in Haiti and flooding in Pakistan supported their members with a number of strategies, including texting, radio and public information campaigns. However, in many rural communities the preferred method of accessing information is through spoken communication – through public announcements, meetings, events, radio and TV broadcasts as well as face-to-face contact.

### Alternative means of accessing information

In recent years electronic media have significantly increased their role in facilitating access to information in emergencies. However, there are still many countries and regions within countries where internet access is low; for example, fewer than 1% of the overall population in the Democratic Republic of Congo or Central African Republic have access to the internet. Limited coverage can affect the applicability of technologies such as Google's People Finder, which had limited success in the aftermath of the 2010 Pakistan floods where internet access was poor. In contrast, the same application was highly successful in Japan following the earthquake and tsunami in 2011 as access to electronic media is considerably more reliable and widespread there.

The **All In Diary** is an information tool for field-based humanitarian actors, particularly those at national and local level. It is available in print and electronic format and in country-specific and translated versions, and:

- combines information in a practical field diary and notebook to enable 'hands-on' reference
- has regularly updated content
- keeps information to a minimum with links to further detail if needed
- uses simple language and clear concepts for ease of translation and adaptation
- is open source and offers free, unrestricted access.

[www.allindiary.org](http://www.allindiary.org)

Globally, mobile phone coverage is generally greater than internet access, and is increasing. The average coverage in Africa is estimated at over 40% (compared with 77% globally) – but coverage remains very low in some countries such as Burma/Myanmar where it is estimated at less than 0.1% of the population.

There are increasing numbers of free mobile phone-based services and applications providing critical information, such as infectious disease reporting and earthquake or tsunami warnings. However, phone purchase or subscription costs still limit access for many poor and vulnerable groups and even reasonably high mobile phone coverage does not necessarily translate into high levels of usage for receiving humanitarian information. In a survey of over 1,000 people in flood-affected districts within Punjab and Sindh provinces of Pakistan, 27% had access to a mobile phone but fewer than 0.5% had received information from a humanitarian organisation.

### Print or electronic?

The All In Diary [see box] is an information tool aimed at facilitating a minimum level of awareness and common understanding of key humanitarian principles, standards and concerns across all humanitarian actors. Evaluations of the initial project launch and subsequent country-specific versions of the All In Diary in Sri Lanka and

Zimbabwe provide valuable insights into the importance of print media and reinforce its importance in facilitating access to information for local actors. Despite availability of the All In Diary in electronic format, the majority of field-based staff in local and national organisations expressed the need for print-based material due to lack of or poor access to electricity, computers or the internet, particularly in the field.

Patterns of usage of the All In Diary in the field also illustrate the significance of face-to-face communication at community level, with numerous examples of how the content has been used interactively in meetings and workshops, in supporting staff inductions and training, and in community-based training and awareness raising, e.g. on HIV and AIDS.

As technological innovation increases, attention to the importance and value of traditional technologies and funding to support them diminish. But what is the impact on displaced and disadvantaged populations who are unable to access new technologies? Humanitarian organisations with a role in facilitating access to information face the dilemma of how much to invest in new technologies to meet the growing needs and expectations of international humanitarian staff and programmes, and how much to continue to support the need for print media in facilitating access to information for many local actors – and to work hard at convincing donors to support this. If they focus on providing web-based applications which are easier to maintain and low cost, they risk excluding a large proportion of local responders and affected people.

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1. <http://oneresponse.info/Pages/default.aspx>
2. [www.logcluster.org/mobile](http://www.logcluster.org/mobile)
3. <http://infoasaid.org/> See box p37.
4. [www.frontlinesms.com/](http://www.frontlinesms.com/) See box p37.
5. [www.alnap.org/initiatives/tec/thematic/capacities.aspx](http://www.alnap.org/initiatives/tec/thematic/capacities.aspx)
6. [http://ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/Haiti\\_IA\\_RTE\\_1\\_final\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/Haiti_IA_RTE_1_final_report_en.pdf)
7. [www.gppi.net/fileadmin/gppi/GPPI-URD\\_Cluster\\_II\\_Evaluation\\_SYNTHESIS\\_REPORT\\_e.pdf](http://www.gppi.net/fileadmin/gppi/GPPI-URD_Cluster_II_Evaluation_SYNTHESIS_REPORT_e.pdf)
8. [www.comminet.com/en/node/279690](http://www.comminet.com/en/node/279690)
9. See article by Imogen Wall pp4-6.

# Using technology to help save mothers and babies

Sandra Krause and Diana Quick

**A new initiative called 'Mama: Together for Safe Births in Crises' uses social networking to connect frontline maternal health workers in crisis-affected areas to build a professional community of practice.**

In 2010, the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) undertook research to learn why implementation of maternal health interventions in humanitarian settings remained below standard; to map the personalities, values and attitudes of maternal health workers and the specific challenges they face in providing maternal services in crises; and to develop strategies to facilitate behavioural change among practitioners in order to better provide high-quality maternal health services.

Key findings from the research show that although global policy and guidance for maternal health in crisis-affected settings are robust and even plentiful, the actual failure occurs in implementing the policies and guidance. The research also revealed a general consensus that maternal health campaigns were not reaching the field level sufficiently and that the farther into the field one got, the less likely a practitioner would be to come across the maternal health campaigns and products.

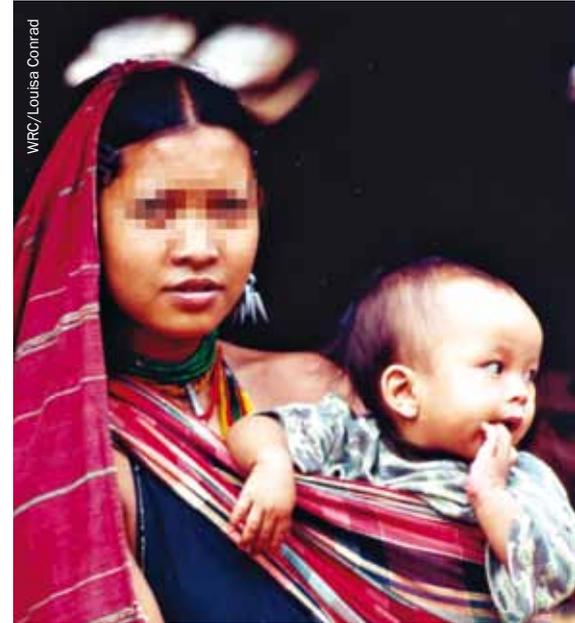
A common theme to emerge was the need for 'maternal health champions' in humanitarian organisations, particularly at the level where services are implemented, in order to continue to sensitise and empower providers about the life-saving care they can and should deliver. The research also revealed that practitioners often work in a relative vacuum, with little peer interaction, support or recognition. However, it was significant that respondents reported using the internet and mobile phones at least once a day, and using Facebook and SMS texting regularly, the last especially when in the field.

## A Facebook platform

In response to the research findings, WRC and its partner M4ID (Marketing for International Development, a Finnish communications firm) developed 'Mama' employing Facebook as a platform since it was the most widely used social networking platform among interviewees. The Mama initiative has pioneered a linkage between Facebook and SMS texting, which is critical for practitioners based in the deep field who do not have regular internet access. Using Facebook's new capacity to gather quantitative and qualitative metrics, Mama also integrates applications to measure changes among members in reported clinical practice over time. This is particularly important so that WRC can monitor the effectiveness of the approach in reaching practitioners and facilitating behavioural change.

The overall goal of Mama is to help clinical practitioners form a community of mutual support and give one another information about and encouragement to use proven standards, tools, and existing and new technologies.

Mama does this by asking maternal health field practitioners to identify themselves, and for humanitarian organisations to identify certain maternal health practitioners, as 'Maternal Health Champions in crisis-affected settings'. These 'champions' should then feel part of a broader community of peers working together to achieve solutions. The Mama community provides opportunities for its members to provide peer support to one another, and also provides practitioners with the latest and most specific tools, information and guidance related



Karenni refugees in Thailand.

to their field in a convenient form. The threshold for participation is kept low by using only basic terminology and technology to encourage members to join in. The overall aim is to build a long-term communications platform where practitioners can learn and improve their skills from a network of support and information for years to come.

The Mama applications are:

- **The Pre-MISP Quiz**

When new members of the Mama community first log on to the Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/mama.wrc](http://www.facebook.com/mama.wrc)), they are offered a quiz designed to educate and reinforce the proven importance in crisis-affected settings of the Minimum Initial Services Package (MISP).<sup>1</sup> After completing the quiz, members are referred to the MISP online distance-learning module where they can gain certification in the module.

- **Self-assessment Survey**

Members are asked to complete a Self-assessment Survey upon joining. Through it each practitioner has a chance to examine his or her strengths and familiarity with the MISP and existing new technologies, and to learn what skills he or she needs to work on. The information gathered is displayed in an easy-to-read visual 'skills profile' that highlights a practitioner's areas of need and tailors a member's further use of what the Mama community has to offer.

- **Field Experiences**

Through a Field Experiences and Lessons Learned application, members are encouraged to share what has and has not worked in their field of practice. Members are encouraged to post videos and photos in addition to their short practice stories. Contributors to this application are acknowledged on the public 'wall' and further discussion about shared examples is encouraged. Participants are given direction on ethical guidelines for such cases, in order to protect confidentiality.

- **Digital 'badges'**

Mama allows practitioners to earn digital 'badges' as marks of achievement in recognition for doing things such as interacting, sharing best practices and taking the pre-MISP quiz.

- **SMS texting**

Practitioners in remote field settings can submit questions or comments via 'Mama SMS' – that is, by text. Texts are posted automatically to the Facebook page, where other members can post proposed responses to the message. The community then votes on the best response. Once a minimum of three members have selected a particular response as the best, a message with the response will be sent to the original practitioner. (It should be noted, however, that Mama SMS is not a rapid response system, and should not be used during a health emergency.)

SMS texting helps to ensure that even members in remote locations can participate. All of the questions and comments sent are stored on the Mama Facebook 'wall'. This is the first time that Facebook and SMS texting have been linked.

- **Lives Saved Counter**

Through the Lives Saved Counter application, Mama members can record when they have assisted in saving a woman's, girl's or newborn's life as a result of their evidence-based interventions and the activities they employed to save a life during a pregnancy or childbirth. This serves as a way to recognise and celebrate proven methods instead of the usual practice of only recording maternal deaths. In this way, the application also helps to capture data on methods used as well as overall community

trends – information that will be relayed back to the Mama community.

- **Mentors**

Field experts and maternal health champions are invited on a monthly basis to share their knowledge and expertise on specific topics as 'Mama Mentors' providing technical information, professional development advice and words of recognition and encouragement to the community. Mama Mentors host specific topical discussions while highlighting their own work and unique and valuable experiences.

- **The moderator**

A site moderator ensures ethical standards are respected in postings, notifies members of forthcoming Mama Mentors and themes (which the moderator decides), announces trainings, conferences and updates relevant to the field, highlights case-study contributions and encourages discussion. The moderator also highlights and encourages field-level contributions that enhance the developing knowledge base on Mama.

'Mama: Together for Safe Births in Crisis' was launched on 21 April 2011. At the date of this publication the concept has started to take hold among head offices, international NGOs and various local maternal health organisations. Remarkably, in the first four weeks after the launch, Mama surpassed its first-year target of 500 users with 641 members and more than 14,000 post views. It now has almost 750 members and more than 83,000 post views. However, the second and most critical phase of roll-out is to reach field-level practitioners. Various networks, conferences and field trainings will be used over the coming year towards this end.

- **Social media challenges and risks**

By their very nature, social media rely heavily on participants to develop content and to engage in discussions and sharing. These technologies offer new possibilities to put discussion in the hands of participants and ensure that they are empowered and even leading conversations in their areas of expertise.

Although this is an exciting development, posting material to Facebook raises concerns with regard to privacy and ownership.

As Mama can be viewed like a webpage, without restrictions placed on viewers, it is important to exercise caution and maintain ethical standards when posting to the site. Stories shared should maintain confidentiality, and pictures posted must be obtained with appropriate consent. WRC calls upon all users to abide by accountability principles and ethical guidelines; guidance and suggestions for this are provided and continue to be developed. Mama reserves the right to remove any posts deemed inappropriate.

There are also questions of ownership of data and information. The general 'wall' for Mama is owned and hosted by Facebook. The Mama applications (listed on the left of the Mama Facebook wall), on the other hand, are owned by WRC and are hosted on servers outside Facebook. Users are encouraged to share stories, photos and experiences on these applications, which were designed with this specific intent in mind, rather than on the wall. None of the information uploaded to Field Experiences or the Mama Mentor page – whether in text, photo or video format – could be used by Facebook in any way. WRC is developing a help guide for privacy settings to ensure that users understand the strengths as well as risks of using these new technologies.

Throughout the development of Mama, the data from Facebook will be utilised to monitor how effectively the target audience has been reached and to refine the project. We expect some applications on Mama to be more successful than others and look forward to sharing the results and refining the initiative.

Sandra Krause (SandraK@wrccommission.org) is director of the reproductive health programme and Diana Quick (DianaQ@wrccommission.org) is director of communications at the Women's Refugee Commission (<http://womensrefugeecommission.org/>).

1. The MISP details the priority actions needed to prevent excess maternal and newborn death and disability, reduce HIV transmission, and prevent and manage the consequences of sexual violence, as well as plan for comprehensive reproductive health services.



# Luxembourg-UNHCR-Skype synergies

Antoine Bertout, Marc de Bourcy and Mohammad Faisal

**A recent strategic partnership between UNHCR, the Government of Luxembourg and communications software provider Skype is keeping UNHCR staff in hardship locations in touch with their families and friends. The partners are now considering how the technology might be adapted for use by other humanitarian organisations.**

Some 44% of UNHCR staff work in the field, often in remote, 'hardship' duty stations. They may be separated from their families and friends for months at a time, sometimes at very short notice, and have limited or occasionally no opportunities for communication. UNHCR is concerned – and has a responsibility – to address staff isolation and stress, not only for the sake of staff well-being but to ensure staff productivity and, ultimately, the quality of UNHCR's operational response.

In late 2008 UNHCR decided to invest internally in measures to improve living and working conditions in remote field duty stations – measures ranging from revised policies for work-life balance and team-building retreats to the introduction of technology support. One such measure was the proposal to enable staff to use Skype to keep in closer touch with their colleagues, families and friends by being able to talk with them.

Skype software enables families, friends and colleagues to get together for free with instant messaging, voice and video over the internet. At low cost they can also call landlines or mobiles almost anywhere in the world. It is one, maybe the largest, of such companies enabling communication over the internet.

## Partners and connections

UNHCR needed a customised version of Skype to provide free or low-cost voice and video calls over the internet that worked on low bandwidth connectivity to avoid jeopardising existing UNHCR business applications

and that could be fully integrated with UNHCR's firewalls and other security aspects. Skype had been developing the technology to offer this and was keen to support the humanitarian community; in return, Skype would gain visibility and a huge testing ground for innovative applications in both remote areas and difficult conditions.

The Government of Luxembourg is a longstanding partner and donor of UNHCR's. It has also become increasingly involved in promoting synergies in the humanitarian community to enable better use of innovative solutions – including promoting telecommunications and information and communications technologies – to improve humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations.

In early 2009, the Luxembourg Minister for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs brought together Skype and UNHCR to further explore the possibilities of a joint partnership, including the launch of an initial fully operational 'staff welfare' project. With a strong commitment by Skype's leadership to this project and the successful first pilot phase, the Government of Luxembourg agreed to fund the first phase of the staff welfare project and hence the joint Luxembourg-UNHCR-Skype partnership was launched.

The UNHCR customised version of Skype was tested and was shown to work in six trial locations. By August 2011 Skype had been rolled out in 118 hardship locations in UN compounds across Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Oceania and Europe benefitting 3,068 members of UNHCR staff. It is anticipated that by the end of 2011 – under

Phase II of the project – this version of Skype will be provided to all UNHCR's hardship postings.

"Skype is the main mode of communication to keep in touch with my family," says Haridass Sriram, UNHCR field protection officer in the UN compound in Aweil, South Sudan. "Every day I call them using Skype. I can see my twins who are now four and a half months old and talk to my wife every day." He laughs. "If not for Skype, my wife would have left me by now!"

Simplice Kpandji works for UNHCR in its base in Goma, eastern DRC. "My family lives in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. I see them every eight weeks," says Simplicie. "Between visits, I use Skype to communicate with them. My children can talk to me and ask me questions about what I have done during the day. They also talk about their activities and their friends. Through Skype, I see them playing and joking around. It is so important to us."

"We are a company dedicated to using our software to enable the world's conversations and effect social change. Our partnership with UNHCR delivers on this mission in a most extraordinary way." Tony Bates, CEO, Skype

## Expanding applications

Given the popularity of the scheme among UNHCR staff and following a needs assessment, UNHCR, Skype and the Government of Luxembourg are now looking into the possibility of extending the use of Skype to staff located in non-hardship but remote areas. They are also contemplating the feasibility of rolling out Skype in staff guest houses in hardship posts as well as making the technology available to refugees and IDPs in designated camps.

Other humanitarian organisations, such as ICRC, are showing an interest in potential applications of Skype in the field. ICRC still relies heavily on pen and paper for its reunification work, for example, and for putting families in touch with detainees. In Kandahar in 2010, however, ICRC staff were able to put families in touch with detained family members via video calls, and are keen to expand this capacity using low-bandwidth Skype facilities. The Government of Luxembourg, which is also a long-term partner and donor of ICRC's, including of its protection activities, recently announced that it is contemplating a possible new joint partnership with ICRC and Skype to develop an appropriate platform to meet this need.

Further discussions are taking place between Skype and the Government of Luxembourg over a possible partnership within the framework of the recently launched Luxembourg-funded 'emergency.lu' project.<sup>1</sup> Emergency.lu is a satellite-based communication platform aiming to provide connectivity and coordination services to the humanitarian community both in disaster settings and in non-emergency humanitarian operations. This initiative is currently being implemented in close collaboration with the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster and will be operational in 2012. The improved connectivity to be provided by emergency.lu could well benefit and enhance future developments of the joint

Luxembourg-UNHCR-Skype partnership.

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1. <http://emergency.lu/> See also the article by Mariko Hall pp9-11.

## Open access to scholarly research

Elisa Mason

### Forced migration authors hold the key to enabling free and unfettered access to the full text of research articles.

Practitioners and policymakers have a wealth of research on forced migration at their disposal online: literature reviews, case studies, conference proceedings, working papers, government documents, policy briefs, unpublished reports, and much more. What they will not find in abundance – at least, not for free – are the final products of research, that is, articles published in scholarly journals. Price and permission barriers have effectively rendered research findings inaccessible to many of those who need them most.

Enter 'open access': digital online literature, free of charge and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions – in other words, without the price and permission barriers noted above.

Researchers can choose to publish in an open access journal; this mechanism does not charge readers or their institutions for access. The Directory of Open Access Journals currently indexes over 6,000 titles that are free, full-text, quality-controlled,

scientific and scholarly.<sup>1</sup> As of mid 2011, none of the existing established scholarly journals with an exclusive focus on forced migration is open access. However, in early 2011, the online *Journal of Internal Displacement* and student-edited *Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration* (OxMo) were both launched as open access.

Researchers who prefer to continue publishing with familiar journals in their field can opt for self-archiving. This involves depositing a copy of an article into an open access repository. There are two kinds of repositories: those that collect the research output of an individual institution and those that collect the research output on a certain subject area.<sup>2</sup> An author can either archive a 'preprint' (the version of an article that has been submitted to a journal for consideration) or a 'postprint' (the version of an article that has been accepted by a journal and has undergone peer review).

As regards copyright, most journal publishers already give permission to authors to archive their preprints and postprints ('e-prints').<sup>3</sup> If authors

do not self-archive, it is because they have not yet taken advantage of the opportunity to do so, rather than because of copyright restrictions.

By embracing open access and putting their research articles within the reach of those who will benefit from them the most, forced migration authors will achieve more impact. Their work will reach a wider and more diverse audience, and they will enjoy greater visibility, be cited more often and, most importantly, make a difference.

Elisa Mason (fminfotracker@gmail.com) is an information specialist who manages a blog, *Forced Migration Current Awareness*,<sup>4</sup> and a wiki, *Researching Forced Migration: A Guide to Reference and Information Sources*.<sup>5</sup>

A good starting point for authors and anyone else who wishes to know more about open access is the *Open Access Scholarly Information Sourcebook (OASIS)*, online at [www.openoasis.org](http://www.openoasis.org).

1. Directory of Open Access Journals [www.doaj.org](http://www.doaj.org).

2. See Directory of Open Access Repositories (openDOAR) at [www.opendoar.org](http://www.opendoar.org).

3. See RoMEO database at [www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/](http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/) for information on publishers' copyright policies regarding self-archiving.

4. <http://fm-cab.blogspot.com>

5. <http://forcedmigrationguide.pbworks.com>

# Remote visual evidence of displacement

Susan Wolfenbarger and Jessica Wyndham

**Geospatial technologies such as satellite imagery provide a means of 'reaching' a conflict zone when on-the-ground reporting may be too dangerous, a region too remote, or access denied.**

The visual evidence provided by satellite images and geovisualisation techniques can serve to corroborate and strengthen local reports of conflict, destruction and displacement. Geospatial technologies and techniques – which include a range of modern tools, such as satellite imagery, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) that allow for mapping and analysis – offer valuable tools for identifying, measuring, monitoring and documenting large-scale displacement, whether displacement caused by conflict, housing demolitions, natural disasters or development projects.

## Geospatial image analysis

In 2006, while preparing the indictment of Sudanese President Omar Bashir for war crimes and crimes against humanity, the International Criminal Court reviewed commercial high-resolution satellite imagery analysis of the Darfur region. For the purposes of identifying and measuring the impact of conflict and the scale of displacement, the most common approach is to analyse 'before' and 'after' image pairs. The American Association for the Advancement of Science's (AAAS) Geospatial Technologies for Human Rights Project<sup>1</sup> had documented the

destruction of villages in Darfur; in coordination with organisations conducting on-the-ground reporting, AAAS collected pairs of images for 28 locations with dates ranging from 2003 to 2007. Through a careful analysis of each image, it was evident that in 75% of cases villages had been destroyed or new IDP camps had been constructed. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that the villages had been destroyed specifically by burning, corroborating on-the-ground reports.

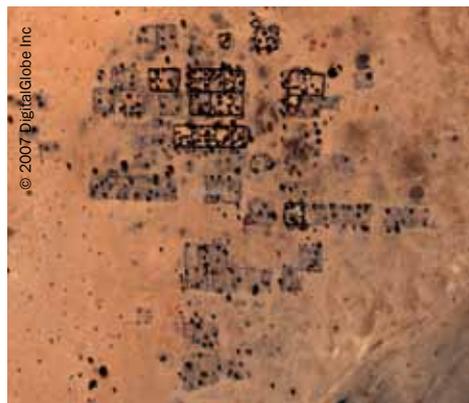
This analysis led to the development of 'Eyes on Darfur',<sup>2</sup> an interactive online site which included images identifying the location and extent of destruction in several villages, and was used by human rights organisations as evidence to support claims of genocide and to advocate for greater international government commitment to addressing the situation on the ground.

The creation of Eyes on Darfur was an early example of interactive data exploration, combining multiple layers of data (e.g. imagery, text and other multimedia elements) and presenting them in a mapped form. The ability to quickly manipulate large amounts of data and create displays in this way has only recently evolved with advances in GIS software and computing capacity.

In 2009, AAAS teamed with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to identify the locations and extent of damage to IDP shelters in Sri Lanka following reports that IDP camps were being targeted. As no outsiders were allowed access to the area during the timeframe in question, commercial high-resolution satellite imagery was one of the few options available for gathering information. They found that thousands of IDP shelters had been removed, and also that there was evidence of shelling in the vicinity of and intermingling with IDP settlements. This analysis informed the US government's 2009 report on war crimes in Sri Lanka.<sup>3</sup>

In 2011, AAAS again linked up with Amnesty International to construct a detailed map identifying numerous human rights-related events occurring throughout Nigeria, from armed conflict, ethnic violence and forced displacement, to the harmful effects of industrial gas flares on local populations and the environment. 'Eyes on Nigeria'<sup>4</sup> revealed the value of using geovisualisation techniques to communicate to the public complex human rights information gathered from a breadth of sources in a way that could not be achieved as effectively by a simple narrative. Among the sources used were remote sensing methods, on-the-ground photos (whose location could be specified through the use of GPS-enabled cameras) and interviews.

Reflecting on the value of these collaborative projects for Amnesty International, Crisis Prevention and Response Campaigner, Christoph Koettl says, "Having been a rather 'exotic' new tool a few years ago, geospatial technologies now belong in the standard tool box for human rights advocates – especially those who work on armed conflict situations. A good example



The 'before' image of Shangiil Tobay (left), in North Darfur, was taken 10 March 2003. The 'after' image (right) was taken 18 December 2006. During the intervening period, 75% of the village was identified as having been destroyed.

was our work during the final stage of Sri Lanka's civil war. While the conflict area in northeastern Sri Lanka was completely sealed off by the government, we were able to give virtual access to our activists and the public, thus supporting our campaigning for accountability for alleged war crimes. This would have been hardly imaginable without geospatial tools."

And the European Human Rights Advocacy Centre, in partnership with the Georgian Young Lawyers Association, relied on geospatial image analysis to document the destruction caused during the conflict between Russia and Georgia in August 2009. This information was presented to the European Court of Human Rights in a case arising from the conflict in South Ossetia.

Governments and humanitarian aid organisations are increasingly using satellite images to determine the scope of natural and man-made disasters, and to locate populations displaced by those disasters. Following both the earthquake in Haiti on 12 January 2010, and the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan on 11 March 2011, high-resolution satellite imagery was used to create large area assessments of damage and to locate populations displaced by the disasters through rapid mapping of the situations and the distribution of this information to disaster response teams.

"Freely available satellite information after the January earthquake in Haiti was invaluable," says Kate Chapman of Humanitarian Open Street Map. "Without having imagery it would have been impossible for OpenStreetMap to create the very detailed basemap used both by traditional responding agencies such as the UN as well as other technology communities."

### Limitations and prospects

High-resolution imagery ranges in price from US\$10 to US\$25 per km<sup>2</sup>, depending on how recently the image was acquired and whether the image is in colour or black and white. Minimum order sizes can even lead to single images costing up to US\$400. Even when cloud cover, for example, does not stop satellite imagery being available for a region, imagery for a specific date or series of dates in close succession may not be available. And government restrictions may mean that non-governmental actors cannot acquire the images.

Finally a human rights or humanitarian organisation wishing to use these tools must be prepared and able to work with technical experts who can analyse geospatial images for them when the requisite expertise is not available in-house.

A number of organisations are beginning to couple geospatial technologies with crowd-sourced information. Crowd-sourcing relies on the ability to call on networks of people, located around the world, and is greatly facilitated by the increasing availability of mobile phone and other wireless technology. Continued growth in mobile phone access, social networking and mapping technologies allows a comprehensive overview of a situation based on an aggregation of a large number of on-the-ground reports to be created. That information can then be combined with other data and mapped to build a holistic picture of what is occurring in a given location.

Providing tools of increasing utility not only to human rights organisations but also to courts and humanitarian response agencies, geospatial technology allows for unprecedented visual access to remote and dangerous locations,

enables experts to analyse and quantify levels of destruction, and provides the means to communicate otherwise complex and/or abstract information in a way that can prove powerful whether in advocacy campaigns, policy debates or litigation.

With the increasing availability of satellite imagery and innovative approaches to the collection, analysis and display of information, it will be vital for the community of scholars, organisations and advocates concerned with displacement to come together with the technology community to identify areas of current need for which geospatial technologies and techniques can provide increasingly vital input.

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This article was written in a personal capacity and does not reflect the views of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

See also 'Satellite imagery in use' by Einar Bjorgo, Francesco Pisano, Joshua Lyons and Holger Heisig (UNOSAT) in FMR31 [www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR31/72-73.pdf](http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR31/72-73.pdf)

1. <http://srhrl.aaas.org/geotech/>
2. [www.EyesOnDarfur.org](http://www.EyesOnDarfur.org)
3. [www.state.gov/documents/organization/131025.pdf](http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/131025.pdf)
4. [www.EyesOnNigeria.org](http://www.EyesOnNigeria.org)



This pair of images, taken on 19 February 2008 and 7 February 2010, reveals the location and extent of housing demolitions that took place along the waterfront in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, in 2009. The demolitions led to the almost total destruction of the Njamense slum which was estimated to house over 13,000 people.

# Web-based monitoring in an insecure environment

Andrew Harper

**UNHCR has developed Project Tracking and IDP databases for its work in Iraq in order to facilitate its operations at a lower risk to all stakeholders and to improve financial accountability, oversight and transparency.**

A major challenge for agencies operating in many conflict and post-conflict environments is the lack of regular access to displaced communities and project sites due to insecurity. In environments where the level of risk limits the ability to monitor, the options for humanitarian actors are normally either to reduce operations or accept the consequences of minimal oversight.

The objectives behind the development of the databases for Iraq included raising the visibility of the needs of the displaced in often remote and insecure locations through a tool that simultaneously improved planning, targetting and coordination of interventions and addressed donor and audit concerns about agencies' ability to monitor and evaluate in high-risk and often inaccessible locations. In effect, the Project Tracking Database reduces the amount of time that national and international staff need to spend on high-risk field visits while providing a live tool to run projects and assess their status.

From the outset we realised that the systems should be simple and relatively cheap and have an interactive interface to 'live' data over the internet. They should also be 'owned' as much as possible by the users so that dependence on consultants or software development companies was minimised (as well as cost) through in-house capacity building. On the technical side the security of data was a priority, so the web-based applications had multiple built-in safeguards for individual data. The software was developed in-house, with much of it pioneered by Iraqi colleagues, some of whom had themselves been displaced; the total for other costs was less than US\$50,000, most of which was for purchasing servers, cameras and other hardware.

The databases were designed to cover everything from initial needs assessment of groups of concern, justification, cost and expected time-frame for the intervention through to completion of the project. They not only collate a wealth of information and data but also provide a user-friendly platform where partners and staff can easily view the status of programme activity. Staff and partners can now proudly provide 'evidence' of their achievements in the most challenging locations, with the ultimate objective to permit donors and other stakeholders access to the non-sensitive aspects of the database.

Since its inception the system has progressed from a reporting platform to a tool which encompasses assessment information, implementation progress and a range of reports, for use by partners as well as UNHCR. It is also an archive for all relevant project documentation and as such has become an A-Z resource for all projects carried out in Iraq. The latest version now includes the capacity to track and verify the condition of assets and, by changing location data, it can easily be exported to other operations.

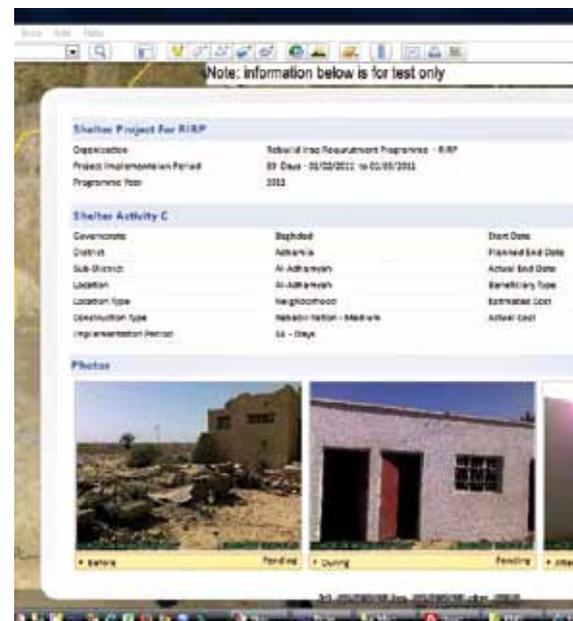
## Database contents

Given that much of the work in Iraq was being undertaken in areas that were still extremely insecure but where the needs remained great, the intention was to provide a degree of confidence that the commissioned activity had been undertaken by registering data on each and every shelter rehabilitated or constructed by UNHCR and its partners. Thus the Project Tracking Database requires the following information to be uploaded for all shelter assistance in Iraq:

- criteria for selection for assistance and demographics of beneficiary families

- scheduled and actual start and completion dates
- photos taken before start of work, during work, and on completion, with GPS (global positioning system) location embedded
- land title deed to resolve any future land disputes and/or to protect those who have benefitted from the intervention
- Bill of Quantities (BoQ) that supports financial verification, allows checking and comparison of input costs between contractors and locations, and automates searches for the cheapest and most reliable supplier by activity, sector and geographical location.

The provision of location-tagged photos not only enables recognition of the achievements of agencies working in difficult-to-access locations but also mitigates the potential for inflated claims in relation to the status or delivery time-line for an activity. Stakeholders can verify the GPS coordinates embedded in the photos against the location agreed to be assisted. Likewise, the date encrypted on the photos should be consistent with the agreed



time-frame for implementation and reduces the possibility of photos being taken of activities which are not consistent with what has been agreed, such as a contractor taking 100 photos of five different houses and stating that 100 houses were built. To enhance the accountability and ownership of the activity, the beneficiary would ultimately sign to confirm that the BoQ was consistent with what has been delivered.

As it is in the interests of the relevant staff or agency to demonstrate to other agencies, donors, authorities or their respective managers progress or improvements in the status of the project or activity, there is an incentive for reporting to be 'live', with stakeholders uploading new data rapidly. Stakeholders also have an incentive to upload 'evidence' of their activity as quickly as possible in order to facilitate the release of payments.

As soon as photos and related information are uploaded, the database extracts the GPS coordinates, registering these against each shelter, IDP camp or other location with a Google Earth interface. UNHCR provided GPS-enabled camera phones to partners – although sometimes the technology proved insufficiently robust for conditions in Iraq and in some areas GPS simply does not work well enough. As data is uploaded, the database automatically generates Google Earth views, summary reports with demographic and

geographic breakdowns, average prices based on BoQs, etc. Maps can also be generated, using almost any number of variables.

Following the successful roll-out of the Project Tracking Database, UNHCR developed an IDP camp database that details the number and location of settlements, the needs, the type of assistance required, and the date when assistance was provided. The database clearly demonstrates not only what has been delivered but also

the conditions of the settlements and the remaining needs.

#### Value added?

The roll-out of the system across Iraq has permitted UNHCR to have a high level of confidence in the location, time, date and cost of almost all activities undertaken, and has reduced the need for monitoring missions. The tracking systems do not, however, replace existing systems but aim to enhance and supplement existing monitoring and evaluation procedures. They were therefore initially viewed by partners as an additional reporting requirement, rather than as a replacement monitoring and reporting tool. Partners questioned its need – and the additional reporting burden – but as the system has developed, partners have come to better understand its value for them as well as for UNHCR and others.

The potential improvements in relation to mitigating fraud, limiting risk to staff undertaking field visits and enabling greater programme efficiency and effectiveness more than offset the limited additional costs, such as for data-inputting, which may be required.

At first it was a relatively cumbersome tool that was difficult to use with unreliable internet access. Partners struggled to input data into the system, in particular land deeds and photographs. As internet connectivity and staff skills improved, data uploading also improved. UNHCR field staff and programme staff also initially found it a difficult tool to work with. With the earlier version, for example, the onus was on the user to update their version of the database when changes were made to it centrally. The later version addresses such issues; updates are done automatically and the technology is more user-friendly and fairly self-explanatory.

Providing a visual image of the needs (such as in IDP camps) linked to Google Earth enhances community-based responses and allows stakeholders to review key information and determine priorities and responsibilities. A visual review via Google Earth of where agencies are working can also often illustrate geographical gaps

and any failure to connect what should be mutually reinforcing or coordinated programmes.

With access to a comprehensive overview of all the displaced sites, with supporting geo-tagged photographs, the previous anonymity of much of the humanitarian suffering in difficult-to-reach locations disappears. Having readily available data also greatly supports advocacy with donors, other agencies and concerned authorities. Such advocacy, based on 'proof' of conditions, has led to increased government support for settlements and in a number of cases has prevented the eviction of vulnerable populations. The system has also recently been recognised by the UN's Board of Auditors as a tool that enables "the verification and tracking of individual activities in insecure environments... and to use this case work to summarise progress, trends and variations within a programme."

This particular system grew up from the field and from an operation in which increased accountability for larger sums of funding and most importantly the beneficiaries was needed. These applications were developed based on the unique needs of the operation and in consultation with the end-users (field staff, implementing partner staff, programme staff, management, etc) which has certainly aided delivery of the product. Nevertheless, as it is a new technology, staff needed to be trained in its use; the very steep learning curve involved certainly had an impact on the time taken for development.

In developing these systems for Iraq we have incrementally addressed all the major issues arising but these initiatives will only truly be successful if and when they are replicated in other operations and implemented voluntarily by other agencies.

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# Phoning home

Linda Leung

**Simply having access to technology does not resolve the problem of communication between displaced people and their families.**

The telephone is the most critical piece of technology for resettled refugees' connection to family members in terms of availability and familiarity. However, it is not without challenges – such as the limited communication technology choices back 'home' and the costs involved.

Prompted by the paucity of studies that deal with the key role of telecommunications technologies in maintaining relationships between refugees and displaced family members abroad, researchers at the University of Technology Sydney decided to research refugees' and asylum seekers' use of communications technology across the contexts of displacement, detention and resettlement. The outcomes were published in 2009 in a report entitled *Technology's Refuge*.<sup>1</sup>

At a follow-up workshop,<sup>2</sup> refugees, advocates, international NGOs, resettlement services and researchers highlighted issues relating to the challenges of sustaining contact with displaced family members from the country of resettlement, in this case resettled refugees in Australia keeping in touch with displaced relatives in Africa. They also generated a multitude of recommendations and project ideas although the feasibility of these could not be assessed at the time.

While refugees resettled in Australia had many technology options open to them, they were constrained by the limited technologies that were accessible to those with whom they wanted to stay in contact. If telephone services were available, the quality of the landline or mobile coverage might be poor, and the cost to the user in Australia tended to be high. Technology choices were a negotiation between what worked best for the family members who were displaced, and what suited the person in Australia in terms of frequency and affordability.

In some areas of Africa, there is no telecommunications coverage. Workshop participants commented that where it does exist, phone connections are regularly cut off, and some of them had also experienced intrusion in communication such as crossed lines. The strength of the

a camp. She sent money to him to buy a phone but other people in the camp would also use it, leaving her often waiting for hours to get in touch.

Cheap options such as email, voice-over-internet or instant messaging may not be accessible or affordable, and access to the internet in Africa is very expensive. Furthermore, displaced family



Mbororo refugee children in Gbiti, Cameroon, play with their 'mobile phones'. The closest phone connection is almost 20 km away and the network is often down.

network signal overseas is weak, and the lack of a reliable or steady source of electricity in a recipient's country can be a major problem, although this varies by region. Growth of populations in some areas weakens network strength, due to the drain on power. Individuals may also have difficulty accessing electricity to charge their mobile phones.

## Matching technology to family

Finding the best technology to use for different family members can be difficult, particularly if they themselves are displaced, because of factors such as the variety of available services, whether the family member could afford them and whether they have the skills to use them. One participant observed that the majority of their family members overseas needed to access communication technology through others. One participant described the difficulties she had in contacting her husband in

members overseas may not know how to use these facilities.

Those who had resettled paid for most of the communication with relatives who were displaced or in refugee camps, usually by initiating and paying for calls to relatives. However, some people preferred to send relatives money so that they could phone Australia, as this was in some cases the cheaper option.

Communicating with family overseas was expensive for many resettled refugees, who had trouble identifying cheap and appropriate options for their particular region of Africa from among what they identified as too much choice in the telecommunications industry, as well as inconsistent service from the providers. Participants proposed that better accountability mechanisms for mobile phone and phone-card providers be

established through an appropriate regulatory body. Specifically, they called for a watchdog on phone card services, so that a minimum level of quality can be ensured.

Mobile phones or phone cards were the most commonly used means of communication, although this varied from region to region. Resettled refugees often utilised multiple service providers for different services in order to reduce costs – and it soon becomes common knowledge within the community if a particular service provider has a cheap option.

Training in communication technology for those in refugee camps as well as for those who have been resettled needs to incorporate information on the ways in which refugees can, in some situations, more cheaply contact family overseas, for example through the use of voice-over-internet or chat. Few newly arrived refugees know how to take advantage of these new communication technologies.

Participants suggested that an official source of up-to-date information about options for communicating with family overseas would be a helpful resource. Information could be sought from key people in the community, telecommunication service providers, and migrant organisations with market

and anecdotal knowledge. The information would need to be disseminated throughout refugee communities, possibly by appropriate community members, volunteers or workers.

Sponsorship for a website could be sought from telecommunications companies who have a presence in the African telecommunications market for providing resettled refugees with options for communicating with family members and friends living in Africa.

Another idea was that a social network ‘chat room’ could be set up to provide an online forum for refugees to discuss communication challenges and to identify the best options for communicating with family who are displaced or in refugee camps. Such an online interactive forum would help refugees avoid the pitfall of relying on out-of-date information. However, participants also noted that computer literacy in communities from Africa is low, and few people are likely to know how to use online social networks.

One particular fear among some refugees was that they will be traced by the government they had fled, and therefore they find it difficult to talk about “exactly what’s on the heart” with friends and family. There is strict scrutiny over communication into some countries, with phones being tapped.

## Conclusions

Workshop participants confirmed the observation of the report that refugees’ overall emotional well-being and capacity to settle are highly dependent on sustaining their communication networks with family members for knowledge and assurance of their whereabouts and safety. Communication technologies that enable refugees to find lost family, communicate with them, inform family and friends of their needs and receive financial assistance can act as a vital lifeline.

This process can be made easier by organisations providing orientation in communication technology products and services, as well as training in the use of those technologies. Organisations could also do this by facilitating informal networks within and between refugee communities. The telecommunications industry also has a role in providing consumer education, information and services suited to this market segment.

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1. Leung L, Finney Lamb C and Emrys L, *Technology’s Refuge: the Use of Technology by Asylum Seekers & Refugees*. 2009. Sydney: UTS ePress. Available at <http://utsescholarship.lib.uts.edu.au/dspace/handle/2100/928>

2. The report of the workshop is at [www.shopfront.uts.edu.au/news/images/Refugees\\_and\\_Communication\\_Technology.pdf](http://www.shopfront.uts.edu.au/news/images/Refugees_and_Communication_Technology.pdf)

# What Ushahidi can do to track displacement

Galya B Ruffer

**Ushahidi is an interactive mapping tool for use in crisis situations, which humanitarian workers can use to help them target assistance.**

Ushahidi, which means ‘testimony’ in Swahili, was initially a website with roots in the collaboration of Kenyan citizen journalists mapping reports of violence in Kenya after the elections at the beginning of 2008. It mapped incidents of violence and peace efforts throughout the country based on reports submitted via the internet and mobile phones. Ushahidi has since developed into a non-profit

technology company that specialises in developing free and open source software for information collection, visualisation and interactive mapping in order to “democratise information, increase transparency and lower the barriers for individuals to share their stories.”<sup>1</sup> Ushahidi has been used after the earthquake in Haiti and the floods in Pakistan, and is being used in North Africa.

In 2008 when Ushahidi mapping software was deployed in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), it was the first time that a population living in a crisis zone was invited to report incidents of violence to be collated into an online map. People on the ground could submit a report directly to the online map by either logging onto the website or sending a text directly to the site. After moderation by the Ushahidi team, the reports appeared on the website as incident data organised

into categories such as riots, looting or sexual assault, and type of actor. Someone viewing the map could look to see the overall clusters of violence across all categories or select a particular category in order to gain a sense of where the greatest incidence of that particular form of violence had occurred.

Getting this kind of technology to take hold locally in a place such as eastern DRC, however, faced some fundamental problems. The greatest challenge came from the overwhelming condition of displacement; living in camps, displaced to nearby villages or fleeing to towns, people on the run, fatigued and struggling to protect their families, have no time to file a report. Much of the violence was anyway taking place in remote villages cut off from any technology. In addition, there were language barriers, and the high value of information in a complicated conflict like that in DRC increased the likelihood of false information and corruption. Even if people had the ability to file a report, security concerns – a fear of being identified and targeted – would deter most.

### Making sense of data

While Ushahidi has not met its aspirations in DRC, the Center for Forced Migration Studies (CFMS) at Northwestern University in the US, which manages <http://drc.ushahidi.com/>,<sup>2</sup> is exploring the potential of Ushahidi's open-source mapping elsewhere in conjunction with data collection and academic research in order to track the patterns and causes of displacement and document the condition of displaced people.

Beyond serving as a resource in the protection of refugees' rights, open-source mapping has the potential to build local capacity to respond to crises that lead to displacement and to protect refugee populations. In DRC, for example, one can at least begin to better understand the connection between factors that contribute to displacement. There, data gathered through on-the-ground reporting of incidents by eyewitnesses, through third-party reports by NGOs, IGOs and media sources, and through academic research and other reports can be used to track the connection

between variables such as ongoing land disputes, mining operations, agricultural development projects, incidents of violence by various actors, and displacement. It can provide useful information regarding patterns and cycles of movement between villages or within the region. As an early warning system, it can be used to alert humanitarian workers that there might be population movement given certain conditions, and it can assist in monitoring the human rights of refugees and displaced populations.

In the expectation that displaced people will not necessarily submit an eye-witness report to Ushahidi, CFMS has been developing a protocol to collect third-party reports, relevant and reliable data and academic research that will allow for a multi-layered understanding of the origin, condition and contributing factors of displacement. This is currently unavailable through other mapping technologies yet can provide data in a visual format to enable users to see the relationships between circumstances and displacement.

### Challenges

The most basic challenge is data collection. The recent formation of the Commission for Population Movements led by OCHA to compare and consolidate data and the new Data Centre for IDPs run by UNOPS in DRC<sup>3</sup> will greatly improve knowledge about IDPs in DRC. However, before the data can become an effective source on Ushahidi, there needs to be a standardised methodology of data collection.

A particular problem of open-source mapping is that multiple first-hand reports of one incident can be submitted; the site must be effectively managed so that they do not appear as multiple incidents.

The problem of verifying the factual accuracy of a report is difficult, especially in remote regions, and requires building an on-the-ground trusted network of local NGOs. Although Ushahidi had been used successfully in Kenya to map reports of post-election violence, DRC presented a new challenge in that the Ushahidi team did not have established networks on the ground to either spread the

news about the new technology or verify incoming reports. They therefore created a new category of 'verified source' to differentiate these from reports coming into the system from unknown sources.

Although the problem of verification has not been resolved, CFMS has begun discussions with local NGOs and interested international organisations to address how best to build a network of local partners that can inform local populations about Ushahidi, provide resources such as internet connections, computers and satellite phones, and verify sources.

Although much of the local population is understandably still focused on survival, there is now a more developed network of local NGOs in the Kivus in DRC than there was in 2008-09 and, through training and education, local populations are now more aware of new technologies (although the problems of lack of electricity in remote villages, frequent electricity cuts even in cities and limited internet access persist). Since relaunching the Ushahidi DRC site, CFMS has been contacted by a number of organisations interested in collaborating or forming partnerships. Their main focuses are on using Ushahidi as an early warning system for sexual violence and in efforts at peacebuilding. There is no reason why these different objectives should not be compatible within Ushahidi.

Technology such as Ushahidi clearly has the capability to aggregate data on displaced populations. It is less clear, however, what the implications are of equipping local populations in situations of ongoing conflict with the ability to produce that knowledge in terms of their security. It is also not certain whether having access to more knowledge will better serve the protection and other interests of refugees and displaced populations.

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1. <http://www.ushahidi.com/>

2. Housed at the Buffett Center for International and Comparative Studies.

3. See 'The Data Centre for IDPs in North Kivu' by Laura Jacqueline Church at [www.fmreview.org/DRCongo/church.htm](http://www.fmreview.org/DRCongo/church.htm)

# Online connection for remittances

Naohiko Omata

**Internet cafés in refugee camps allow refugees to maintain and create networks for overseas remittances. For the many displaced people who rely on receiving money from family members or friends overseas for their daily needs, maintaining these ties is vital.**

In the Buduburam refugee settlement in Ghana, use of the internet has played an important role in retaining and sometimes even forging transnational connections for financial remittances from Western countries. In the settlement there are a few internet cafés run by Liberian refugee entrepreneurs which enhance refugees' access to remittances in two ways: firstly, by maintaining the refugees' existing remittance channels with members of the diaspora community and, secondly, by creating new remittance pipelines by linking refugees with philanthropic individuals in the West.

## Retaining ties by email and Skype

More than 50% of refugees interviewed in Buduburam have relatives and/or friends who either migrated on their own or were resettled to developed countries, particularly the US. These refugees make considerable efforts to keep in contact with those now living overseas. These 'maintenance' efforts have a clear and important implication for drawing financial assistance from abroad.

Having immediate relatives such as parents or siblings living abroad does not guarantee that a person will receive financial support; not all relatives are willing or financially able to remit money to those left behind. According to remittance recipients in Buduburam, contacting them only when they are in need of assistance would normally result in receiving the 'silent treatment' or even a reproachful refusal. Therefore, these refugees regularly come to internet cafés to email their potential remitters to keep them updated with settlement life and their future goals. For instance, if a refugee wants to go to a computer school and needs financial support, he or she must announce their academic ambition in advance to 'pave the way' before they actually ask for a remittance from their relatives.

After they receive money, their maintenance efforts continue. In addition to sending a thank-you email to remitters, refugees often email some material evidence to show that they have used the money appropriately. For instance, one Liberian man emailed a scanned copy of his high-school grade report to his sister who had funded his education. This is a common scene in the internet cafés in Buduburam.

International phone calls between Africa and the US, especially when both speakers are using mobile phones, can be expensive for refugees (and their relatives abroad). Sending emails and chatting through Skype using the internet cafés are therefore the preferred means of communication.

## Networking to create new links

Despite the peace in Liberia and the dwindling assistance from UNHCR and other international aid organisations, many Liberian refugees are not prepared to return to the precarious economic situation in Liberia and have chosen to remain in the settlement even without assistance. Those who do not have access to family remittances, particularly young people with computer knowledge, seek financial help via internet sponsorship from people they have never met. This is one of the leading (economic) activities for young Liberians in the settlement and the major reason why the internet cafés are crowded. They register themselves with friend-searching websites and place their own profile within these networks. Once they make 'friends' through these websites, they will describe their lamentable situation. With perseverance and some luck, some Liberian refugees succeed in obtaining material and financial assistance from these online friends.

For instance, a male former unaccompanied minor got connected

with an Australian individual sponsor who sympathised with his tough living conditions and was willing to support him in improving his basic literacy. A Liberian war-widow in the settlement was linked with a Nordic man who not only financially assisted her and her children but also later visited her in Ghana and became her formal partner. The influx of remittances has not only improved the living standards of recipients but also benefitted other refugees in the settlement because the money received is often redistributed to other refugees.

In the settlement, there are some Liberians who derive an income by helping other refugees without IT skills to set up their profiles in friend-searching websites. They register them with multiple networking websites and tell them how to write an initial email and how to forge trust with these potential sponsors. They then receive a commission from their clients if they are successful in getting external support.

It would be too simplistic to consider these activities to be a form of internet scamming by refugees. While there are some cases of internet fraud, most refugees have been posting only genuine information about themselves on these friend-searching websites. According to a refugee who teaches these networking skills, users of these websites are nowadays increasingly cautious about internet frauds and few people are taken in by untrue stories. Also, it is well known that some of the individual philanthropists visit the settlement to see the person with whom they have been communicating before providing any substantial support.

## Recommendations

Some refugee-assisting organisations see the practice of using communications technology for forging and retaining remittance channels as a symptom of increasing aid dependency in this refugee community. However, these activities should rather be seen

as part of refugees' resilience – a coping strategy in their inauspicious economic environment where they face a declining level of international aid and local restrictions on their livelihood activities. In the face of these challenges, refugees are fully aware of the significance of overseas networks for remittance support.

Organisations that support refugees should recognise the value to refugees of communication with the diaspora and more particularly with possible helpers abroad, and should:

- create enabling facilities for refugees to access internet services cheaply as a means of keeping ties with the diaspora
- help improve refugees' IT skills as part of skills training programmes since computer knowledge is now a part of basic literacy
- consider the potential of matching philanthropic individuals with refugee groups or projects, so that donors can see the impact of their support more vividly
- not treat refugees' searches for sponsors through the internet as a criminal activity
- teach refugees about internet risk (including potential exposure to human trafficking rings).

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## How displaced communities use technology to access financial services

Abdirashid Duale

**As drought forces hundreds of thousands of Somalis to flee to Kenya and Ethiopia or to displaced camps within Somali territories, providing financial services might not seem an immediate priority. However, these services are a lifeline for millions of people, including those displaced by drought, civil war and political unrest.**

Technology has some but not all the answers to the many problems associated with poverty and displacement. However, amongst the internally displaced Somali population of more than two million, and the hundreds of thousands of refugees in Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti, people are beginning to have access to basic banking services. This is due in part to their use of remittance enterprises that they trust as a reliable and well-established way of receiving and sending cash.

Somalia's telecoms sector is one of the most competitive in the world, with a growing number of licensed companies operating there, including Dahabshiil's Somtel. The mobile telecoms industry in particular has been the focus of continuous investment since the mid-90s, and has become a beacon of commercial success in the country. Demand for services is high but stiff competition between operators has limited price increases. The technology is up to date and reliable, and the signal is one of the clearest in Africa.

As a result, mobile phones have become part of everyday life in the Somali regions for many different groups. Handsets are often shared between three or more people, so the number of regular users of mobile services is much higher than the number of subscriptions. Reliable estimates are that 70% of families have at least one mobile phone, and that more than 1.5 million people in Somalia have access to mobile services. Of the Somalis who have fled the country, around two million are estimated to be using mobile phones to communicate with those they have left behind.

Dahabshiil was founded in 1970 in what was then northern Somalia by my father, Mohamed Said Duale. It was initially a general trading business but gradually became centred around the handling of remittances sent into the country by migrant workers in the Middle East. In 1988, as fighting swept through our region, hundreds of thousands of Somalis walked through the bush to refugee camps

in Ethiopia, Kenya and elsewhere. Many eventually ended up living as refugees in all corners of the world.

During this time of mass displacement, my father saw that people desperately needed a way of receiving help from their families and friends in the diaspora. He drew on his overseas network of contacts to re-establish his business offering remittance and other services to refugees. Operating in a war-torn region was very risky but the business grew in line with the steadily increasing numbers of people in the camps and in the diaspora.

At the start, our business was a rudimentary but practical outfit. It not only delivered money but also food and other items to people in the camps and elsewhere. We gave people the option either of receiving cash from their relatives abroad, or we would transform the cash remittances into food or other items that they told us they needed.

Somalia's national banking, postal and telecommunication systems had collapsed during the civil war. People were desperate to keep in touch, especially because there was so much violence and displacement. My father devised ways for Somalis to trace and

communicate with lost and displaced relatives and friends. He started to deliver by hand letters and tape cassettes with recorded messages on them to displaced people. He did this at the same time as he delivered remittances. In this way, people in the diaspora discovered that their relatives were still alive, where they were and what they needed.

There are, sadly, many parallels between those years and the situation of today but innovations in the way we deliver financial services can and will make a difference. Dahabshiil customers already have access to a web-based tracking facility, and receive SMS notifications of their financial transactions. Customer feedback and communication have been revolutionised by the developments in technology over the years. Although Somalis in remote regions still use HF radio, others use the most modern forms of communication, like smartphones, Facebook and Twitter, and everything in between. Our debit card helps promote a cashless society, something of vital importance in a region beset by insecurity, and our telecommunication company offers a 3G mobile phone service, broadband internet and mobile banking.

We remain committed, however, to our original aim of providing

services to remote areas in difficult situations. Where appropriate, we use the traditional Somali clan system, especially for the verification of clients, and we combine this with modern SMS, internet and mobile technology to track down recipients in refugee camps and other normally inaccessible locations.

In the same way that Dahabshiil has provided a lifeline to Somali refugees, it has also become popular with other displaced communities, including South Sudanese, Rwandans, Ugandans and Yemenis. We now attract customers from all over the world, including international aid agencies who work with displaced communities; we facilitate these agencies' cash flows and other requirements so that they can assist the displaced. And Dahabshiil itself has donated millions of dollars to needy communities through its Corporate Social Responsibility programmes.

Those in need who receive cash transfers appreciate the degree of independence and dignity that such assistance offers them when compared to food or material donations. From the donors' point of view, lower administrative costs and reduced risks associated with handling hard cash are among the factors that make innovations

in money transfer so attractive. I believe such advances can be made to suit the interests of all community stakeholders in countries struggling with poverty and displacement – including private companies, governments and NGOs.

Apart from enabling Somalis to send and receive essential remittances and to communicate with each other nationally and globally, Dahabshiil also provides employment for thousands of refugees and migrants all over the world, without discriminating along clan lines, nationality or background.

In the end we see Dahabshiil not only in commercial terms but as what we hope is a helpful and essential part of the Somali community. For many people in the region, the remittances they receive from relatives in the diaspora are their main source of livelihood. We are able to help them, including the millions of displaced, by keeping up with and implementing the latest developments in technology.

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Somali refugee children, Ifo camp in Dadaab, Kenya.



## GBV data collection and sharing

Kristy Crabtree

While information can attest to the severity of need and call people to action, it can also be collected, stored and shared in a way that violates safety and ethical standards for data collection. These challenges are particularly acute when it involves survivors of gender-based violence. Not only is survivor consent often missing in the data collection process but identifying details about the survivor and service provider are also often shared.

To meet the demand for data while protecting survivors and service providers, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), UNFPA and UNHCR collaborated to create a data management system that would enable service providers to safely and ethically collect, store, analyse and share data on reported incidents of gender-based violence. This inter-agency initiative is known as the Gender Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS). With the help of a consent form, the system emphasises survivors' control of their information beginning with the initial client meeting.

The GBVIMS also provides a mechanism for service providers to share compiled data in a safe and ethical manner through the development of an information sharing protocol that clarifies what data will be shared, with whom, and for what purpose.

Taking into consideration the resources available in humanitarian settings, the GBVIMS was developed to employ simple, long-existing technology. By using Excel as the hub of the system, instead of an elaborate database, the technology can be more easily utilised in the field, in particular in settings where there is infrequent access to the internet and computer skills may be basic. Utilising simple resources such as Excel ensures the system's sustainability even with staff turnover. Furthermore, to accommodate the need that some offices have to transfer files between locations, IRC developed a carbon copy data intake form that allows

the safe transfer of paper files, removing all identifying information but still allowing for data entry.

The challenge ahead is to ensure the systematic uptake of the GBVIMS that will allow the humanitarian community to establish new norms for client protection and generate valuable information.

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## Disabled persons database after Pakistan floods

Niaz Ullah Khan

During the rescue and rehabilitation phases following the 2010 Pakistan floods, Sightsavers and its partners knew that certain groups of marginalised people, such as people with disabilities and older persons,<sup>1</sup> would be at greater risk of neglect. In response to this, Sightsavers supported one of its partner organisations, STEP (a disabled persons' organisation), to establish the Information Resource Center on Disability (IRCD) as a point for information sharing and dissemination for the two districts of Nowshera and Charsaddah.

This comprises a computerised database which is connected to STEP's online web portal and linked with the central crisis centre of the Red Crescent Society of Pakistan. The database includes the national identity card number of every person with a disability on the database and can also provide a detailed



STEP team members collect information from affected PWDs.

profile, including the nature of their disability and their location, of the person and his or her family if required. The use of this database has proved very helpful for identification of people with disabilities and in providing a coordinated service for disseminating information to these people and their families regarding food distribution systems, medical outreach services, distribution of cash and food grants, cash-for-work programmes suitable for people with disabilities and so on.

STEP used the information received through the IRCD to provide technical advice to the WASH and Shelter clusters in terms of making their services more accessible for all – in particular for people with disabilities and older persons.

In the future, STEP and Sightsavers will be able to utilise the IRCD as a resource centre for building the capacities of these people with disabilities, such as getting them organised in the form of Displaced Persons' Organisations, making them aware of different career and educational opportunities and getting them connected with other relevant like-minded organisations working for promoting their rights. The IRCD is already enabling marginalised and vulnerable groups who cannot raise their voice during the aftermath of natural disasters and emergencies to be heard.

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1. See FMR 35 on 'Disability and displacement' at [www.fmreview.org/disability/](http://www.fmreview.org/disability/)

## From the local community in Colombia into cyberspace

Juan David Gómez-Quintero

New technologies of communication allow new types of action and partnership between social movements in Colombia and international NGOs, who support them in claiming their rights or in denouncing abuses. International cooperation and advocacy have allowed the suffering of victims

to be seen by the outside world and have led to justice being done and reparations being made.

The growth of globalised means of communication allows the global accompaniment of communities affected by violence. Peasant communities displaced by violence, for example, are enabled to become visible outside, while they have always been rendered invisible within their state borders. Information and communications technology has turned the local into the global.

The ability to take collective action without being physically present in the same place has transformed solidarity, assistance and cooperation programmes, through blogs, online campaigns, etc. Online records of abuses of rights, or of the numbers of people displaced by conflict, are an extremely valuable resource. But information technology does not automatically give visibility to excluded groups – it also requires the existence of social networks and the ability to create the technical infrastructure for organisations to be able to participate in the virtual spaces.

Grass-roots organisations in remote areas of Colombia, such as in Chocó in western Colombia (home to a large Afro-Colombian population), have created and strengthened means of communication with Spanish counterparts. Organisations in Spain then forward reports of abuses to the appropriate authorities of both governments. This kind of networking is proving useful in preventing or denouncing human rights violations – although one consequence of their success is that armed actors have begun to target those means of communication that connect local organisations and communities with the outside world.

“In Pereira, the riot police weren’t letting people enter [the town], they were shooting and threatening women and children, one person was killed... So I phoned the Belgian Embassy, the Spanish Embassy, all the NGOs in Zaragoza that I knew, saying that people were being attacked... and please would they protest, please would they contact the Provincial Governor.

The NGOs and Embassies made phone calls, wrote messages, sent reports to the Governor. The fact that it was people from the international community contacting him had a real impact on the Governor...” (Spanish aid worker)

According to both Spanish and Colombian NGOs, the support of European activist NGOs has a positive effect for vulnerable communities, and a deep impact on both civil and military authorities in Colombia. This is a political strategy to make visible and denounce in the outside world violations of human rights, particularly where there is armed conflict. The virtual spaces within which this happens are flexible, adaptable and immediate across local, national and global spaces.

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## Mobile phones used for public health surveillance

Kebede Deribe

In Darfur, the Ministry of Health, WHO and partners have developed a mobile phone-based infectious disease surveillance system designed for use where resources and facilities may be limited. Traditional pen-and-paper methods of disease reporting are not efficient or practical in complex emergencies in developing countries. Instead, reporting formats can be provided on mobile phones, making it easy for health providers to enter data and send reports. Such a system will help reduce errors, decrease the time used in reporting and facilitate compliance with reporting schedules.

An early warning system has been established in 103 health facilities across South Darfur with over ten diseases to be reported on a weekly basis and four diseases reportable on a daily basis. The health facilities were equipped with mobile phones; after having been briefed on the use of short text messages, the health providers send a short daily text

message to the focal points, including zero reports.

There are some challenges. Despite recent improvements, not all areas have mobile network coverage, resulting in an incomplete picture of the health situation. However, combining the mobile phone service with a paper-based reporting system in areas where there is no network access gave good coverage. The use of satellite phones in areas off the network would help to strengthen the system further. Even in areas where the network is working, there is a shortage of electricity supply to recharge the batteries; future interventions should consider the use of mobile phones with a silicon solar panel embedded into the shell of the phone.

Whenever possible mobile phones with geographic information system (GIS) capacity should be used. The reporting system can be programmed to automatically generate coordinated data for each text message, which could help to track the disease reported with more specified locations.

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## Community Technology Access project

Daniela Ionita

In today’s world, ‘protection’ cannot be complete without access to technology. We must use new tools and technologies to empower refugees, given the importance of the internet, social media and distance learning. In recognition of this, UNHCR is striving to ensure that access to technology – primarily, the internet, mobile phones and solar lights – is strongly incorporated into its protection and operations model.

Since 2010 UNHCR has opened 31 Community Technology Access (CTA) centres for refugees and IDPs both in urban areas and in remote field locations in 13 countries in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. Some 10 additional centres will



Community Technology Access (CTA) programme, Georgia.

open later in 2011, including in Sudan, Nepal, Kenya, India, Malaysia, Republic of Moldova and Costa Rica. CTAs provide access to the internet even in the remotest settings to connect communities, families and individuals, to provide distance learning and livelihoods opportunities and to raise awareness of rights.

In Armenia, Ramella took part in the CTA programme and has now found employment teaching basic computer skills to children at a school in the neighbouring village. In Georgia, Mari, who fled her home in South Ossetia in 2008, enrolled in a CTA course: "I was an accountant but not IT-literate and couldn't find a job. Now I have a job as a cashier."

In Kiziba camp in Rwanda, some 145 teachers are learning basic computer skills at the centre during school holidays. And in Kenya's Kakuma camp, Somali refugee Suad uses the computers in Kakuma's CTA to "research specific problems affecting my immediate community in order to work on a plan to solve the problem – for example conducting research on why the rate of the girls' enrolment in schools is very low in our community." Suad also follows courses in an American university via the internet.

As with other projects, CTAs may be affected by operational problems such as limited financial resources or restrictive state policies (for example, limited or lack of access to internet and new technologies) but they can at least help remove geographical restrictions and barriers to education, job creation and family reunification.

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## Android phones for mosquito net surveys

Sarah Hoibak and Marian Schilperoord

UNHCR has been investigating collecting data using smartphone technology for many areas of its operations such as site assessments and refugee profiling. In 2010 it carried out a pilot to assess the advantages and disadvantages – including feasibility, cost, time and human resources – of using mobile phones compared to existing paper-based data collection for a mosquito net coverage survey in Dadaab in Kenya.

The available applications ('apps') for Android phones<sup>1</sup> allow the collection of a variety of data types: audio, GPS, image, video and barcode. Uploading and saving the data records were done easily and the data collected were validated and saved in a convertible format that could be analysed in standard statistical software – epiinfo, STATA, SPSS. The phone offered additional features for validation of data that are not found in paper surveys: a) the surveys recorded the time of data entry; b) households visited were tagged with GPS coordinates; and c) photos of mosquito nets showed that a net was actually present.

The time to complete the data collection was significantly reduced using the phones and the phone technology eliminated the additional days required for data entry, data cleaning and shipment of data sets. With a faster implementation of the survey and the elimination of data entry, the phone method is less reliant on human resources, though a direct comparison of the quality of the data by comparing paper and mobile technology at the same household would be worth making.



Ifo camp, Dadaab, Kenya.

The cost comparison – not including the costs involved in or preparation – was not unfavourable. Start up costs for surveys were US\$3,578 for paper and \$1,363 plus \$3,928 for purchase of the phones for Android. Assuming that all items for the paper-based survey would need to be procured again for a second round but not the phones, this would show an overall combined cost savings in two rounds of surveys of \$501 for the Android phones over paper surveys. For every subsequent survey the cost savings for smartphone use would increase, although their lifespan is assumed to be approximately 18 months of field use before they require replacement. It is also important to consider and budget for spare parts and repairs.

There was overwhelming support for the use of the mobile phones in Dadaab, from both the interviewers and the UNHCR staff, for providing timely data to make decisions with. Besides the other advantages, interviewers found the use of phones less cumbersome than paper surveys and less prone to losing data, and the format helped them to follow the questions in order.

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1. An open source mobile smartphone technology.

## Refugees enjoy freedom to surf

Angella Nabwowe-Kasule

The Refugee Law Project (RLP) in Uganda has set up an internet café to enable refugees in Uganda to link up with family and friends back home and those resettled to other countries, to help them to keep in touch with conditions in their countries of origin, as well as to allow free access to the world-wide web more generally.

Made possible through the generosity of friends of the RLP, the project was launched in July 2009 and is housed in the RLP's Information Centre. The café is open 9am-5pm Monday-Friday. It works on a 'first come, first served' basis to avoid argument, and



each user is allowed a maximum of 40 minutes on a computer.

The café has seen ever increasing usage, with refugees coming to prepare all kinds of documents, type application letters and their curriculum vitae, and read news online about their countries of origin. On average, 25 clients use the free internet access point daily. As female clients are unfortunately still scarce, with an average of four women a week, efforts are being made to encourage more women to use the facility.

Future plans for the café include a dedicated space (separate from the Information Centre), the provision of short courses in basic use of the internet, and linking to the Refugees United web-based programme designed to help refugees locate missing or lost relatives through the internet.<sup>1</sup>

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1. See article by Galya Ruffer pp20-1.

## Satellite phones help rescue of refugees

Virginia Signorini

The first phone call came at 04.30 in the morning one day in 2006. It was summer – usually the most intensive period of migrants' landings on the Italian coasts. They were in trouble out at sea in the Mediterranean and were calling for help. The Eritrean woman who received the call, and who had migrated to Italy some years before, had no idea how these people could have got her phone number. Despite the possibility of it being considered as aiding and abetting illegal immigration, she immediately called the local police and informed

them about what was happening. They contacted the coastguards who then ensured that the boat reached safety on the island of Lampedusa. After this event she kept on receiving phone calls from migrants at sea and the coastguards always responded. The last time she was contacted for help was in November 2009 but this time the boat never arrived.

Mussie Zerai, an Eritrean priest living in Rome, has received similar phone calls. The migrants contacting him were initially Ethiopians and Eritreans living in Italy but from 2002 he started receiving phone calls directly from the boats crossing the sea. Despite telephones generally not being trusted for confidential communication by Eritreans, they are fundamental for the Eritrean diaspora in moments of emergency. In late 2010 Mussie Zerai started receiving calls from refugees living in Europe whose migrating family members had been kidnapped in the Sinai area and who were being asked for up to US\$8,000 dollars per person in ransom. Those being blackmailed gave him their relatives' phone numbers and he was able to talk directly to the kidnapped migrants. Armed with their first-hand accounts, Father Mussie has not only been supporting the relatives but has also been campaigning through his organisation, Habeshia Agency (<http://habeshia.blogspot.com>) to get the European Union and other organisations to create 'humanitarian corridors' and increase provision of resettlement to help avoid more refugees taking such risks.

Virginia Signorini (virginia.signorini@yahoo.it) has worked since 2005 as a social worker within Italy's System of Protection for Asylum Seekers and Refugees ([www.serviziocentrale.it](http://www.serviziocentrale.it)). She is a PhD student at the University of Trieste.



Three people died on this boat, which ran aground on Lampedusa after the journey from Libya. May 2011.

## The networking Tibetan diaspora

Emma Tobin

Since the internet first came to Dharamsala – capital of the Tibetan exile community in India – in the late 1990s, Tibetan exiles have forged an active online community, with Tibetan 'netizens' hailing from around the world. In a period of just over ten years, Tibetan exiles have created a heavily-used network of discussion boards, chat rooms, blogs and more. As a result, Tibetans in Australia stay informed on Tibetan government-in-exile politics, people from the same village in Tibet can reconnect in Taiwan, college students in South India can chat with counterparts in New York... In essence, the Tibetan exile community online is a prime example of the growing phenomenon of what has been deemed the 'digital diaspora'.

The internet has become increasingly important in the lives of many refugees but not all diasporic networks are as well established as the Tibetans'. In many ways, the Tibetan exile digital network is both a result and an illustration of what the 150,000 Tibetan exiles have achieved in the 'real world': the maintenance of a collective community, even after fifty years of exile.

The exile community has limited contact with the six million Tibetans in Tibet, who are largely cut off from the activities of the exiled government. However, in recent years, digital technology has allowed for increased connection between the two groups. In 2008, when protests erupted all over Tibet in response to the Beijing Summer Olympics, Tibetan exile activists and journalists relied on mobile phones and the internet for information that was then distributed throughout the exile community, and the world; in periods of calm, Tibetan exiles stay connected to their families and friends via Skype and other technologies. Security risks for Tibetans in Tibet itself remain high, however, and communication is still limited.

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# Making online connections

Jennifer Flemming

**Internet-based technologies are changing the way refugees are able to remain connected to their origins while adjusting to life in a new country.**

Nearly 75,000 refugees were resettled in the United States in 2009. Volunteer resettlement agencies across the country offer extensive support services to help refugees settle into US society – such as English and job-training classes, social and community events, and youth programmes.

The use of computers is often central to these activities – as a tool in the basic skills that refugees may need in seeking employment and in acquiring language skills but most importantly the internet allows them to stay connected to their past. In the US, computers with internet access are available at local libraries and in most resettlement agencies. Social networks and the information readily available via the internet provide the opportunity for individuals to connect to people and places around the world, even those which have not until recently become ‘connected’.

There appears to have been little research documenting the effects of internet-based technologies in the resettlement process but countless personal stories from refugees highlight the efficacy of such tools in contributing to effective adjustment. These stories provide a framework which further research should build upon in establishing the use of internet and social technologies in the resettlement process.

A Nepali refugee, aged 62, had rarely used a computer before resettlement in the US. “It was difficult, a confusing new thing to learn,” he says. Upon settling into his new life in Colorado, his 12-year old daughter taught him the basics. Each day, he reads the local news from back home on the internet. “I feel so far from home, from everything I have known. If I can read the news from home, a little piece of my old life is still alive and not lost forever. It makes me happier and less lonely.”

The psychological impact of displacement has been well-documented. A common coping mechanism for resettled refugees, according to much research in this area, is the suppression of the past, yet this strategy of adaptation is often both short-lived and ineffective. In fact, the ability to continue to feel connected to one’s roots, and to forge a new though uncertain future while retaining the stability and foundation of past life, eases the transition for many refugees. Checking the news from home, remaining in regular and immediate contact with loved ones, communicating with resettled refugees in other parts of the world... these simple actions, made possible by modern technologies, are changing the manner in which refugees cope with resettlement.

Two young refugee women from the Congo, both aged 19, had access to computers in their refugee camp in Zambia. “We learned English on the computers and practised typing,” one says. “We emailed our friends in other camps and our family members who had already been resettled. We heard their stories and knew what to expect. It made moving to the US a lot easier, and we knew we could stay in touch with our friends from home.”

Many younger refugees have often been using the internet socially for years; however, people resettled from more remote areas of South Asia and Africa have often never used a computer before and the task of learning this new technology is daunting.

International programmes specifically designed for refugee populations have emerged in recent years, often with a creative take on the potential value of social networking. Refugees United, for example, offers online profiles similar to Facebook, where refugees can search for lost family members.<sup>1</sup> Innovative approaches

An Iraqi refugee, aged 43, is the mother of two girls, aged 14 and 16. “They love the internet, always on Facebook or Gmail chat,” she says. “At first, I knew they were using it to stay connected with old friends. I knew this was good for their mental health but I worried that they would not make new friends here in the US.” “But it makes it easier to make friends here, too,” says one of her daughters. “Kids here, they see that we are on Facebook and we have lots of friends and enjoy lots of activities. They realise we have something in common, and we become friends online. I am shy and nervous at school, and this is a good way to start friendships.”

to social technology offer new and exciting opportunities for those being resettled but refugees do not necessarily require sophisticated technological tools; the simple acquisition of an email address can offer the invaluable ability to stay connected.

Technology certainly changes the process of resettlement for thousands of refugees worldwide each year. Further exploration of its impact, uses and access issues would help resettlement assistance programmes to provide and improve specific services for refugees adapting to a new life.

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1. [www.refunite.org/](http://www.refunite.org/) See article on pp37-38.



Young Iraqi refugees in their rented home in Trnava, Slovakia.

# The role of technology in family tracing in Kenya

Lucy Kiama, Christopher Mikkelsen, Caroline Njeri and Mikkel Hansen

**Capitalising on the spread of mobile phones and the internet, new digital tools can help refugees trace missing family members. Security of data is a vital aspect of any such tools.**

A new initiative allows refugees and NGOs to register a search for missing loved ones through internet-enabled mobile phones or the internet, and tools for smartphones are currently being developed. These tools mean that basically any phone anywhere can be used to submit data on separated families and help them reconnect. Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK), in partnership with Refugees United (RU), has rolled out the tracing project – known as the Refugees United Project (RUP) – through its three offices in Nairobi, Kakuma and Dadaab.<sup>1</sup>

## How it works

Refugee families are often separated as they flee across borders to different countries and continents. Attempts to heal the distress refugees undergo are pivotal in pursuance of key universal rights, such as the right to enjoy community and the right to family life.

An RCK/RU assessment had established that 80% of respondents wanted to trace a loved one and that refugees within Nairobi, Dadaab and Kakuma had difficulties tracing and reconnecting with one another. During the twelve months of operation since its launch in July 2010, over 46,000 refugees in Kenya registered with the RUP (slightly more than half of all the clients that RCK served within the same period).

The success of this project is dependent on the size of the RUP database. RCK has stepped up its RUP awareness and sensitisation initiatives, hoping to bring information about the service to all refugees in Kenya and other parts of the world through RU's growing partner network using web- and non-web-based activities to expand tracing services in East and North Africa, Western Europe and the US.

Using any of the available platforms (mobile browser, internet, Android), refugees register their search in a globally promoted database, designed (with security in mind) to hold only what the refugee in question is willing to disclose. Refugees may expand their basic 'profile' to include specific information deemed recognisable only to family and friends, such as nicknames, physical descriptions and shared moments and/or secrets, coupled with a birth village, a preacher's or teacher's name, the place where they had last been with family, etc. Many refugees choose to sign up with their full name but not to disclose their physical whereabouts.

Once they have created their profile with as much or as little data about themselves as they feel comfortable making publicly available, each refugee can then search for family and friends by name, age, gender and other information. The personal information in a profile allows the refugee to distinguish between people with similar names and actual family members. After finding someone who might be a family member, messages can be exchanged to confirm the identity of the two parties. Refugees can send each other messages within the site using the RU platform itself and thus do not need to have an email account or a mobile phone, although having such tools does increase the user friendliness of the system.

## Security

RUP attempts to maintain a secure database, and does not store information about location, beyond the country of the refugees using the system. Access to the database is granted through a software interface to selected partners (such as Ericsson, the mobile phone company with which the mobile tools were developed). The

rules governing use of RUP are transparent and refugees are at all stages informed about the nature of the programme, and where their information is held and displayed.

Much lies in the education of the users so that even people with only a basic understanding of technology can make educated decisions about how to use the platform. RCK conducts workshops and community awareness forums in both refugee camps and urban settings for people to understand how the platform works and to have their questions answered. At these forums staff carry laptops and offline registration forms to register those who are interested. Once registered they are able to visit the RU platform to see if there are others looking for them or to upload more details to increase their chances of finding their loved ones. It is emphasised that those refugees with serious security concerns should not register themselves on the RU site and this is also on the FAQs page on the RU website. Refugees who feel that being on the website will put them at risk will not register.

Some choose to register with a 'changed' name to safeguard against future identification by persons interested in tracing them with malicious intent. The possibility of remaining anonymous on the platform makes it easy for a refugee to stay hidden from view. Some refugees are concerned that their governments or other actors may use the facility to jeopardise their security or seek to repatriate them. Some fear that various political or armed groups may try to recruit them. So people often choose to give their name but not disclose their physical location, making such recruitment very difficult.

Some refugees, especially those without valid identification documents, are unwilling to sign up for fear of being exposed to the authorities. The potential for anonymity in the service – allowing



refugees to provide as little or as much information as they are comfortable with – is still something that needs to be better communicated.

RU informs refugees throughout the process of signing up what the organisation provides and does not provide. Namely, if people are contacting you with offers of assistance, employment or other 'benefits', it is a scam and should

be reported to RU. RU utilises its own encrypted messaging system internal to the site, where refugees can be guided through the process of responding to messages.

The platform should be considered as supplementary to other existing tracing methodologies and activities. RU also stresses that the tracing project is not meant to cover all refugee groups. If signing up could

potentially place a refugee or family in any form of danger, people are strongly advised not to sign up.

There have been some teething problems. Most refugees have mobile phones but the majority of their handsets are not WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) enabled. A planned text service is yet to be implemented in Kenya.

The Refugees United Project is currently being rolled out across other parts of East Africa, with UNHCR testing the service in northern Uganda and various entities working with the platform in North Africa. More than 4,500 new refugees are coming on board every month.

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1. The project is supported by the Kenyan Department of Refugee Affairs, UNHCR, the Kenya Red Cross Society and Ericsson.

#### A success story

In 1991 Ahmed Hassan Osman\* fled the conflict in Somalia, leaving his family in Kismayu, and made his way to Kenya in search of asylum. Ahmed lived for a while in Ifo refugee camp before being resettled to Colorado in the US where he was granted full US citizenship.

In 1992, his cousin Abdulahi Sheikh arrived in Kenya in search of support. Granted refugee status, Abdulahi ended up in Dagahaley camp in Dadaab. He believed Ahmed was either in Dadaab or had been there but his efforts to find him were unsuccessful and he soon gave up hope of ever finding him. In fact, Abdulahi believed Ahmed had gone back to Somalia.

In early 2011 RCK employed Abdulahi to assist the RU project in Dagahaley refugee camp. Abdulahi registered with the tracing project and began a search for missing loved ones. Coming across a name that was familiar, he contacted the person through the RU message system. When he received a reply he realised that, after 20 years of separation and search, he had found his beloved cousin. They exchanged phone numbers and Ahmed called, breaking 20 years of silence. Today, the two keep in touch regularly and both Abdulahi and Ahmed continue to search for more friends and family members.

\*Not his real name

# Technology and engineering to support work with refugees

Stephanie Hunt and Geoffrey C Orsak

## New partnerships are being forged to encourage young engineers to use their skills in the service of refugees.

We have all benefitted from the remarkable global transformation brought about by the work of engineers and innovators. What was once science fiction is today commonplace. None of this would have occurred had there not been engineers and companies motivated by the challenge of the problem paired with the potential for commercial gain.

Meeting the needs of refugees and other marginalised people, however, requires us to find ways to attract crucial engineering problem-solvers

to humanitarian work where the profit motive is not a primary driver.

### Attracting a new generation

The engineering salaries of recent university graduates rank at the very top of the pay scale. To attract these individuals to careers that provide direct humanitarian benefits, they must therefore be inspired to a higher goal than simple monetary gain. Engineering has a history of solving problems for the general good – and with so many active conflicts around the globe, there is an opportunity to reframe the myriad challenges

associated with supporting refugees as a worthy effort in that great engineering tradition.

Many young engineers today are in search of inspiration. Unfortunately, their limited understanding of the global problems of refugees comes primarily from mass media, which often paints the picture as hopeless and driven by political squabbles – not effective messages for recruiting talent. To address this problem, the Hunt Institute for Engineering and Humanity at SMU has been working with teaching staff across the Southern Methodist University (SMU) in Dallas to augment its engineering programmes with

a range of global development programmes that explore the cultural, financial, legal and of course technical challenges faced by those in the Global South, including refugees in camps. Students who were once intent on gaining engineering skills for a life in commerce can now make informed choices about pursuing an alternative vision for engineering.<sup>1</sup>

### An early success story

Engineering innovation should not be limited to engineering professionals; students and non-engineers can also provide creative solutions. At the Hunt Institute's first Engineering and Humanity Week held in April 2011, interdisciplinary student teams competed to develop a complete micro-business to provide clean water and cell phone recharging services from within a temporary refugee shelter. Competing teams formulated detailed business plans that dealt not only with product innovation but also with marketing, sales and distribution challenges. Creative concepts included leasing advertising space on the exterior of the shelter to market to those queueing for services, as well as accepting payment via cell phone for water or phone recharging. The resulting ideas were inventive, practical and, according to the competition judges, viable.

This small-scale competition successfully demonstrated how effective cross-discipline collaboration can be in addressing well-defined challenges with immediate benefit to specific local communities.

### Field innovation centres

In August 2011, UNHCR and the Hunt Institute for Engineering and Humanity at SMU signed

an agreement establishing a framework for increasing the role of engineering and innovation in support of refugee camp operations. This agreement calls for the organised engagement of universities, government-run research institutes and corporations to work together to address the most pressing technical and infrastructural issues faced by UNHCR in assisting refugees in relation to water, sanitation, shelter, communications and health care.

One key element of this plan is to collaboratively develop and deploy Field Innovation Centres in a number of locations within or adjacent to refugee camps and urban slums. These research and development sites will allow for researchers, engineers, innovators and graduate students to work side by side with those working and living in the refugee camps. These Field Innovation Centres, staffed by experts seconded by their organisations, will expose engineers and scientists to the complexities of actual problems faced within the camps, thus increasing the likelihood of real advances.

Importantly, the Field Innovation Centres will directly engage the refugee communities themselves in the development and testing of solutions, particularly those refugees who have engineering skills. This will help ensure that solutions meet



Innovations at the first SMU-Hunt Institute Engineering and Humanity Week, April 2011.

the local cultural and technical needs of the community while in turn providing opportunities to develop a specialised workforce within the camps for maintaining and protecting these new assets.

Furthermore, creating an international base for technical innovation within the refugee communities we serve will provide a strong humanitarian motive needed to attract the best problem solvers in the world to the service of those with some of the greatest needs.

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1. The new programme elements were introduced in 2011.

## Mobile technology in emergency response

In determining whether and how to use mobile technology (in particular, SMS) in emergency response, factors such as customs around the use and control of mobile phones, the state of the national mobile market, and the condition of the network are all important considerations. infoasaid and partner Frontline SMS ([www.frontlinesms.com](http://www.frontlinesms.com)) have developed a checklist of factors to be aware of in assessing the mobile context.

infoasaid (<http://infoasaid.org/>) is a consortium of Internews and the BBC World Service Trust, funded by DfID. This initiative aims to enhance the quality of humanitarian assistance through improved information exchange between disaster-affected populations and aid agencies. infoasaid is developing a range of tools and resources for improving preparedness for communications in emergencies and is also working in partnerships with selected aid agencies to inform and support their communications responses in emergencies. See <http://tinyurl.com/infoasaid-checklist>

infoasaid's YouTube clip, called 'Communication is Aid', can be viewed at [www.youtube.com/user/infoasaid](http://www.youtube.com/user/infoasaid)

# Sharing sensitive data on forced migrants

Prisca Benelli, Alessandro Guarino and Jen Ziemke

## Can a collaborative web-platform for sharing critical demographic information about displaced people improve delivery and response?

The development and relative accessibility of innovative software have led to the rapid growth over the last decade of a variety of tools to create, analyse, visualise and use real-time data for humanitarian response. The Italian NGO INTERSOS<sup>1</sup> has used web-based Geographic Information System (GIS) platforms to help profile and track population movements and needs, and began publishing geo-referenced<sup>2</sup> data on displaced populations in 2005. Data on affected populations in Darfur and, later, in neighbouring Chad was collected and published on a GIS platform.

As much information as possible was collected about the make-up of the refugee populations, including historical and current population estimates, ethnicity and movements; sectoral data on health, education, security, shelter, agriculture and land tenure; settlement types (e.g. inhabited, abandoned, destroyed); and specific information on vulnerable individuals.

The data gathered was made available to a broader audience through ad hoc semi-private web-platforms. Since web-based tools allow for 'real time' sharing of information, individuals working in different agencies were able to help update collected information in real time. However, not all NGOs availed themselves of these platforms to the same extent. Some used the data platform on occasion but did not share information or did not participate in the system. Others used the web-based platform frequently but their level of use varied over time, depending upon who was leading the effort in that agency at the time. Nevertheless, if these tools were to be adopted more widely in the field, such collaboration could improve inter-agency coordination and response by eliminating the risk of duplicated work and assessments.

Following the experience in Darfur and Chad, INTERSOS extended the use of web-GIS platforms to other programmes, customising the platforms according to the specific needs of the affected population, and offering categories and visualisations depending on the context. For instance, in Darfur and in Chad, the village was the unit of analysis, and the geographical scale was huge. By contrast, in Yemen individuals and households were the relevant unit of analysis and the geographical coverage was limited to a camp and two urban areas.

In all of INTERSOS's web-GIS platforms, data can be accessed by users in four different ways:

- as customised thematic maps, specified by the user (e.g. presence or absence of IDPs, water points, schools)
- as lists, statistics and tables created by the database, again on the basis of the user's request
- in a downloadable Excel table
- in a downloadable text report.

### Differentiated access to sensitive data

In the context of widespread insecurity, the dissemination of sensitive information has the potential to harm the intended beneficiaries, and violate their privacy. In our experience, questions around disseminating sensitive data while simultaneously ensuring the safety and security of respondents greatly tested and challenged attempts to respect core humanitarian principles. An organisation can retain control over data gathering, storage and analysis because they can apply protocols to protect confidential information. However, in the dissemination phase, by virtue of the fact that agencies are sharing

the data, there is the additional burden of ensuring confidentiality with other agencies over whom they have little or no control.

In an attempt to mitigate these privacy and security concerns, INTERSOS restricted access to some of the information on its web-based platforms and required all users to register for access to the site. Users were required to introduce themselves to the web-GIS manager and give information about their role as a precondition for being allowed to access the database or contribute to its content. The web-GIS manager approved applicants and provided passwords.

The registration process made it possible to grant differential access to types of data. Some core members had access to all of the information collected, including names and other sensitive data. INTERSOS staff holding critical managerial positions, some UNHCR personnel and selected managers of other critical organisations were granted access at this level. A second tier of access excluded personal information but still involved a great deal of detail, especially in relation to unmet needs and economic information. Most of the aid community who had personnel active in the area were granted access at this second level. Finally, a third tier was open to academics and other organisations that were not present. This tier provided general information about the context but restricted the level of detail about individual persons.

Differentiating levels of access allows one to protect the most sensitive data while still allowing the intended audiences crucial access to these files. INTERSOS felt it struck the right balance with this system. However, even with different levels of access questions remain: Who owns the data? And how can the organisation that collected the data ensure that consumers will not misuse the data?

INTERSOS found it extremely hard to accurately predict possible uses of the data and to classify data according to levels of sensitivity. The organisation is now considering requesting the users to accept more stringent legal conditions in order to access the site, as a way to restrict the potential uses of the data by the individuals who access the GIS platforms. But even then how can an organisation guarantee that all of the approved users will be able to ensure safe storage of their data? How much time and resources should be devoted to ensuring that certain security criteria are met? On the one hand, agencies need to control usage by minimising the number of allowed users. On the other hand, they recognise the need for collaboration and thus the need to promote widespread knowledge and use of the tool. One of the main challenges for the future is navigating such security concerns in difficult or politically sensitive operating environments.

### Quality of the data

Inaccurate, contradictory or missing data can have unintended negative consequences both on affected populations and for humanitarian agencies. While it may be impossible to ensure that all the data presented is entirely reliable, it is however entirely within the capacity of an NGO to provide detailed information on how the reports were gathered, which can help shape our level of confidence in the data.

Organisations in the field need to make it clear how their data was collected and coded, and to detail the sometimes difficult choices they might have had to make. Creating a code-book, or at least a detailed explanation of the entire process of data gathering and coding, becomes particularly important – and challenging – in collaborative settings. While allowing information and updates, such as newly identified needs or the installation of a new water point, for example, to be uploaded into the system by registered users including from other agencies, INTERSOS endeavoured to increase the reliability of the information by publishing only information deemed reliable by its profiling team. Considerable attention should be paid in future to ensuring that anyone who posts an

update provides information on their methodology, and is identified, for the purposes of being able to check the reliability of the information.

### Effectiveness of the tool

We want to ensure that technology does not become an end in itself but rather a means to a wider goal. There are, however, two sets of challenges to the achievement of this objective.

A first set lies on the technical side. In order to ensure the broadest possible use of the tool, the level of IT proficiency of the intended users and the quality of internet connection need to be carefully considered at design stage. A constant effort is required to raise awareness and offer basic training in the use of the tool, both inside the organisation and across organisations. As in emergency settings there tends to be a high turn-over of humanitarian personnel, training needs to be provided periodically for newly arrived personnel.

One of the most useful features of a web-based tool is the fact that it embeds the capacity to monitor the number and the frequency of visits, the type of data downloaded and the type of users, which in turn allows the system itself to be helpfully updated. Knowledge of the most frequent queries in the system can be used to create new tools with better functionalities and update data collection methodologies. Monitoring the use of the new platform is a never-ending process and one that requires constant attention.

The other challenges, however, are structural, and belong to the sphere of inter-agency coordination. In Darfur, INTERSOS and the Danish Refugee Council reached a strong level of collaboration in collecting information on population movements through the web-GIS platform. Other agencies, while contributing some updates to the system, remained mostly passive users of the tool. Yet a third group of agencies developed independent

tools, not integrated with INTERSOS platforms. This scenario is not unique to Darfur. Duplication and lack of integration are likely to continue to be an issue but so too will the pressing need to share data and tools. The time for conversations around such duplication of effort and waste is now.



Data collection by Intersos enumerators in Umkher province, Darfur.

After establishing need, sharing the information gathered by various agencies through a web-based GIS platform is increasingly becoming a next step for collaboration and response. We urge critical actors in this space to continue to explore this issue. We think they will discover that the kind of web-based GIS collaboration and data sharing described here demonstrably improves the lot of forced migrants through improving humanitarian assistance.

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1. [www.intersos.org/en](http://www.intersos.org/en)

2. Geo-referencing: specifying the location of something in terms of a map or coordinates.

# Country of Origin Information: old problems, modern solutions

Marco Formisano

**The current multitude of sources of information paradoxically renders access to good quality Country of Origin Information for refugee status determination procedures quite cumbersome.**

In the challenging task of determining the legitimacy of a claim for refugee status, Country of Origin Information (COI) is a key element, complementing the testimonial of the applicant. It may, for example, corroborate or contradict the likelihood of the risk of persecution or help ascertain the relevance and reasonableness of available internal flight or relocation alternatives. Government COI Units will attempt to provide a balanced account of facts but may face a variety of difficulties in accessing relevant COI.

The first issue at stake is the quality of information versus its quantity. Searching the web can produce an almost unworkable amount of information, and finding targeted impartial, authoritative and trustworthy country information may be technically burdensome.

Secondly, one would have to look into a sufficiently large store of information – looking at sources with different mandates, goals and biases – and evaluate them one against the other in order to judge their degree of reliability as proof. This can be a lengthy and resource-intensive process.

Thirdly, the depth of information required for adjudicating cases has significantly increased in recent times. Although a few years ago cases were decided on the basis of information from a country guide book and a few file notes in a dossier, in the era of Twitter and YouTube the thirst for meticulous detail has deepened exponentially.

Lastly, language barriers may pose additional problems, especially if local detailed information is sought. Translations are expensive and online research is limited if the researcher does not know the relevant language. This is where new filtering solutions

are needed and where technology could play a positive role.

## Online databases

In order to overcome these problems at least in part, some specialised agencies such as UNHCR and NGOs such as the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)<sup>1</sup> have developed platforms containing legal, policy, procedural and evidentiary materials to support their decision making. Online documentary repositories such as UNHCR's Refworld ([www.refworld.org](http://www.refworld.org)) and ACCORD's Ecoi.net ([www.ecoi.net](http://www.ecoi.net)) permit one-stop-shop access to selected reliable and publicly available COI.

Beside the primary task of carefully evaluating and selecting high-quality documents and making them available on the internet, these particular platforms offer plenty of versatile features, such as:

**Daily updates**, with an average of 20 to 50 new documents a day. This represents almost 30,000 new information items a year. Weekly personalised alerts on selected countries and/or document types are sent on request, enabling easy monitoring of country updates. At present, they offer access to more than 300,000 documents, covering COI and refugee-related policy, legislation and jurisprudence. This constantly updated information is accessible from anywhere, free of charge.

**Easy to use and powerful research and navigation functions:** Filters can be used for country, publishers, document types, publication timeframes and languages. Search and spelling suggestions assist when looking, for example, for different spellings of names of political parties, military groups or religious

groups. All these features allow for speedy and effective investigation.

**Personalisation features**, whereby users can create and organise their own online libraries, saving documents or entire search results. This saves considerable time in retrieving documents and local computer space, as the information is safely stored online.

**Versatile Content Management Systems (CMS):** Both Refworld and Ecoi.net are fed through a specifically designed CMS that allows for identification, specification and retrievability of each document, allowing for batch imports of hundreds of documents at a time.

Despite the apparent niche clientele of refugee practitioners, these sites have seen considerable traffic of visitors from all over the world. On average, more than 130,000 unique visitors to Refworld access approximately four million pages per month.

## RSD Community of Practice

Asylum adjudicators can also benefit from modern technologies in the form of collaborative platforms for the exchange of expertise and knowledge on asylum laws, procedures and COI. More often than not, adjudicators may feel they work in isolation, and in light of UNHCR's scattered operations and the need to bridge different geographical locations, the RSD Community of Practice (RSD CoP) materialised.

Based on a Windows folder system, the CoP enables users to undertake two very simple actions: adding documents to a 'knowledge' database organised according to the agreed themes, and to pose questions in a forum space, by starting 'Discussions' within topics (legal or procedural matters, COI queries, etc). This renders the CoP easy to use, even for the less technically skilled. The system further allows for subscription to selected topics in order to be notified of community

activity. Replies to questions, as well as documents posted, may be accessed directly from the email alert, considerably saving time.

The structure can be modelled very flexibly so that it can be adapted to different and changing communication purposes and classification needs. It also helps prevent the loss of a large amount of tacit or informal knowledge that would otherwise be lost with rotation of duty station and mobility of staff. The CoP is accessible over the internet but has enhanced security features such as high-bit encryption, a log-in requirement and hierarchy of access of users. Rather than functioning through moderators, the community is based on peer-to-peer communication. As a result, the RSD CoP is ultimately an efficient tool for better informed decision making.

#### Future cooperation and integration

We should look to technology to develop dedicated applications to help reduce workloads, solve impasses and share experiences

by connecting people. Improved online repositories and incremental use of communities of practice would be one way to go.

New tools may be also be explored, such as different ways of accessing COI through interactive maps and satellite imagery that would geo-code country evidence, precisely locating security incidents or human rights violations in any corner of the world. Partnerships with news information providers would also complement current capacities.

We should then look into interfaces that would allow communication between existing incompatible systems, in order to overcome duplication and strengthen cooperation in access to and distribution of COI. This will be one of the crucial tasks of the European Asylum Support Office, the EU Agency mandated to provide practical assistance to Member States in implementing the EU Common Asylum System. Integration of existing COI

repositories as well as development of ad hoc communication platforms will contribute to the success of an agency that has to provide services to 27 Member States, in 23 different languages. These same comprehensive solutions will also help other jurisdictions, such as the US, where geographic distances and differences in capacities and approaches between the various offices benefit from harmonised and equal access to COI.

While the basic framework for making asylum decisions remains similar, the means available to those making the decisions have changed. The same technologies that are driving the changes can also be used to push up the quality of the information used for making the decisions.

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1. www.roteskreuz.at/118n/en/organise/accord/

# Technology: bringing solutions or disruptions?

Paul Currion

**Most of our discussions still focus on how responding organisations can use technology more effectively, rather than how disaster-affected communities might use those same technologies. The availability of information through new technologies is challenging existing power relations and current ways of working, and we may not be prepared for the consequences.**

Ten years ago few aid workers were thinking about how information and communications technology would change how relief operations were carried out; technology was the preserve of experts discussing technical issues within a relatively small community of practice. The global spread of mobile technology and web access has brought those discussions into the spotlight, as technologies previously used only by experts is now in the hands of the general public. The effects of this have already been felt in the private sector, and they will increasingly change the way in which the humanitarian sector does business.

The 2010 Haiti earthquake focused attention on how social media – web-enabled services exemplified by Facebook and Twitter – could support the response. Some projects caught the public imagination, particularly those involving crowdsourcing – outsourcing tasks traditionally performed by an employee or contractor, to an undefined, large group of people or community (a ‘crowd’) – and such innovations will change the way in which the humanitarian sector does business.<sup>1</sup> However, most of our discussions still focus on how our organisations can use technology to respond to disasters, rather than how affected

communities might use those same technologies. This is understandable but represents a missed opportunity.

We can identify cases where social media have been used to good effect by disaster-affected communities to mobilise their own resources rather than draw on external assistance. In the Philippines and Indonesia, Twitter was used by communities to manage their responses to Typhoon Megi and the Mount Merapi volcano eruption. This innovation does not come out of nowhere; at the start of 2010, Indonesia and the Philippines were the third and eighth largest countries respectively in terms of Facebook users, and sixth and twelfth largest in terms of Twitter users.

Enough people were already familiar with social media before those disasters that they were able to adapt existing tools to a particular need.

By contrast, social media played a much smaller role in the 2010 floods in Pakistan, where the number of social media users lags behind those two other countries. By December 2010, the 'PakReport platform'<sup>2</sup> had received only 1,144 messages from an affected population of an estimated 20 million. People are likely to use tools that they, their families and friends are familiar with, rather than start to use a new technology in the immediate aftermath of an emergency.

These experiences also show that, as communities gain access to more information, they come to rely less on outside organisations, which has implications for the humanitarian community. We need to think more seriously about how people are using these technologies, how that will affect our relationships with disaster-affected communities, and what the appropriate responses to these developments are.

### Information and power

Historically, information has been extracted from affected communities by organisations claiming to work on their behalf. The assumption is that, in exchange for that information, communities will receive physical or financial assistance from organisations – but rarely do communities receive information back again in a useful form. Access to information changes the power relationships between affected communities and aid providers, and consequently challenges the existing model of humanitarian assistance.

In Haiti, the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) group brought together aid, media and technology projects to enable access to information.<sup>3</sup> This was undoubtedly useful but the model was still of broadcasting information from or through aid providers to affected communities. If information is power, broadcast models maintain power in the hands of aid organisations. Once empowered by information, however, affected communities will be increasingly unlikely to accept the role of passive recipients of external largesse, and instead demand greater levels of partnership in how aid is allocated, distributed and monitored.

An example of this has been Kanere,<sup>4</sup> an independent newspaper produced by residents of Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya, whose mission states that "in exercising a refugee free press, we speak in respect of human rights and the rule of law in order to create a more open society in refugee camps and to develop a platform for fair public debate on refugee affairs." This type of project should be a welcome development but has the potential to alter the balance of power between refugees and the organisations that provide them with services.

The 2005 *World Disasters Report* concluded that "disaster-affected people need information as much as water, food, medicine or shelter".<sup>5</sup> Information is one of the most valuable resources an

affected community can receive, enabling them to make more informed decisions for themselves. Information is also essential for enabling communities to hold aid organisations accountable, to judge our effectiveness compared to the commitments we make and to the work of other organisations.

If access to information is as fundamental to people as access to clean water, it follows that providing communications infrastructure and information resources to refugees, IDPs and other disaster-affected populations should be seen as a core part of our response. This paradigm shift will not be easy, since many people still view information as a non-essential requirement; yet a shift is clearly underway in the humanitarian world, not caused solely by technology but in which technology plays a pivotal role. At present we are unprepared for the transformations that information empowerment will bring.

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1. See *Disaster Relief 2.0: The Future of Information Sharing in Humanitarian Emergencies*, 2011, published by OCHA, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and the UN Foundation & Vodafone Foundation Technology Partnership [www.unfoundation.org/global-issues/technology/disaster-report.html](http://www.unfoundation.org/global-issues/technology/disaster-report.html)
2. <http://pakreport.org/ushahidi/>
3. <http://cdac-haiti.org>
4. <http://kakuma.wordpress.com/about-kanere/>
5. [www.ifrc.org/publicat/wdr2005/](http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/wdr2005/)

### Sifting hype from reality

The absence of useful metrics for success is a persistent challenge in information and communication technology projects in the humanitarian sector but how should we judge whether a new technology is worth adopting? Unlike commercial technology projects, success has nothing to do with how many users you have or the value that they might derive from the technology. The key measure is whether that technology improves the lives of individuals and communities affected by conflict, either directly or indirectly. At first glance measuring this kind of impact looks impossible but the difficulty of measuring impact is not an excuse for attempting it. At present the tendency is to rely on anecdotal evidence provided by operational agencies or assumptions imported from the technology sector. However, both of these parties have a vested interest in promoting their own work, and so we remain largely in the dark about the real impact technology has.

The opportunity costs of technology – not just developing but implementing and maintaining it – are relatively high, making the sector conservative rather than innovative. In practice this means that innovation usually comes from outside established actors, increasingly in the form of partnerships with individuals or groups coming from the private sector. This leads to more challenges as each sector struggles to understand the others and it is particularly important to remember that the definition of 'success' may be different for each side.

Lastly, you don't hear much about projects that promise a lot and then fail to deliver, or about projects built on technology that is out of date by the time they go public. We don't discuss the reasons why projects start strongly but then grind to a halt or deliver little operational value – yet these are exactly the projects which we need to hear about, and these are the discussions that we need to have, if the sector is to learn from experience.

Adapted from a chapter by Paul Currion in *Peacebuilding in the Information Age: sifting hype from reality*, ICT4Peace Foundation ([www.ict4peace.org](http://www.ict4peace.org)), January 2011 <http://ict4peace.org/updates/peacebuilding-in-the-information-age-sifting-hype-from-reality>

# ‘Identity unknown’: migrant deaths at sea

Stefanie Grant

**Political unrest in North Africa has led to a resurgence in irregular migration to Europe and an increase in migrant deaths at sea, yet there is still no framework for identifying those who die or recording their numbers.**

In the last decade, tens of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers have lost their lives on dangerous sea crossings – victims of weather, unseaworthy boats and unscrupulous smugglers. Where their bodies have been recovered, often washed onto European beaches, too often their names – and even their nationalities – are unknown, and so they add to the growing number of anonymous graves around the EU’s southern frontiers.

In their 2009 Stockholm Programme,<sup>1</sup> EU member states recognised the need to avoid these tragedies and to record and identify the migrants, and called for dialogue with countries of origin. In recent months, the need for such humanitarian action has become more urgent. Since January 2011, reports of death and loss have risen sharply; in April alone, more than 800 migrants left Libya by sea and are believed to be missing, feared dead.

There is at present no common practice for correlating information about migrant deaths, either nationally or between different states. The technical skills needed for identification exist but there is not yet an international framework establishing what information should be collected, and how it should be shared.

A good starting point would be to review international practices for responding to death and loss in situations of humanitarian emergency. These typically use principles drawn from human rights and humanitarian law, focusing first on prevention of deaths, and then on identification of the dead. They acknowledge a duty to treat the dead with respect and dignity, to acknowledge the rights of families, and – where possible – to return bodies to the families. They recognise

that families have a right to know the fate of missing relatives; to have access to information on the place of burial; and to obtain the confirmation of death needed to clarify inheritance, marriage or property rights.

A useful first step would be for European states to develop common standards in three areas:

- Preservation of evidence for identification – photographs, fingerprints, possessions, clothing. This will enable families to obtain information at some future time, and establish if a relative has died.
- Creation of an international database in which deaths would be registered, and which relatives could access.
- A common set of principles for burial, to ensure that the dead are treated with respect and dignity; if identified, they would be returned to their families or buried in individually marked graves.

It is important to consult with migrants’ home countries and communities on how this should be done. New internet technologies enable individuals to search for relatives, anonymously if this is a family’s wish; specialist online databases and websites have been created for death and loss in emergencies by humanitarian organisations and by private commercial enterprises (such as Google).

Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights, describes the need to identify and account for undocumented migrants who disappear on the journey as “imperative”. And a forensic anthropologist who works to identify those who die at the US-Mexican border put it this way: “If this were to happen to us, God forbid, we’d want every jurisdiction possible doing everything they could to try to identify the person.”



In Lampedusa cemetery, Italian police and naval personnel pay their respects at the funeral of three people killed when their boat ran aground on Lampedusa after the long journey from Libya. May 2011.

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1. 2010-2015 guidelines for justice and home affairs of the member states of the EU: *The Stockholm Programme – an open and secure Europe serving and protecting the citizen*, doc. 17024/09, adopted Dec 2009 (see Part 6) [www.pmlp.gov.lv/en/ES/PPD\\_Stockholm\\_program\\_EN.pdf](http://www.pmlp.gov.lv/en/ES/PPD_Stockholm_program_EN.pdf)

# Nearly a refugee: thoughts from Cairo

Shaden Khallaf

**Turbulence in North Africa and the Middle East has forced many to flee their homes and countries. One woman in Cairo, on the brink of flight, considers her options.**

As I packed my bags, and threw in a few toys for my two young boys, I was struck by a pang of anxiety and fear. What if this move to seek safety during these turbulent days in Cairo ended up being longer than we expected it to be? What if we ended up being unable to go home?

And as my mind raced to figure out where we could go and what we would do if the worst case scenario unfolded, I remembered my first days of working with UNHCR in 1998. Reading the *Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status* as part of the orientation for my new job as Protection Assistant in UNHCR's Cairo office had struck a chord. I had always had the sense that having to leave one's country and seek asylum elsewhere was not such an alien prospect to many in the Middle East, as things were so unstable and mechanisms to address deep-seated grievances unreliable, to say the least. I felt a strong affinity and sense of empathy for asylum seekers in Egypt. And this was not because I had ever been put in that kind of situation. Quite simply, it was because I lived in the Middle East, and I knew that it could happen to any one of us living there, at any time.

When the revolution of 25 January 2011 erupted in Cairo and across many other Egyptian cities, it was extremely difficult to predict where it would lead. Demonstrations and public protests had increased significantly in number and size in recent years, yet never had the country witnessed popular mobilisation on this scale. It was stunning, inspiring, energising. Then, just as the country was starting to ride the wave of exhilaration that came with the release of so much pent-up repression and the opportunity to finally have a voice, tragedy struck on 28 January. The police fired live ammunition at peaceful demonstrators, killing

over 300 people and injuring more than 6,000 others. There then followed a series of events which led to complete lawlessness. Prison cells were raided and an estimated 23,000 inmates were set free. Police stations were abandoned by their officers and stockpiles of weapons and ammunition were stolen. The police disappeared from the streets of Cairo, and fear ran through the country as thugs and criminals were reportedly vandalising and destroying public and private property. Popular Defence Committees appeared out of nowhere to patrol neighbourhoods all night to keep homes and families safe after curfews were imposed.

Our neighbourhood was expected to be one of the prime targets for vandalism and violence due to the large number of government officials and businessmen who lived in it. It was thus during this time that my family decided to move to a safer location, in a busier neighbourhood where we would be less visible as part of a larger crowd. Which brings us back to my packing...

As I packed, I felt my heart race and my head become flooded with worries over the safety of our two young children. Should we perhaps leave the country? And if we did, where would we go? Where did we have valid visas for? And how could I leave my parents here alone? How would we secure our home once we left? How long could we stay away? Where would we get the resources to live while we were away? And finally, the big question, if things really blew up and we couldn't go back, would we apply for refugee status?

I paused for a second, then quietly went to the bookshelf and picked up my old, tattered copy of the *Handbook* – just in case, I thought to myself. It had guided me so many times in my case assessments for asylum seekers

I had interviewed from war-ravaged countries such as Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Iraq. And now, I thought, it might very well apply to me and my family.

The security and political situation remained unstable and extremely unpredictable until the President finally stepped down on 11 February. Following the scenes of euphoria and jubilation in Tahrir Square, a relative degree of order and some sense of normalcy started to be restored, despite the shockwaves which had swept throughout the world with the fall of the Egyptian regime. Thankfully, my fear of total breakdown did not materialise and I did not need my *Handbook*. But in Libya, where the popular uprising is being met with violent resistance, thousands are fleeing in fear of their lives into Egypt and Tunisia. These two countries of asylum, which helped inspire the Libyan movement, are themselves still reeling from their own revolutions and widespread social upheaval, yet are keeping their borders open.

So, in the end, I didn't need the *Handbook* but this experience was, if nothing else, a lesson in humility. What we experienced, while very real, can in no way be compared to the experiences of people caught in the middle of wars, who lose family members, who are personally attacked, or who travel for days on end to reach safety – and perhaps never do. Put yourselves in the shoes of a refugee for a day, a week, a minute. And I can assure you, you will never again take your safety, rights and future prospects for granted.

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This article is written in a personal capacity and does not reflect the views of the UN or the AUC.

# Language training in the Czech Republic

Markéta Bačáková

**Language skills are crucial for the integration of refugees into the local community. In the Czech Republic, all persons granted international protection have the legal right to language tuition but a recent study by UNHCR revealed serious shortcomings in provision.**

Provision of language training is one of the three main pillars of the government's State Integration Programme (SIP) in the Czech Republic. In 2007 the Ministry of Education financed the production of a new set of textbooks prepared especially for the language instruction of refugees. But teaching such a variety of individuals using the same textbook for all is not and cannot be a successful way forward. Those seeking international protection inevitably comprise people of different age groups; ethnically, linguistically and culturally different individuals; people with different experience, levels of education, abilities, goals and personal histories.

The textbooks do not take into consideration that elderly people, persons with mental disabilities or illiterate individuals will be taking the courses as well as highly educated professionals wishing to pursue careers in their new home. Given the heterogeneity of the group, one would expect that each person would have an individualised teaching plan based on the initial assessment of their language competencies as well as their needs, abilities and personal goals. UNHCR's research<sup>1</sup> revealed that the refugees attending the language courses were not asked about their personal goals, nor were their needs properly assessed. A young refugee preparing him/herself to study at a university was taught with the same aims and methods as an elderly lady wanting to acquire new social contacts or a young mother whose aim was to be able to hold a conversation with parents and teachers at school.

To date the courses have not incorporated the use of modern technologies – computer language

programmes, use of online dictionaries, video programmes etc. These should be standard teaching tools when educating younger refugees, who indeed expressed dissatisfaction with the rigidity of the teaching methods used.

UNHCR has also discovered that children under 16 years of age are not being offered free language training. The consequences of this omission are potentially serious. They include not only difficulties of inclusion in the education system but also potential delays in cognitive, social and psychological development as well as setbacks in future educational and work opportunities for these children.

The reasons for this omission remain unclear. The Czech Ministry of Education claims that children under 16 are obliged to attend government-funded primary schools, which should provide refugee children with language support. Besides the fact that attendance at primary school should not replace a child's entitlement to language training under the SIP, UNHCR's research shows that refugee children in the Czech Republic in many cases do not receive any special language training at all at school. And what is more, schools are not obliged to offer language courses to refugee children. Any support provided depends solely on the initiative of individual teachers, who may offer support – often in their free time – to refugee pupils.

Furthermore, not all those who are older than 16 receive the language training to which they are entitled. Administrative shortcomings apparently led to a failure to inform them of this right, and between 2007 and 2009 some 20% of eligible adults did not receive language instruction.



## Way forward

If language instruction is to be effective from the point of view of both the refugees themselves and the state (in the sense of effective use of public money), changes must be made. First of all, the voices of refugees need to be listened to. Participation of 'students' in the decision-making processes is crucial for the language training to be successful. Their needs and personal goals must be assessed and agreed in advance and then evaluated during and following instruction. Only then can it be seen whether the training was successful or not.

The state has yet to solve the current unsatisfactory situation in the language training of refugee children. Experience and research clearly show that without any external help Czech schools will not be able to offer the necessary language support to their refugee pupils. Financial support through the SIP for all schools educating refugee children would be a significant step forward for the actual provision of language training for all refugees in the Czech Republic.

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1. 'Analysis of the State of the Language Training within the State Integration Programme in the Period of 2007-2009', available at: <http://tinyurl.com/UNHCRcz-lan-training>  
See also: <http://tinyurl.com/UNHCRcz-education>

# Forgotten and unattended: refugees in post-earthquake Japan

Katsunori Koike

**Despite being a world leader in disaster preparedness, Japan paid scant attention to the needs of one of its most marginalised social groups after the 2011 earthquake. Refugees and asylum seekers suffered restrictions on movement, increased impoverishment and shortage of essential information.**

In the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan on 11 March 2011, more than 20,000 people lost their lives or went missing. Over 250,000 buildings were damaged or destroyed; some 4.4 million households were left without electricity and 2.3 million without water. Despite enormous amount of relief money and other donations, some groups of people in Japan received little or no assistance. Among these are refugees and asylum seekers.

The impact of the disaster and its aftermath was so devastating that many foreigners – fearing another earthquake and radiation leaking from damaged nuclear power stations – were quick to leave the country. The Immigration Bureau (IB) was inundated with people asking for the ‘re-entry permit’ that they need in order to obtain a visa for another country and to return to Japan if and when things get better. However, under the current asylum system, the IB will not issue re-entry permits for refugee applicants. Asylum seekers therefore had to weigh up the possibility of persecution in their country of origin against the immediate risk in remaining in Japan. While many refugees and asylum seekers did choose to leave, many of

those who stayed felt they had little choice, and no prospect of assistance.

“We have no home to return to. No places to go like others; it’s not permitted. We are stuck in Japan. We are like prisoners; we feel forgotten and unattended. No responsible body is there to take care of us in this crisis, or if things get worse.” (Ethiopian asylum seeker)

Although few refugees and asylum seekers appear to have been in the most affected area of Tohoku, those living in the Kanto-Tokyo region (where most refugees/asylum seekers reside) still suffered considerable distress. The Japan Association for Refugees (JAR), an NGO engaged in refugee assistance, embarked upon a refugee community/home visit project a few days after the earthquake in order to confirm that they were safe, understand their needs, provide counselling and information on the recent events and distribute emergency packages containing rice, flour, cooking oil, pasta, chocolate bars, canned food, face masks, water and sanitary items. Through the visits it has become evident that refugees and asylum seekers

face three main sets of particular challenges related to the disaster.

First, the restrictions on freedom of movement imposed on undocumented asylum seekers loomed larger in the time of crisis. Under Japan’s asylum system some asylum seekers without residence permits are detained while others have ‘Provisional Release status’ (PR) – in lieu of detention – for periods of up to three months, after which they have to request an extension.<sup>1</sup> PR status comes with restriction on the area of movement; to travel beyond the agreed area, an IB permission letter has to be obtained each time. Yet all that the IB did for PR status holders, in the face of the unprecedented chaos, was to issue an unofficial and ambiguous comment that it “would take disaster-related reasons into their consideration.”<sup>2</sup> In practice, PR status holders were still required to make routine appearances to the IB; some were hesitant to leave their designated area even in emergency circumstances, for fear of punishment.

Meanwhile, detained asylum seekers were stuck. According to some detainees in the East Japan Immigration Centre (about 150 km from the Tohoku area), immigration officers would not let them outside the detention building during the earthquake, saying that there was no need to worry and that “moving detainees outside requires permission from the boss”. It was only after detainees started panicking – hitting locked doors, breaking glass, screaming – that the IB finally unlocked the doors until the following morning. The IB subsequently sought compensation from the detainees for damage done to the facility during the turmoil.

Japan is one of the most earthquake-prone countries in the world and has done more than most when it

Although a signatory to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, and the second-largest donor after the US to UNHCR, Japan accepts very few refugees. The rejection rate for refugees in Japan – roughly 95% – is the highest for any industrialised nation. In 2010, out of 1,906 decisions on asylum applications, 39 (2%) were granted refugee status. Recognised refugees are overwhelmingly from Burma/Myanmar – in 2010, 37 out of 39 were Myanmar nationals – although hundreds of applications are made every year by Turkish Kurds and Sri Lankans and those from Middle Eastern and African countries. Cases for refugee recognition can take years to reach a conclusion; during that time, the asylum seeker has limited access to public social services.

comes to disaster preparedness. Every year since 1960, the country marks Disaster Prevention Day on 1 September, the anniversary of the devastating 1923 Tokyo quake. It also boasts the world's most sophisticated earthquake early-warning systems.<sup>3</sup> Yet no emergency or evacuation drills or instructions had been in place at the detention centres.

Second, refugees and asylum seekers with economic difficulties have suffered even more since the disaster. Most refugees and asylum seekers in Japan live in extreme poverty. Inadequate governmental support, language barriers and the economic climate are all contributory factors. The destruction of nuclear power plants and the ensuing electricity shortages brought regular three-hour-long blackouts which in turn have forced factories and restaurants – common workplaces for refugees and asylum seekers – to operate for fewer hours and days. Fewer working hours or even layoffs mean an immediate loss of income. And now that almost all available funding resources are directed to disaster-related projects, it has become extremely challenging for NGOs to raise funds for refugee assistance projects.

Third, refugees and asylum seekers have been significantly affected by a lack of reliable information on earthquake and radiation issues. As most refugees and asylum seekers come from countries where quakes are less common or where nuclear

power is unknown, they are all the more in need of information. Access to the internet, Japanese language skills and involvement in their own communities seem to be three key factors determining their level of access to information. But refugees sometimes avoid mingling with the same ethnic communities for fear of meeting people from former opponent groups or organisations. Even when they do have access to the internet, without sufficient Japanese language skills they are apt to depend heavily on foreign media, which have tended to focus more on the seriousness of the radiation crisis than the Japanese media and the government have done. Their fear is further reinforced by suspicions about the authorities in general acquired through their experience of being persecuted by the government in their country of origin.

The case of one Kurdish refugee family illustrates the awful dilemmas they face. The family of six had put down its roots in Japanese soil; they had lived in Japan for more than 10 years and two of the children had been born in Japan. Their refugee applications had been rejected but they were expecting a positive decision by the Minister of Justice on their leave to stay on humanitarian grounds – and then the earthquake hit. The impact of the disaster and the uncertain circumstances pushed them to take a hard decision; fearing for the safety of their small children (having learned that infants are far more vulnerable than adults to

radiation), the mother and children returned to Turkey while the father remained in Japan. They did not have a residence permit and were all under PR status. The mother and children therefore left as deportees, prohibited from returning to Japan for the next five years at least. In short, the family chose to be separated for more than five years rather than to stay together in Japan with the old and new difficulties that they were facing.

In this emergency situation, marginalised populations became even more marginalised and vulnerable. The IB seems too busy with other categories of foreigners to show any care for panicked refugees and asylum seekers and people in general hardly seem to know of the existence of refugees in the society, let alone of their problems. In contrast, some refugees and asylum seekers proved themselves to be supportive members of society. Quite a number of them eagerly raised their hands to support disaster victims. A group of Burmese nationals, for example, was quick to provide curry for 300 displaced people. Detainees in the West Japan Immigration Centre sent what little money they had to Tohoku while Burmese refugee community organisations donated more than 500,000 yen (US\$6,500). Many of them are still regularly visiting the disaster-affected areas to do voluntary work.

As one Ugandan refugee said: "Now is the time to return the favour to Japan for saving my life." Let us hope that this shared experience helps create a society that is more responsive to the needs of all, a society in which no one is neglected.

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1. PR is usually three months for Burmese, one month for others. The refugee application procedure takes two years on average, so they have to renew PR periodically until their final decision is made.

2. telephone conversations with JAR, other NGOs and individuals

3. [www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2058390,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2058390,00.html)



Japan Association for Refugees

Asylum seekers from Uganda help in the post-tsunami clear-up in the city of Rikuzentakata.

# A new strategy for meeting humanitarian challenges in urban areas

Roger Zetter and George Deikun

**Experience indicates that significant challenges remain across key humanitarian operational approaches relating to the needs of growing numbers of IDPs and refugees who migrate to cities. Addressing these issues more effectively will require scaling up, new tools and humanitarian guidance.**

These challenges, as well as potential opportunities, were highlighted in a set of case studies prepared for the IASC as background to its Strategy for urban areas [see box]. The case studies focused on Nairobi and Eldoret in Kenya (post-election violence), Manila (typhoons) and Port-au-Prince (earthquake). Drawing on this experience and lessons which emerged from it, this article considers four of the most pressing challenges and some of the potential opportunities.

## Working with community organisations and resources

In all four of these cities, in both chronic and acute crisis situations, urban dwellers relied heavily on the community setting for their protection, housing, access to basic services and support for their livelihoods. The challenge faced by those designing humanitarian responses in these cities was to develop knowledge of these communities and tap their strengths.

The international community's restricted understanding and knowledge of the urban context are evident in:

- very limited interaction with national and local governments, communities and the local private sector, leading to a supply-driven approach by humanitarian actors which occasionally results in negative impacts on pre-existing capacities
- an inability to stay on top of rapidly moving situations in an urban context

- a registration system for affected populations which focuses on large self-settled camps rather than neighbourhoods: this tends to generate incomplete and inaccurate information which can hamper return to sites of origin by concentrating the distribution of support in the camps (as in Haiti).
- over-reliance on satellite imagery to capture the complexity of the impact on the built environment
- uncoordinated actions, such as the detailed damage assessment conducted in Haiti with limited recognition of socio-economic factors and without meaningful communication with communities, owners and previous occupants.

## Displacement and urban environmental conditions

Urban communities vary significantly from one city to another, and are very diverse compared with rural areas. Some urban slums and squatter settlements have been more or less stable communities whereas others have chaotic agglomerations of people. Urban growth tends to be rapid and unplanned, and urban populations very mobile; their communities and neighbourhoods can be extremely large and densely built and are often in a state of flux. The traditional camp approach in rural settings, in contrast, relies on the supposed homogeneous character of communities.

Sudden onset emergencies and the arrival of new populations in the case-study cities resulted in extreme pressure on existing infrastructure and services, especially where the displaced people were hosted by

The Task Force of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group on Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas approved a Final Strategy and two-year Action Plan in Rome in November 2010.<sup>4</sup> The principal aim of the Strategy is to recommend ways in which humanitarian actors can deliver more effective responses to humanitarian crises in urban areas, including accelerating early recovery. The Strategy is designed to be relevant for all international actors, mandates and types of crises. Specifically it seeks to strengthen four key elements: partnerships; host country national and local leadership; preparedness planning and understanding/analysis of vulnerability; and community resilience and beneficiary targeting.

friends and relatives. The coping strategy of the vast majority of the urban displaced in all four case-study cities was in fact to find host families to take them in. A strategy to support host families in existing communities is thus urgently needed, given the time it takes for longer-term housing solutions to be implemented. Care should be taken, however, to ensure that the hosting culture is not undermined by formalised host family support programmes.

The case studies identified generic problems for all those affected by crisis in urban settings but forced migrants and other displaced people face particular risks and hazards. The case studies covered all humanitarian sectors; this article looks at just two sectors – protection and shelter – with some of the findings pertaining to these areas.

## Security and protection

The security and protection needs of affected urban populations constitute one of the most significant urban challenges. The aftermath of crises is likely to precipitate

an increase in urban violence as affected populations compete for scarce essential resources such as food, water and shelter. At the same time the capacities of national and local government departments tend to become overstretched with arrival of IDPs from the same or neighbouring cities.

Cities are generally not safe havens to which to escape. Indeed, the case studies point out that, out of fear of harassment, detention and possible *refoulement*, many refugee and IDP populations live in a precarious legal status; this reduces and often impedes their access to official protection machinery. Locating displaced persons, identifying them and limiting assistance only to them all run the risk of placing them in danger and this gives rise to problems that are both operational and ethical. A significant challenge is how to protect a) those IDPs and refugees who wish to remain anonymous and b) others who are hard to identify in dispersed communities.

In Kenya, it is to be hoped that the new draft National IDP Policy will become an integral part of Kenya's legal framework, serving as a guarantor of IDP protection through all phases of displacement and during the return phase. This should help facilitate the return of IDPs to urban areas from transit settlements. A national IDP Policy such as that adopted in Kenya should become an integral part of the IDP protection framework elsewhere too.

UNHCR has developed a Participatory Protection Appraisal tool for use in training local government to be able to detect and appraise protection problems in communities and in disasters. The tool has specific applications for urban settings and shows great promise; if implementation in the pilot project is successful, it could be scaled up for other urban contexts. Care is needed to ensure that there will be sufficient funds not just to use the appraisal tool but to act on the recommendations that emerge from its use.

The case studies show the value of setting up information centres for newly arrived refugees and IDPs

– which can then be tapped as sources for information on urban vulnerability and IDP profiling. Community Information Centres and Safe Houses are useful in enabling urban communities to identify and target displaced people where there is a need to identify 'invisible' caseloads. These models could be replicated in more communities but such activities are resource-intensive and may not find sufficient donor support.

Information centres can help newly arriving refugees to learn about the availability of community goods and services, better understand their rights and responsibilities, learn where to get treatment for 'stigma' issues such as SGBV and HIV/AIDS and, in the case of refugees, find out where to get language lessons. If they were open to all in the community it could serve to reduce the possibility of tensions between displaced people and the host community.

These approaches require guarantees of 'tolerance space' by national and local authorities to protect information and the identities of visitors to such centres. This is crucial as visitors to the information centres will shun them if they suspect their anonymity may be at risk.

Agencies could make greater use of information technologies, for example by periodically text-messaging to community groups information about community services, events, new legislation and human rights issues relevant to refugees and IDPs in urban areas.

### Shelter

A salient feature of all four case studies is that the crises left a significant number of displaced people with no satisfactory shelter for protracted periods. The common challenge was how to provide adequate shelter to all, especially in cities where the sheer numbers and density of populations generate chronic conditions since longer-term housing solutions are generally only slowly implemented and where there already exist enormous backlogs in providing satisfactory housing.

For example, in Manila over 5,000 families displaced by floods caused



Bacoor, near Manila, the Philippines.

by typhoon Ketsana remained homeless in evacuation centres and transitional shelters and with host families over a year later, adding to the pre-disaster backlog of 500,000 persons in need of permanent housing solutions. While the Shelter Clusters in both Kenya and the Philippines devised strategies for shelter solutions, these are proving very slow to implement. Clearly, new thinking is required to assist IDPs with faster and better housing options. For example, many people displaced within Manila were paying some kind of rent prior to the emergency; this pre-existing culture of rent-paying could offer a way to provide shelter to the homeless. Shelter materials were provided to urban IDPs in Eldoret. However, since many IDPs had been used to living in concrete structures, they were not willing to accept assistance in the form of what they considered inferior materials. Nor should transitional shelter solutions be an indirect means to shelve permanent housing plans and continue to allow people to live in hazardous conditions.

In Haiti, Shelter Cluster discussions over the use and appropriateness of emergency centres resulted in these being confirmed as the only option for emergency shelter provision. Other options such as providing dedicated evacuation facilities were thought likely to result in these being taken over as new informal settlements.

In the Philippines, a private company was assisting relocation through the development of low-cost,

medium-rise apartments for those who can pay modest rents. This is an interesting disaster reconstruction model of an integrated approach, including infrastructure planning, livelihoods and training on home enterprises (among other activities).

The predominant gap is what to do with the large number of homeless people who used to live in informal settlements but have neither independent means to rebuild their destroyed homes (even though they were often little more than fragile shacks), nor clear title to the land that they previously occupied. International agencies will not go against government regulations (or their own principles) by providing reconstruction assistance to those living in informal settlements or on land where ownership or right-of-use does not exist or is contested. The establishment of peri-urban camps without a clear strategy to develop permanent settlements is contributing to chaotic urban sprawl. While

relocation represents one option for a long-term solution, and conforms with urban planning regulations, an urgent solution is needed while waiting for new housing to be built. In some cases, as appropriate, a written agreement between the municipality and the IDPs is called for that the IDPs will vacate their current sites once permanent housing becomes available.

### Conclusion

The Strategy focuses on how the traditional humanitarian actors, both UN and NGOs, can and need not only to continue to improve and adapt their responses but also to break out of the mould of humanitarian response in the context of people affected by crises in urban settings. A key to this is acknowledging that towns and cities have existing social and institutional infrastructure that should be incorporated into the response.

Thus the Strategy identifies many opportunities for closer cooperation

between international humanitarian assistance actors, governments and non-traditional partners in civil society and the private sector. The large scale and increasing incidence of urban-based emergencies call for closer collaboration of these actors in both the design of emergency responses in order to reach the vulnerable and affected populations and in the delivery of humanitarian assistance itself.

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1. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/IASC-MHCUA>

## Preventing partner violence in refugee and immigrant communities

Greta Uehling, Alberto Bouroncle, Carter Roeber, Nathaniel Tashima and Cathleen Crain

**For many refugees and other forced migrants, sexual and gender-based violence does not necessarily stop after resettlement; for some, that may be when it starts.**

Although some research suggests that domestic or intimate partner violence (IPV) is no more or less prevalent among minority groups in the United States than in the general population, refugees and immigrants face special barriers to receiving appropriate services. The causes of violence are multiple and complex but the intense stress associated with adjustment to a new life can create tension and conflict that may make IPV more likely. In the US, changes involving greater female empowerment or independence may disrupt a previously established balance of power within a family and precipitate forms of emotional, psychological or physical abuse. It has also been argued that the psychological effects of experiencing the normalisation of violence in

countries at war may be contributing factors for intimate partner violence.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of IPV, it is generally understood as actual or threatened acts of physical, sexual, psychological, financial and verbal harm, including stalking. Intimate partners include current or former spouses (including common-law), boyfriends, girlfriends and persons wishing to be in a romantic relationship. They may or may not be cohabiting.

Over the past decade, a growing body of research suggests that there is not one but several types of violence that occurs in intimate relationships and that these different types require different kinds of interventions. What is not yet

known is the extent to which IPV as experienced by refugees and immigrants falls into the same types.

Addressing IPV in refugee and immigrant communities is complicated by a number of factors. The domestic violence prevention community in the US is largely organised around separating perpetrators and victims. The assumption is that violence occurs in a cycle and that separating the perpetrator and victim is the best and most long-lasting solution. However, for cultural reasons and due to the vulnerability created by migration, separating a refugee or immigrant IPV survivor from her or his family may not be the most advisable course of action; many refugees prefer to find remedies within their relationships. As one service provider put it, "Over the last decade, I've learned that the priority [among refugee clients], rather than safety, is family preservation."

Other factors that complicate prevention include the use by perpetrators, victims or service providers of 'tradition' or 'culture' to justify abusive behaviour. Some service providers engage in a process of questioning destructive or unhealthy practices and use a human rights or social justice framework to communicate the fact that – regardless of the way a person may have been treated in the past – every individual is entitled to specific rights and freedoms under US law. However, traditional norms and cultural practices can also be protective, as well as contributing factors to IPV.

Many prefer to keep partner violence private and seeking help may be seen as a form of betrayal. Privacy is also sought to avoid inciting discrimination and stigmatisation from the host community. This reluctance to disclose violence underlines the importance of creating an environment in which refugees and immigrants can address the issues themselves within their own families and communities.

Tolerance thresholds and definitions of abuse are far from universal. One advocate told the story of a Somali refugee who requested and was offered shelter when her husband left her without food and electricity to provide for another wife. She insisted she had not been abused but was merely destitute. During her stay in the shelter, the provider said, "She started to understand that your husband hitting you is violence. .... Only when she started to understand more about IPV did she begin to talk about the violence she had experienced from her husband."

### Good practice?

There is a significant gap in knowledge about the most effective psychosocial interventions and prevention strategies for refugees who are either at risk of or are experiencing IPV. A new three-year initiative entitled 'Preventing Partner Violence in Immigrant Communities: Strengthening What Works'<sup>1</sup> aims to generate practice-based evidence to fill this gap, enabling the organisations involved to identify, strengthen and promote creative and innovative approaches.

The eight organisations working on the programme have seen some success in embedding IPV education in other services such as English language teaching, sessions about US law in general and even financial literacy workshops. Meanwhile, they are evaluating potentially promising practices to address IPV, including the following:

#### **Engaging young people whose attitudes are still forming to speak about IPV among their peers.**

For example, Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence believes that overlapping forms of racial, ethnic and gender inequality are the root cause of violence. They suggest that by teaching youth to recognise and address these inequalities, healthy relationships and communities can be built. In 2010 refugee youth and US-born children of refugees and immigrants created an electronic magazine with anti-violence content including photographs, poetry and articles.

#### **Engaging spiritual and community leaders to target unhealthy traditional or religious practices.**

Spiritual leaders are often instrumental in helping their communities to examine the values, norms and beliefs that can be used by some to justify violence.

#### **Overcoming shame and stigma, and drawing on informal networks of support.**

The Asian Women's Shelter was finding that survivors of abuse in the Asian and Pacific Islander lesbian, gay and transgender community were hesitant to access services due to fears of sexism, racism and homophobia. They developed the 'Chai Chat' programme, providing a space to meet and explore issues of relationships, sexuality and safety from violence.

#### **Including men and women in programming.**

As part of an effort to challenge community norms that support IPV, Migrant Clinicians Network in Austin, Texas, has designed a project called Hombres Unidos Contra la Violencia (Men united against violence) that uses role-playing to provide men with skills to prevent episodes of IPV.

#### **Building community capacity or 'social capital'.**

Early on it became clear that organisations serving refugees and immigrants recognised the complexity of issues surrounding IPV in their communities, and that strengthening formal and informal social networks, creating links between organisations and decreasing people's sense of isolation are all important features of a community-level response to IPV.

Building community capacity or social capital may contribute to IPV prevention through mechanisms such as dissemination of information about healthy and unhealthy relationships and about healthy norms of behaviour. This parallels discoveries within the humanitarian community that the response to sexual and gender-based violence must engage refugees, be multi-sectoral, and rebuild family and community support networks.

### Conclusion

IPV is both a human rights issue and a public health concern. Many lessons have been learned about preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence in complex humanitarian emergencies and camp-based settings. Sexual and gender-based violence is now a common (although many would say as yet insufficient) part of international humanitarian monitoring and evaluation efforts. It is now time to link these efforts with those that can be made to protect refugees and immigrants after resettlement. The eight organisations in the programme are being supported in evaluating their practices with a view to creative and innovative approaches being identified, strengthened, and disseminated.

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The programme discussed in this article is an initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

1. [www.strengtheningwhatworks.org/](http://www.strengtheningwhatworks.org/), a programme of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

# Kenyan refugees included in transitional justice processes

Bernadette Iyodu

**In the complex relationship between forced migration and transitional justice, a visit by the Kenyan Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission to a refugee settlement in Uganda seems to mark a significant step.**

After Kenya's 2007 national presidential elections were marked by violence resulting in loss of lives and widespread displacement, a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) was established. Some of the reported 12,000 Kenyans who fled to Uganda had returned spontaneously shortly after arrival.

original violence does not recur could be key to facilitating the return of such residual populations of refugees.

## Transitional justice

Transitional justice concerns itself with how societies address legacies of past human rights abuses and mass atrocity in order to build a democratic, just and peaceful future. It is concerned with halting ongoing human rights abuses, investigating past crimes, identifying persons responsible for human rights violations, preventing future human rights abuses, preserving and enhancing peace, providing reparations to victims, and fostering individual and national reconciliation.<sup>1</sup>



Mulanda Refugee Transit Centre in Tororo, Uganda: home to several thousand Kenyan refugees who fled post-election violence after the December 2007 presidential elections.

Others, however, found themselves unable to return so long as the issues which contributed to their flight remained unresolved. In March 2011 members of the TJRC visited Kenyan refugees in Kiryandongo in Uganda to invite the community to air their grievances and offer suggestions on how refugees could be included in the transitional justice process. The TJRC also recorded refugees' stories to share with the rest of the country and for inclusion in the process.

It remains to be seen how far the refugees' views will be incorporated into the emerging Kenyan process and whether doing so will enable them to obtain justice and facilitate their return. Yet a demonstrated willingness on the part of the home country to engage in transitional justice processes, improve governance and otherwise ensure that the

The inclusion of all affected parties, and victims in particular, in the planning and execution of any transitional justice process has increasingly been recognised as crucial to the proceeding's success. This in turn has resulted in the increased popularity of quasi-judicial bodies such as truth and reconciliation commissions which provide greater opportunity for victim participation than formal legal processes. If decision makers can demonstrate the value they attach to the refugees' opinion, they may be able to increase refugees' willingness to return. The psychological impact for forced migrants of feeling heard cannot be over-emphasised.

Although the true impact of this single consultation act is not yet known, the Kenyan TRJC's visit does at least demonstrate a respect for the refugees' rights as Kenyan citizens. A majority of the refugees

were excited to make contact with fellow countrymen involved in the reconciliation discussions, and commented that they have not, after all, been forgotten as they had feared.

Generally, transitional justice mechanisms are limited in their outreach. Resident populations are often surveyed about their attitudes to transitional justice options but no refugee or IDP populations are asked their views. The Liberian truth commission<sup>2</sup> was unusual in that it specifically sought to integrate people in the diaspora, collecting statements from victims in countries across West Africa and further afield and conducting public hearings in the US. Other truth commissions in countries such as Sierra Leone, Guatemala, Peru and Timor-Leste did not consult those still displaced over issues wider than human rights violations.

The gesture by the Kenyan TJRC can thus be seen as 'leading by example'. Whether displaced internally or externally, those who flee violence deserve the right to participate as citizens in rebuilding, reshaping and transforming their country. More work is needed in the transitional justice field to determine the best ways in which victims forced into flight can be heard in these respects. In particular, explicit connections must be made between victims' right to restitution and refugees' right to return home in safety and dignity. With Uganda embarking on its own transitional justice process aimed at addressing the legacy of its two-decade-long civil war, the question is whether Uganda too will include the diaspora in its deliberations.

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1. OHCHR Principles and Guidelines [www2.ohchr.org/english/law/remedy.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/remedy.htm)

2. The Liberian TRC reported in 2009 <http://trcofliberia.org/>

# Protracted internal displacement: is local integration a solution?

Elizabeth Ferris and Kate Halff

**Local integration should be given greater consideration as a desirable settlement solution for IDPs, particularly in situations of protracted displacement. Recent research in six countries in Africa, Europe and Latin America highlights a range of factors that may help or hinder integration.**

Around two-thirds of the world's 27 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) live in situations of protracted displacement.<sup>1</sup> The IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for IDPs identifies three settlement options for durable solutions for IDPs: return to their community of origin, settlement in the area to which they have been displaced or settlement in another part of the country.<sup>2</sup> While return is the settlement option usually emphasised by governments and other international actors, other durable solutions – particularly local integration – should be considered, especially when IDPs want local integration or when they have been displaced for long periods of time and their return is blocked.

In order to explore both the good practices which have facilitated local integration and the obstacles to it, the Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, in collaboration with UNDP and UNHCR, organised an expert seminar in Geneva in January 2011. The seminar focused on six countries experiencing protracted internal displacement – Burundi, Colombia, Georgia, Serbia, Sudan and Uganda – each of which was the subject of field research commissioned for this seminar.<sup>3</sup> In most cases (Colombia, Georgia, Serbia and Burundi), countries have experienced multiple waves of displacement. In all six cases, governments have promoted return – even in cases where returns are not possible due to continued insecurity.

In spite of official insistence on return as the preferred solution, returns are often difficult. Return has been the settlement option chosen by some 90% of IDPs in Uganda and around 50% of IDPs in Burundi and southern Sudan (though the figure for the latter

includes those who have returned to southern Sudan<sup>4</sup> as a whole, not necessarily to their places of origin). In Colombia, Georgia and Serbia, only a small minority have returned due to insecurity and the absence of political resolution of the conflict.

Local integration is a qualitatively different settlement option than return and settlement elsewhere since it does not usually involve physical movement and IDPs may not make a conscious choice to integrate locally at a certain point in time. While governments all use the term 'return' when discussing the return of IDPs to their places of origin, they use different terms for local integration. For example, it is called 'improving living conditions' in Serbia, 'supporting decent living conditions for the displaced population and their participation in society' in Georgia, and 'stabilisation' in Colombia. Settlement options often evolve over time.

The research in all six countries shows that there has been some progress towards durable solutions through local integration. IDPs in Burundi stated that the main factor facilitating their local integration was their strong desire to remain where they are. They had forged strong relationships with their non-displaced neighbours, participated in community affairs, had access to documentation and services to the same extent as their non-displaced neighbours, and felt safe. In southern Sudan, IDPs had adapted their livelihoods to the local setting (from cattle to agriculture) and their displacement was not a barrier to obtaining documentation, receiving health care or being able to participate in public life.

IDPs are not a monolithic group and their different settlement preferences

are based on their personal experience and circumstances of war, even within one family. The experiences of individuals, families or groups from specific areas may make them opt for local integration even if return is considered possible by others. In Serbia, Roma IDPs are less interested in return than Serb IDPs, and while older IDPs would prefer to return if they could remain under the jurisdiction of Serbia, young IDPs are not interested unless livelihood opportunities are made available. Indigenous communities in Colombia, for whom return to their place of origin is of vital importance, have been displaced several times and still continue to return.

IDPs may also prefer mixed settlement options, for example by commuting to their area of origin to work their land. In Uganda, some IDPs have simultaneously returned and integrated by using land at their place of origin for shelter and cultivation while maintaining a business at their place of displacement. In Burundi, the majority of IDPs still cultivate their land at their place of origin while living in IDP settlements. The intentions and preferences of IDPs may also change over time and according to where they are displaced; even in protracted situations, displacement is a dynamic process.

## Impediments to local integration

In all the case studies, difficulties around three inter-related issues were major impediments to local integration: access to land and security of tenure, housing, and livelihoods. Many IDPs in Burundi live in settlements built on land that may be subject to various state or private claims, while in southern Sudan, IDPs have often occupied the houses of refugees who have then returned and claimed it back. IDPs in protracted situations continue to live in dilapidated and overcrowded dwellings, often with inadequate security of tenure.

Housing assistance programmes in Colombia, Georgia and Serbia, for example, have not led to widespread acquisition of permanent housing.

Livelihoods are key to local integration. On being evicted (a process made easier by their weak security of tenure), IDPs in southern Sudan also lose their crops and access to livelihoods. In Uganda access to livelihoods programmes is difficult, as most only target areas of return. In Serbia in 2010 a survey indicated that IDPs are twice as likely to be unemployed as their non-displaced neighbours.

One difference between the displacement situations depicted in the six case studies is the attitude of the host community towards IDPs. In Uganda, people were originally welcoming but gradually grew tired of hosting IDPs. However, host community members and IDPs in Burundi and Georgia reported they had always had friendly relations and that inter-marriage was not uncommon. In Colombia, internal displacement has strained local resources; local governments were willing to host IDPs but sometimes lacked absorption capacity. Local authorities are essential in facilitating local integration but too often local governments are mandated by central governments to provide services to IDPs without a corresponding transfer of funds to the local level. Political buy-in to create the legal, policy and programmatic instruments enabling local integration is necessary to ensure that IDPs living in host communities feel secure, have access to services, and receive the support they need.

Development issues such as property rights, livelihoods, services and governance are crucial to the ability of IDPs to integrate locally. The research found that development organisations are involved in the internal displacement situations covered by the case studies but not to the extent needed. In Uganda, most agencies noted a critical disconnect between humanitarian support and transitional and development programmes. Ideally, early recovery programmes would address poor land adjudication by strengthening governance and judicial systems, as well as supporting livelihoods interventions before returns begin. Development organisations such as the World Bank and USAID have committed significant funding to IDPs in Georgia, though this has mainly been directed to the newly displaced rather than people in protracted displacement. In Burundi, UNDP has undertaken socio-economic studies of IDP settlements in three provinces to assist the most vulnerable to find sustainable and lasting solutions, and in Colombia organisations such as the Inter-American Development Bank have taken on IDP issues – but the transition from emergency support has not usually been smooth.

Local integration and return should not be considered as mutually exclusive solutions. IDPs can be encouraged to integrate locally while retaining the possibility of eventual return when conditions permit. Some governments may be more accepting of integration if it is presented as an interim or temporary measure even though there is a contradiction between the terms 'interim' integration and 'durable' solutions.

IDPs have a right to a durable solution. Given the difficulties with returns in many areas, more attention and support are needed for local integration as a feasible alternative for many of the world's IDPs who are living in protracted displacement. IDPs should have the opportunity to get on with their lives.

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For more information on the seminar see: [www.internal-displacement.org/thematics/durable-solutions](http://www.internal-displacement.org/thematics/durable-solutions)

1. See the report of the Expert Seminar on Protracted Internal Displacement, June 2007. [www.brookings.edu/fp/projects/idp/conferences/20070622.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/fp/projects/idp/conferences/20070622.pdf)
  2. IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for IDPs [www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/04\\_durable\\_solutions.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/04_durable_solutions.aspx)
  3. The seminar report is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/IDMC2011-localintegration>
- The six case studies are available [English only] at: <http://tinyurl.com/Brookings2011casesstudies>
4. Since July 2011, the separate state of South Sudan.

### FMR Issue 33 Protracted displacement

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### New director for the RSC

Professor Roger Zetter retired as Director of the Refugee Studies Centre at the end of September 2011. He will continue to work with the RSC as Emeritus Professor on his research projects. Professor Dawn Chatty takes over as Director of the RSC for a three-year term from 1 October. After that it is envisaged that the Directorship will rotate among permanent academic staff at the RSC. Professor Chatty (dawn.chatty@qeh.ox.ac.uk) is a leading scholar and activist in the field, and has been a central figure at the RSC for many years.

### JRS special issue on faith-based humanitarianism

Dr Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (elena.fiddian-qasmiyeh@qeh.ox.ac.uk), Departmental Lecturer at the RSC, has edited a special edition of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* on Faith-Based Humanitarianism in Contexts of Forced Displacement (see <http://jrs.oxfordjournals.org/content/24/3.toc>). The special edition compiles and expands upon the findings of a conference hosted at the RSC in September 2010 on the challenges and prospects of faith-based organisations engaging in humanitarian work to address forced migration crises. The conference report and podcast of the closing lecture are at: [www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/events/faith-based-humanitarianism](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/events/faith-based-humanitarianism)

### Special issue on anti-Gypsyism

Dr Nando Sigona (nando.sigona@qeh.ox.ac.uk), Senior Research Officer at the RSC, in collaboration with Dr Isabella Clough Marinaro (John Cabot University, Rome), has edited a forthcoming special issue of the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* (vol 16, no 5) on anti-Gypsyism and the politics of exclusion in Italy exploring the complex governance of Romani communities, including case studies on long-established residents, newly arrived EU citizens and forced migrants from former Yugoslavia.

### Unlocking protracted displacement: new case studies and website

The RSC has published three new case studies highlighting cases of protracted displacement, focusing on displacements in Central America during the 1980s-1990s and on the contemporary Somali and Iraqi displacements. Online at [www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/publications/working-papers](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/publications/working-papers) These have been prepared as part of the RSC's joint research project with the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and the Norwegian Refugee Council/Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. A policy overview which synthesises the general findings of these case-study papers and draws on wider PRS and 'solutions' literature to suggest new ways in which international actors should seek to both frame and respond to protracted displacement will be online shortly. In addition, a new PRS website ([www.prsproject.org](http://www.prsproject.org)) is being launched in October,

bringing together a variety of resources on thematic issues and regional case studies relating to protracted refugee situations. For more details on the research project, visit [www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/research/international-institutions/unlocking-crises](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/research/international-institutions/unlocking-crises).

### New Working Papers

In addition to the case studies on protracted displacement, the RSC has published four new Working Papers in 2011 since the last issue of FMR:

- Rwanda's Ingando camps: liminality and the reproduction of power, by Andrea Purdeková
- Reviewing the application of the Cessation Clause of the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees in Africa, by Yasmeen Siddiqui
- Should citizenship be conditional? Denationalisation and liberal principles, by Dr Matthew J Gibney
- Sexual orientation in Refugee Status Determination, by Janna Weßels

Download the papers at: [www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/publications/working-papers](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/publications/working-papers)

### New RSC Resource DVD available

The RSC has released the second edition of its Resource DVD, which includes all RSC publications to date on one easily searchable DVD – available free of charge. The DVD contains over 1,700 items on 100 countries, most published within the last five years. All publications are available either as web pages or PDF files. They are subdivided by geographical area and by theme, including recent additions on statelessness, environmental change and migration, urban displacement, protection, research and methodology. All back issues of FMR, in all languages, are included. To request a copy, please go to [www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/resource-dvd-request](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/resource-dvd-request) or email [rsc@qeh.ox.ac.uk](mailto:rsc@qeh.ox.ac.uk)

### Redesigned Forced Migration Online website

Forced Migration Online (FMO) is pleased to announce the launch of the redesigned FMO website at: [www.forcedmigration.org](http://www.forcedmigration.org) Forced Migration Online is home to a large collection of resources relating to refugees and forced migration. The website is designed for use by academics, practitioners, policy makers, the media, or anyone else interested in the field of forced migration. What's new:

- a cleaner, less cluttered interface
- a more consistent layout and navigation structure
- clearer copyright information throughout the site

If you have any feedback, please email [fmo@qeh.ox.ac.uk](mailto:fmo@qeh.ox.ac.uk)

### International Summer School in Forced Migration 2-20 July 2012

Now in its 23rd year, this three-week course combines the very best of the University of Oxford's academic excellence with a stimulating and participatory method of critical learning. The closing date for applications is: 1 March 2012 for applicants requesting a bursary; 1 May 2012 for all other applicants. Cost: £3,220 (pay by 31 March 2012 to qualify for a reduced fee of £3,050). See [www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/study/international-summer-school](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/study/international-summer-school) or contact: [summer.school@qeh.ox.ac.uk](mailto:summer.school@qeh.ox.ac.uk) for further information.

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# New technologies – always an improvement?

Lisbeth Pilegaard

The person affected by a humanitarian crisis is, if they are 'lucky', subjected to a stream of processes such as various sectoral needs assessments, registration, distribution, assistance tracking and so on. What if all this could be brought rapidly together into validated, corruption-proof lists of beneficiaries with records of their entitlements across programmes as well as their consumption and participation levels? Just imagine a single data card with biometric data, information about other members of the household and their entitlements for shelter, water, food, health, education... And just imagine if that card also carried data of how many distributions or cash transfers had already been received, whether children were malnourished or not and whether they had been vaccinated or attend school or not. This would allow aid to be tailored to the household, allow beneficiaries control of their overall entitlements and choice in their utilisation, and offer increased efficiency of assistance and, not least, fewer assessments.

Technology is supposed to enhance our collective ability to recognise, describe, coordinate, resource and respond to crisis-affected people. But the support

environment is critical. Technology has to be more than good, simple to use and robust – it has to be widely adopted to be useful in creating new, shared capabilities. If everyone is using different technologies the results can be worse than no technological development at all. Various systems for rapid digitised registration and use of biometrics, for example, have been piloted (including by the Norwegian Refugee Council). Many evaluations of such technology have been positive but where are these technologies today? No agency has the power to say, "We will now adopt this technology and not the other one – and we will all use it." There is an absence of the necessary critical mass of decision-making power in the humanitarian world to invoke shared technology standards.

The UN seems to be the obvious choice for the development of standard technologies (as it has the convening power). But a UN agency must take on this role explicitly and ensure competence and develop legitimacy through an open and participatory process that can be move through testing to adoption and dissemination.

Let us not stop inventing and innovating. Let us work on appropriate technology – technology that can be supported and

maintained where we work and that adds value and new opportunities, technology that is designed to do real jobs that are really needed in our field of operations. And let us get real aid workers and beneficiaries involved in product specification and design.

We must not let technology become a barrier to engaging and communicating with the people who need protection and assistance. The risks are there that it further separates us from people we wish to work with and for. The greatest technological achievements – remote monitoring, for example? – may undermine our purpose by enabling us to be physically absent. Humanitarian action is also about proximity, compassion and solidarity, whilst witnessing and documenting the violation of rights.

Lisbeth Pilegaard ([Lisbeth.Pilegaard@nrc.no](mailto:Lisbeth.Pilegaard@nrc.no)) is Head of Technical Support, Norwegian Refugee Council ([www.nrc.no](http://www.nrc.no)). This short article is extracted from a presentation given at the DIHAD Conference in Dubai in March 2011 which focused on 'New technologies' ([www.dihad.org](http://www.dihad.org)).

