Saving lives during disaster through a communications platform for immediate response

by *Teresa Marchetti* on 05/10/2013 11:24 AM CDT

Networking Services Used: SMS or MMS, VoIP, Location-Based Services, Social Networking

1. What problems are you hoping to solve?

The goal of the Humanitarian Early Warning Service (HEWSweb) is to improve the speed and effectiveness of immediate response to hunger and food security operations, particularly when disaster strikes, and time saved can make the difference between life and death for thousands of vulnerable people. State-of-the-art, unified solutions are a critical element of speeding up the ability to get food, shelter, and other immediate human needs on the ground where and when needed to save lives.

2. How has technology helped to solve this problem? What devices does your solution run on?"

The Humanitarian Early Warning Service (HEWSweb.org) platform promotes better and faster humanitarian analysis, warning and response by putting a wealth of specialized data in one central location. A single homepage map enables users to overlay early warning information about multiple hazards. Pages dedicated to each individual hazard type will aggregate information on their particular topic with the added value of early warning analysis capabilities from Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) members. IASC is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance. It is a unique forum involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners.

It is fair to say that tens of millions of people around the world affected by severe weather and natural disasters will benefit from the use of HEWsweb. Access to more current and relevant information will lead to better emergency preparedness and response operations.

1. The ability to choose specific alerts by hazard type and by country, and enable notifications via RSS, SMS, CAP, KML, WMS, or Twitter when changes occur on a relevant external website
2. Individual country and hazard monitoring pages
3. Smart phone app development (e.g. Blackberry, iPhone) to reach users with vital information when they are not at their desks, but responding in the field

3. Where is this solution being used? What company provides the networking service in your area?

All over the world! HEWSweb is a service of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and its members and it is intended as a free public site for the benefit of the wider humanitarian community operating in more than 200 countries and serving 14 humanitarian agency partners. The United Nations World Food Programme is responsible for coordinating and managing the overall information content, design, and organization of HEWSweb.

4. Describe the current and future reach of your program. How can it be scaled to reach a wider audience?

HEWSweb is used all over the developing world in more than 200 countries. The platform serves more than 2000 humanitarian response workers. HEWSweb.org was designed with an API that allows the data to be used on other sites and within other platforms. Developers can register on HEWSweb.org and then draw the data to populate their own sites or platforms. Public and private sector organizations have expressed an interest in accessing HEWSweb's repository to integrate the site's data into their systems.

5. If you are one of the winning entries, how will you use the award money?

The award will be used to further the World Food Program USA's work to solve global hunger, building a world where everyone has the food and nutrition needed to lead healthy, productive lives. In particular the funds will be put towards current emergency relief operations and the millions of people who need vital food assistance every day.