IRIN

Evaluation Report

by

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&

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The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Introduction

1. The lack of reliable information and impartial news sources in Rwanda in early 1994 helped to create conditions in which misinformation and propaganda fuelled human rights violations on a previously unprecedented scale. The Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), which opened its first office in Nairobi, Kenya in late 1995, was developed as a response to the Great Lakes’ crisis to provide accurate, timely and contextual information from a regional perspective to humanitarian workers in the field, decision makers at headquarters and local populations.

2. IRIN started by analyzing and synthesizing information on the Great Lakes region. It has since expanded its geographical coverage to include West Africa and Southern Africa by establishing offices in Abidjan and Johannesburg and now reports on 46 African countries. IRIN established an office in Islamabad in July 2000 to report on developments in Afghanistan and seven other countries in Central Asia. IRIN’s information products include analytical reports, daily summaries of events, chronologies, interviews, and weekly digests.

3. As IRIN enters its eighth year, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), of which IRIN is part, proposed an evaluation to review IRIN’s progress.

Purpose of the Evaluation

4. The purpose of the evaluation was to review the experience of the IRIN network, learn from this and provide accountability to donors, OCHA management and its constituencies by assessing the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, value-added, impact and sustainability of IRIN’s products and services, with emphasis on current services and organisation. The evaluation sought to obtain opinions from a broad base of subscribers, including the United Nations (UN), Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media, donors, governments, academics and civil society.  

5. Two consultants, Graham Mytton and Sharon Rusu, were selected by OCHA on the basis of their backgrounds and experience in media marketing, humanitarian affairs and

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information management. Field visits were carried out in New York (briefing), Nairobi, Johannesburg, and Pristina. The purpose of the field visits was to undertake interviews with key stakeholders. A visit to Abidjan was planned, but due to the security situation at the time, not completed. However, questionnaires were duly sent out to key stakeholders. An e-survey was also carried out. Though IRIN has no physical presence in the Balkans, the advantage of adding Kosovo was to compare the humanitarian information capacity and response in an area a) which has no IRIN presence and b) where the potential for renewed conflict continues to exist.

**Principal Findings and Recommendations**

**Findings of the Electronic Survey**

6. We ran a survey of IRIN users in December 2002 using both e-mailed and web-based questionnaires. 1,891 responses were received from the e-mail contacts. But only 91 responded to the web-based questionnaire. The main findings are as follows:

- Users gave IRIN a high rating for all major factors by which a humanitarian news agency can be best assessed – with very high scores for Credibility. Relevance, Timeliness and Depth of Coverage and Detail.
- 89% gave IRIN’s Credibility a score of 4 or 5 out of 5. The equivalent figures for Relevance, Timelines and Depth were 89%, 84% and 67% respectively.
- More than two in three IRIN users recall recent stories (and gave examples) that they had seen first on IRIN.
- Three in four IRIN users believe that it had information that other agencies and sources did not have, and were able to give several recent examples.
- Nearly two in three IRIN users thought that the agency provided views of events, people and organisations that were not otherwise available, and were able to provide several recent examples.
- Significantly, media users were the most likely of all to view IRIN as an original and exclusive source for some stories. Four out of five Media subscribers believed IRIN provided exclusive information.

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2 Web-based questionnaires usually need more time and more active prompting. For various reasons neither of these was possible.
Most IRIN users work in the field of humanitarian relief and related activities – in NGOs, government service, the UN and its agencies, the media, private companies and in teaching and research.

IRIN users report very regular use, with 94% having read IRIN content within the previous week and 72% within the previous day.

IRIN material is used in a wide variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. In most cases, users wish to keep up to date with particular countries, areas or stories. Many also use IRIN for background material about crises.

More than half of IRIN users regularly pass content on to others, thus considerably expanding IRIN’s reach.

Most IRIN users – 73% - also visit the IRIN website, although not nearly as regularly as they read or use the e-mail service. The most frequent users of the website were those who work in the media.

One in four IRIN users had visited the IRIN website within the previous week.

Most IRIN subscribers use the Internet as a news source. The BBC is their most used Internet source for world news. The prime source for humanitarian and development news for most respondents was IRIN, and it came far ahead of any other source.

Few respondents (only 17%) were willing to answer a question about the annual value to them of IRIN’s services. The median figure given by those who did reply was $100.

7. The e-survey showed that present IRIN users have a very high regard for IRIN and place a high value on its products and services.

Findings from media interviews

8. The findings from the media interviews are summarized below. They enlarge on and corroborate most of the above findings from the electronic survey.

- Daily stories on Africa were the most used IRIN product. Users have a very high regard for the relevance, journalistic quality and usefulness of what they receive and for the coverage of remote and otherwise forgotten places and crises.
- There was almost universal appreciation of IRIN’s consistent humanitarian focus.
For some impoverished African media IRIN provides a free and valued news agency service.

But some local African domestic media make little use of IRIN, largely because it does not report the kind of news they seek.

IRIN is viewed as a very important source for Horn of Africa news by the leading broadcaster to the region.

There is no single view on what gaps there are at present, although several users wanted IRIN to extend coverage.

Low awareness of IRIN among non-users appears widespread. IRIN is still relatively new.

For many potential users in Africa, IRIN will continue to be unavailable until Internet and e-mail access is extended.

Some existing media users of IRIN are unaware that stories can be made available immediately rather than as part of a daily single time feed.

While nearly all media users believe IRIN to be completely credible, a few did question its independence and ask whether it has to continue to be within the UN system. But its independence from commercial or tabloid news pressures is seen as a major strength.

Findings of Media and Humanitarian Community Interviews compared against Assessment Criteria

IRIN’s Analytical Capability

9. From the perspective of both IRIN users in the media and humanitarians, by far the most important criterion among those by which we evaluated IRIN was its analytical capability. This encompasses almost everything the media look to IRIN for. Current users interviewed gave a high performance rating on this aspect, with few criticisms. Only those who used IRIN very little (mainly a few in the media) gave a low assessment. The humanitarians, on the other hand, were clearly of the view that IRIN demonstrated an excellent capacity for analysis. Backed by rigorous reporting and editorial standards, and a highly professional staff, IRIN’s analytical capability was what humanitarians look most to IRIN for. In this regard, the evaluation found that IRIN had achieved a workable
and effective balance between international staff and nationals. This balance was directly reflected by subscriber attestation as to IRIN’s credibility and value-added as an in-depth and analytically sound source of humanitarian news.

**IRIN’s Communications Strategy**

10. Communications strategy was also seen as important, especially by those media involved in some form of advocacy for human rights and emergency relief. And in these cases, IRIN was generally commended. Some criticism was made of a perceived lack of timeliness. But this probably arises from the fact that some subscribers are unaware of different delivery formats and timings of the e-mail service that can better meet their needs for timeliness. The humanitarian community, on the other hand, gave IRIN a high rating for focusing its reporting on humanitarian issues and monitoring long-term news stories often neglected by others. They had no issue with IRIN’s frequency, and the majority found it timely. The humanitarian community further recognized IRIN’s importance at the field level, specifically in that IRIN supports OCHA’s capacity to effectively manage information for the purpose of humanitarian coordination. The evaluation found that IRIN directly supports OCHA to discharge its core function to ‘manage information effectively’ in support of the ‘coordination of humanitarian emergency response.’ Additional insights and corroboration of these findings have been gained through interviews with journalists and editors, the humanitarian community, and OCHA/IRIN senior management and staff.

**IRIN’s Influence**

11. Media users viewed influence as important. IRIN has extended outreach through the media and through the humanitarian community. This multiplier effect enhances greatly IRIN’s scope, reputation and influence beyond both media and the humanitarian community into a global arena of respected informants and informed decision-makers. And many media users were appreciative of the uniqueness of IRIN content. For humanitarians, there was a clear link between IRIN’s products and services and informed decision-making on the part of IRIN subscribers. The evaluation found that IRIN products have a measurable influence on the discourses and behaviours of policymakers. And, IRIN influences the decisions taken by humanitarians in their daily work, strategic planning and programme implementation and evaluation.
IRIN and Cross Network Learning and Knowledge Transfer

12. As far as cross network learning and knowledge transfer were concerned, the dominant view of the media was that IRIN was a humanitarian news agency rather than a network, although IRIN’s capacity to make linkages between different actors in humanitarian and emergency related stories was widely recognised. The humanitarians shared this view. At the same time, humanitarians recognized IRIN’s usefulness as a tool for sensitizing and educating audiences through Web specials, PlusNews and IRIN radio. As testimony to IRIN’s competence as a knowledge network, IRIN’s coordinator, Pat Banks, has just been awarded the 2002 UN 21 Award in the area of knowledge management.

IRIN and Connectivity

13. As with the previous criterion, high connectivity was viewed by many as a strength of IRIN in that it made connections with the various agencies involved and was comprehensive in this important respect as far as media users are concerned. The humanitarian community shared this view. High connectivity was especially important in terms of developing an expert network of informateurs, building relationships with donors, UN, NGOs and civil society based on trust and shared humanitarian values. The evaluation found that IRIN had characteristics of both knowledge and learning networks. Its move into PlusNews and radio was viewed by the evaluation as a positive indicator and demonstration of its awareness of the importance of its network advantage.

IRIN and Sustainability

14. The issue of sustainability was not something that seemed especially relevant to media users, except in the sense that IRIN’s disappearance would be regretted to a greater or lesser extent by all active users, and that IRIN had proved its value in its reliability and effective use of the material it collected and disseminated. By contrast, the vast majority of the humanitarian community observed that if IRIN was no longer available it would have an immediate effect on their daily work as IRIN occupies a unique niche that is not easily filled. The humanitarian community found IRIN, with its use of humanitarian sources to report on humanitarian issues and themes, a source vital to support for strategic planning, programmes and substantive monitoring and reporting on humanitarian issues. Moreover, were IRIN’s customized e-mail delivery system to disappear it would drastically reduce the immediate availability of information and analysis on important humanitarian issues. Finally, the majority advised that IRIN was in itself so clearly
needed that funding for IRIN was viewed as integral to positive humanitarian outcomes not the least information support for coordination.

**IRIN and Governance**

15. Very few media users had any view on the governance criterion. There does not seem to be much direct contact between media users and IRIN. But none of the users interviewed made a point about this or wished to change the relationship. On the other hand, the humanitarian community clearly linked IRIN’s excellent products with good management. A number pointed out that the IRIN Readership Survey strongly supported this view. Others pointed to the fact that IRIN management had managed, in a short time, to develop IRIN as an authority in the humanitarian news area. The community as a whole shared this view. Thus, the issue of governance for the humanitarian community was directly linked to strong and effective leadership in the management of IRIN.

**IRIN and Editorial Independence**

16. The important issue of editorial independence came up several times during the study and deserves special mention here. IRIN, although part of the UN system, is not subject to the same constraints to which other information providers in the UN are subjected. This independence sometimes sits uneasily within the UN system, but is essential for IRIN to function as a reliable and credible source of information. As the e-survey shows very clearly, IRIN’s stories are trusted and relied on by the great majority of users. It is especially significant that users who work in mainstream media, who are trained to be sceptical of any information coming from a sponsored or official source, place a high level of trust in IRIN’s credibility. Some questioned whether IRIN needs to continue to sit within the UN system. When pressed on this issue, none of the media users interviewed could come up with any clear examples where the UN status of IRIN had compromised IRIN’s editorial independence. But they raised the issue as one of principle and wondered whether circumstances might arise that would, because of internal UN pressure, lead to the suppression or amendment of stories. But no examples of such interference were noted or raised. Everyone agrees however that IRIN’s credibility is high and must be maintained. We observed that IRIN operates in every way as a news agency committed to accuracy and comprehensiveness in the reporting of news with a humanitarian focus and context. It is obviously vital that this should continue.
Conclusion

17. Our study found overall that IRIN reporting had clear benefits for the majority of its subscribers. IRIN saved time, was easily personalized and was given high scores for credibility, relevance and influence. Its products and services were described as providing timely, in-depth analysis and detail of coverage on humanitarian issues. IRIN products are used for a wide variety of purposes: funding, policy, security or programming decisions, but most often for updating, background briefings on crises areas, and forwarding to others. The latter activity is highest amongst NGOs, businesses, and UN, and least among media and academic users. Nearly two in three IRIN users thought that the agency provided views of events, people and organisations that were not otherwise available. Most importantly, the evaluation found that IRIN content informs the decision-making of a wide range of stakeholders. This alone is so compelling an attribute that it places IRIN in a position of unique value and demonstrated competence as an essential element in humanitarian coordination efforts.

Recommendations

IRIN and the Media

18. The multiplier effect achieved by the media’s use of IRIN content should be acknowledged and furthered by:

- Increased promotion of IRIN with local and international media; and
- Staff exchanges, where possible and appropriate, for a week or two week orientation.

IRIN Capacity and Professional Staff

19. The evaluation recommends that OCHA and donors support IRIN to continue to enhance its analytical capacity in line with current initiatives by:

- Acknowledging that IRIN has the right balance between its staff, analytical capacity and the production of highly valued product lines; and
- Supporting IRIN to continue to sustain a high level of analysis through the recruitment of highly qualified professional staff in line with the continuous development and evolution of its products and services.
Support to OCHA Core Functions

20. In light of IRIN’s demonstrated direct support to OCHA’s core information management function, the evaluation recommends that IRIN continue to remain an integral part of OCHA with full support from OCHA and subject to UN rules and administrative procedures. The evaluation further finds that IRIN’s French language coverage is central to OCHA’s coordination function and recommends that it be clearly supported to expand in line with this function.

IRIN and Expansion

21. The evaluation recommends that IRIN be first recognized as having achieved an effective balance between its resources and coverage to date, including expansion. Though recognizing that donors have not shown willingness to fund further expansion in the past, the evaluation is recommending that future requests for expansion meet two tests:
   - Stakeholders making the request for IRIN expansion demonstrate why and where IRIN coverage is needed as well as that the IRIN model can be easily and cost-effectively replicated; and
   - The necessary and appropriate resources are identified and made available to finance such expansion.

IRIN and its Network Advantage

22. The evaluation recommends that IRIN be supported by OCHA and donors to continue to capitalize on its network advantage through the production of focus articles, PlusNews, Web specials and, especially the IRIN radio project.

IRIN and Sustainability

23. The evaluation recommends that based on its demonstrated highly rated performance that IRIN’s funding requests are considered in ways consistent with its needs, especially to counter the uncertainty of current funding trends by:
   - The establishment of a revolving fund with donors in line with UN rules and donor agreement
   - Ensuring longer term funding for certain core activities
   - The development of a Trusteeship Forum, or likely alternative, of well-connected and knowledgeable former humanitarians and others, to help IRIN to further raise its
profile, and raise funds through the promotion of IRIN’s mission, products and services.

**IRIN Management**

24. In view of the evaluation finding that good products are linked to good management based on cost-effective planning and implementation, the evaluators recommend that OCHA and donors support IRIN by:

- Acknowledging that IRIN’s management has succeeded in producing products in a cost-effective way whose content is viewed as authoritative and for which there is no equivalent in either the private or public sectors that has the capabilities to fill the gaps like IRIN; and

- Ensuring IRIN is valued and promoted at the highest levels in government and the UN as a credit to the UN system, its management and its donors.

**IRIN and Editorial Independence**

25. The evaluation recommends that the editorial independence of IRIN be maintained. IRIN needs to be able to continue to report on humanitarian news without reference to or approval of UN headquarters. If this were to be compromised it would damage if not destroy the agency’s usefulness. The present status of IRIN as an independent and credible news provider working within the UN system, although it appears anomalous to some, especially in the media, nonetheless works well and does not need to be changed. If at any time this becomes impossible then consideration would need to be given to separating IRIN from the UN system if it were to continue its vital role as a humanitarian information provider. Any change is not necessary as things stand. IRIN has *de facto* editorial independence that is essential for its work.
Part 1  
Background and Introduction

1. The lack of reliable information and news sources in Rwanda in 1994 proved a contributing factor to the genocide, as well as an impediment to the coordination of the humanitarian response. To counter misinformation and vertical information practices, the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) was born, opening its first office in Nairobi in late 1995. Recalling the circumstances leading up to the birth of IRIN, Randolph Kent, a former Humanitarian Coordinator and UN Resident Representative for Rwanda, highlighted ‘the fact that agencies in Goma and Kigali were communicating with New York or their various headquarters, but not with each other.’ A regional information capacity was needed, and the development of IRIN was the perceived solution. Kent goes on to comment that the name IRIN was formulated to ‘reflect recognition of the importance of having a network of information producers that was both regional and integrated.’

2. Established by the Department for Humanitarian Affairs (predecessor to OCHA), IRIN first acted as a clearinghouse for the compilation and dissemination of key humanitarian reports (situation and field reports, maps and other related documents) from various UN and NGO actors. The key step to its future direction, as observed by a former staffer, was the Coordinator’s assessment that the IRIN model at the time did not fill information gaps. What was required, in her estimate, were summaries of events and written reports on humanitarian concerns not being reported on by the traditional media, or in the absence of media altogether. As a start to redressing these identified gaps, IRIN introduced the Weekly Roundup which had two immediate benefits: a summary, in the place of individual reports, of the week’s major events, and the instant reduction of information overload.

3. By mid-1996, at the request of the humanitarian community, IRIN took steps to produce synthesis reports, recognizing in ‘distillation, an art that is undervalued.’ By the time of the return of the Rwandan refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in late 1996, daily reporting was introduced which led to an expanded network

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5  Ben Parker, Senior Information Manager, Africa ONLINE, Interview 3 December 2002, Nairobi, Kenya.
6  See above, Ben Parker.
of core staff and further regional coverage possibilities. As former staffer Ben Parker observes, ‘IRIN’s real value-added was evident soon after start-up when it began, in addition to the Roundup, to produce its own synthesis reports and write its own stories.’ Movement away from the clearinghouse model into humanitarian reporting was irritating to some UN agencies, as the potential for criticism of UN policies and practices increased. Most of the donors were supportive.\(^7\)

4. The single biggest factor in IRIN’s development, however, was the availability of web technology. The ‘successful linking of technology and humanitarian reporting’ was as one observer noted, clearly central to IRIN’s development.\(^8\) Advances in technology permitted IRIN to move from faxes to e-mail, a move that produced three immediate benefits: cost savings and expansion in the areas of geographical coverage and readership. In 2001, a new web system was introduced which permitted the streamlining of IRIN’s e-mail interface by linking e-mail with the web. The benefits as a result of the transition were at least threefold: more cost-effective communications and staffing and better subscriber management. These savings are further elaborated in Section 2.

5. IRIN’s initial focus was on the Great Lakes. From the start, however, IRIN’s readership was broader than just donors and relief workers in the region. The successful launch of synthesised reporting was succeeded by demands for IRIN services and products in and outside the region. Over a six and a half year period, from July 1997 to January 2003, IRIN opened 3 additional offices: Abidjan in 1997 to cover West Africa, Johannesburg in May 1998 to cover South Africa, and Islamabad in July 2000 to cover Central Asia. In 2000, IRIN moved to an editorial desk structure with desks for the Horn of Africa (2000), East Africa (2001) and an Editor-in-Chief located provisionally in West Africa.

6. By the end of 2002, IRIN was covering 54 countries and producing Daily Reports, Web Specials, Focus Reports and Features, the Weekly Round-up and Interviews. IRIN was also managing two projects: PlusNews, an HIV/AIDS information service, and an Outreach Radio Project. From a few hundred subscribers in 1995, IRIN’s daily e-mail subscriber list topped 18,000 at the end of 2002, with a current estimated readership in

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\(^7\) Pat Banks, Coordinator, IRIN, Interview 2 December 2002, Nairobi.  
\(^8\) See above, Randolph Kent.
the area of 100,000. This latter number increases substantially if readership statistics from websites re-posting IRIN articles are included. Since its upgrading in October 2001, a steady increase in the numbers visiting the IRIN website has been observed.\textsuperscript{9} In its readership survey of March 2002, over a quarter of respondents claimed that IRIN saved them at least one hour of online research time per week.\textsuperscript{10}

7. IRIN in 2003 has a current total of 22 international staff and 40 nationals. They also have about 11 stringers and four or five translators. The contractual arrangements for these groups vary and are further elaborated in Part 2.

8. IRIN’s total core activities budget for 2003 is US$ 4,324,957.\textsuperscript{11} But a chronic problem for IRIN is cash flow, maintaining enough cash in hand to support operations. At the end of September 2002, IRIN had a shortfall of US$ 900,000.\textsuperscript{12} This is a recurring problem for IRIN, generally related to the late release of donor funds. To counteract this predictable shortfall, OCHA has recommended that donors contribute to a revolving fund, staggering their donations so that IRIN can cover this predictable shortfall. But this remains a recommendation in need of follow-up.

9. But these financial challenges are not new to IRIN. As one senior OCHA official noted, ‘IRIN has from start-up seen many upsets and struggles: financial, staffing, communications, and even mission focus, but these did not stop it from becoming quickly recognized as an effective source of humanitarian information.’\textsuperscript{13} Despite adversity, the central challenge for IRIN has always been to maintain a high standard of professional reporting. Thus, IRIN introduced a system of oversight, based on rigorous guidelines and editorial standards, with a view to ensuring that IRIN reports would withstand challenge as examples of ‘reliability, professional analysis and balanced content.’\textsuperscript{14}

10. In 2003, IRIN will be faced with additional difficulties including requests from humanitarians for the further expansion of IRIN reporting. IRIN’s budget for 2003 is based on zero-growth and it has already undertaken consolidation efforts. Other

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{9} IRIN Global Funding Document for the Year 2003: Bridging the Information Gap. The readership estimates are adduced from subscriber feedback.
\item \textsuperscript{10} See above IRIN Global Funding Document for the Year 2003: Bridging the Information Gap and ‘IRIN 2002 Readership Survey Results.’
\item \textsuperscript{11} The two outreach projects, PlusNews and IRIN Radio have entirely separate budgets and are not included in these figures.
\item \textsuperscript{12} See above IRIN Global Funding Document 2003: Bridging the Information Gap, p19. See also Pat Banks, Interview, Johannesburg, 9 December 2003. At the end of 2001, IRIN had a shortfall of US$ 500,000 with unpaid pledges of around US$ 1 million.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Kevin Kennedy, Director, Humanitarian Emergencies Branch, OCHA, New York, Interview, 27 November 2002.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ed Tsui, Director, OCHA, New York, Interview, 27 November 2002.
\end{itemize}
challenges relate to management and the most effective ways to ‘get the job done’ and ‘to translate IRIN’s positive aspects into needed resources’. Still, the major challenge is how to move IRIN beyond chronic funding deficits without compromising its credibility and integrity as a distinguished humanitarian news service.

**Purpose of the Evaluation**

11. On the eve of its eighth year of operation (October, 2002), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) initiated an independent evaluation process of the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN). The purpose of the evaluation was to review the experience of the IRIN network, learn from the experience and provide accountability to its donors, OCHA management and its constituencies by assessing the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, value-added, impact and sustainability of IRIN’s products and services, with emphasis on current services and organisation. The evaluation sought to obtain opinions from a broad base of subscribers, including UN, NGOs, media, donors, governments, academics and civil society. A team of two consultants undertook the evaluation, Graham Mytton and Sharon Rusu, selected by OCHA on the basis of their backgrounds and experience in media marketing analysis, humanitarian affairs and information management. (See Annex 1, Terms of Reference for the IRIN Evaluation).

**Framework for the Evaluation**

12. In developing a framework for the evaluation of IRIN as a ‘humanitarian news service’, broadly conforming to the characteristics of regional information, news and learning networks, but with a strong focus on knowledge, the evaluators first considered an overarching question: to what extent has the network advantage been achieved? Reference to the implications of this question as to what comprised an ‘effective’ IRIN

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15 See above, Ed Tsui, Interview, 27 November 2002.
was helpful in the development of methods for assessing the impact and measuring the effectiveness of the IRIN model.\(^8\) (See Annex 2, A Framework for Analysis)

**Evaluation Method**

13. The method employed for the IRIN evaluation was an iterative one, over 3 phases. (See Annex 3 for a description of the 3 phases of the IRIN Evaluation). Oral interviews and an e-survey were the major methods used for capturing the information. (See Annexes 4 and 5 for examples of the e-survey and interview questionnaires).

14. The e-survey was developed and sent out 9 December 2002 to all IRIN e-mail subscribers and posted on the IRIN website. Between 9 December 2002 and 6 January 2002, 1,891 responses were received from the e-mail subscribers, while the IRIN website produced 91 responses.

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<td>E-mail subscribers</td>
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<td>Website</td>
<td>91</td>
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15. By 31 January 2003, 137 interviews had been completed. (See Annex 6 for a complete list of interviewees).

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\(^8\) Assessing the IRIN network model, which is not a single but composite entity, posed several challenges. Is it a regional humanitarian news network, one that provides the context for learning and transfers knowledge to its sources of information, sister agencies and its larger readership? Or is it simply a news service that networks solely to provide and verify sources amongst a group of ‘informateurs’? If it is a functioning information network, how effective is IRIN’s networking capacity in terms of its institutional role and partnerships, strategic alliances, and its influence on decisions? If not, does it matter? Another challenge was assessing IRIN’s credibility and independence, which are arguably central to assessing IRIN’s relevance as a reliable source of information and its capacity to produce balanced reports. Although a non-commercial venture dependent on donor support for funding, IRIN is part of the UN system under the direct administration of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) which, at the least, makes the assessment of independence, a potentially thorny one. A further challenge lay in assessing the value-added of the IRIN model, especially its cost-effectiveness. Arguably IRIN’s value and the costs attached to its upkeep depend on the judgement of its readership. Assessing their opinions of IRIN’s products and services was viewed as central to measuring the effectiveness of IRIN’s performance as a humanitarian news service. A yet further challenge lay in assessing the tendency of organisations to develop self-protecting mechanisms (including networks) that militate against change and challenge by vigorously defending the status quo. Thus, measuring the impact of a composite information network like IRIN, within the UN system, meant more than simply evaluating IRIN’s performance as a humanitarian news service against agreed performance benchmarks. Overall, it meant assessing the impact and influence of IRIN products and services on the behaviour of its users, including assessing the extent to which IRIN informed policy and decision-making in support of positive humanitarian outcomes.
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The results of both surveys were analysed and can be found in Part 2 under Findings.

16. An informal narrative history approach was also employed, most of which is to be found in Part 1, Background. This approach required various interviewees to recall their memories of IRIN from start-up to today. A narrative history is a particularly sensitive evaluation tool in that it places events in a context which better permits analysis of significant events in the life of a project and is useful for drawing lessons. Moreover, it does not preclude the use of more analytical models whose purpose is to assess performance and accountability.

17. The assessment criteria were developed with a view to measuring the effectiveness of the IRIN model by assessing IRIN’s performance as a humanitarian news service through analysing user perceptions of IRIN’s products, services and management. Interviews with OCHA and IRIN senior managers and staff, as well as an extensive literature review, helped to provide the additional information required for an evaluation of IRIN’s management under the more general heading of IRIN sustainability. Under sustainability, the IRIN model, staffing and management, and over-all cost-effectiveness were assessed.

18. Based on the following assessment criteria, an effective IRIN would be one with:

- a reputation for rigorous analysis and investigative reporting based on multiple viewpoints and the application of quality assurance as prescribed by the IRIN Style Guide (high analytical capability)
- a focussed communications/media strategy in planning and operations, which is demonstrably communicating with and educating strategic
audiences and decision-makers (high communications strategy)
• strong influence on the discourse, behaviours and policy approaches of key decision-makers or key groups associated with major IRIN advocacy initiatives (high influence)
• high levels of experience and best practice exchange between network members, and demonstration of the institutionalisation of lessons learned into future practice, including standardized investigative and editorial practices. (high levels of cross-network learning and knowledge transfer)
• strong relationships with key decision-makers in the UN, media, governments, NGOs, civil society and with donors. In addition, the capacity to initiate new relationships with a view to enhancing the mainstream capacity of IRIN and developing new approaches to fundraising and sustainability (high connectivity)
• a high level of credibility and access to key stakeholders whether international agencies, media or local actors and success in mainstreaming key issues thereafter. Accountable, relevant and effective management structures and practices, including information technology, based on effective planning and people management, and successful donor relationships that are premised on broadening IRIN’s funding base and supporting relative, appropriate expansion while avoiding overstretch19 (sustainability)
• a high level of accountability in the application of best practice principles of accountability and transparency in operations and reporting. An organisational culture that encourages and rewards creativity, initiative, new knowledge and inclusive decision-making. (governance)

19. Using the criteria as a base, each interview response was ranked high, medium or low. These designations rated the performance of IRIN against each of the criteria as applied to several categories including: mandate, institutional role and partnerships, products and services, gaps in geographic coverage, themes and language, and sustainability. Importantly, these ratings are viewed as a means to identify patterns in subscriber perceptions of IRIN’s overall performance rather than to measure quantity. This formula was also used to assess the effectiveness of the management of the IRIN model and, as perceived by its subscribers, peer groups in the media and other humanitarian agencies, the extent to which IRIN adds value as a humanitarian news service. (See Annex 7 for a sample interview with ratings).

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19 Ed Tsui, Director, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, New York. ‘Note to Mr. Kenzo Oshima’, Report on Mission to Abidjan and Nairobi from 10-14 June 2002 who, in paras 10, 11 and 13 of the Recommendations, underlines the need for consolidation, ‘a no-growth budget’ in 2003 and ‘the development of a fundraising strategy with a view to broadening the range of donor support.’
Part 2  
Findings

Summary of the Findings of the Electronic Survey of IRIN Users

20. The main findings of the E-Survey are summarized below:

- Users gave IRIN a high rating in all major factors by which a humanitarian news agency can be best assessed – with very high scores for Credibility, Relevance, Timeliness and Depth of Coverage and Detail.

- 89% gave IRIN’s Credibility a score of 4 or 5 out of 5. The equivalent figures for Relevance, Timelines and Depth were 89%, 84% and 67% respectively.

- More than two in three IRIN users recall recent stories (and gave examples) that they had seen first on IRIN.

- Three in four IRIN users believe that it had information that other agencies and sources did not have, and were able to give several recent examples.

- Nearly two in three IRIN users thought that the agency provided views of events, people and organisations that were not otherwise available, and were able to provide several recent examples.

- Significantly, media users were the most likely of all to view IRIN as an original and exclusive source for some stories. Four out of five Media subscribers believed IRIN provided exclusive information.

- Most IRIN users work in the field of humanitarian relief and related activities – in NGOs, government service, the UN and its agencies, the media, private companies and in teaching and research.

- IRIN users report very regular use, with 94% having read IRIN content within the previous week, 72% within the previous day.

- IRIN material is used in a wide variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. In most cases, users wish to keep up to date with particular countries, areas or stories. Many also use IRIN for background material about crises.

- More than half of IRIN users regularly pass content on to others, thus considerably expanding IRIN’s reach.

- Most IRIN users – 73% - also visit the IRIN website, although not nearly as regularly as they read or use the e-mail service. The most frequent users of the website were users who work in the media.

- One in four IRIN users had visited the IRIN website within the previous week.

- Most IRIN subscribers use the Internet as a news source. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is their most used Internet source for world news. The prime
source for humanitarian and development news for most respondents was IRIN, and it came far ahead of any other source.

- Few respondents (only 17%) were willing to answer a question about the annual value to them of IRIN’s services. The median figure given by those who did reply was $100.

**Interviews**

21. With the number and range of stakeholders interviewed and the fact that responses differed sometimes widely between groups, a decision was taken to refer wherever possible to the interview respondents according to their professional affiliation: Media, UN, NGO, donor/government and academic. The interview results below begin with media respondents and thereafter chronicle responses from what is loosely defined as the ‘humanitarian community’ of UN, NGO, donors and academics.

**Media Users’ Views of IRIN**

22. We interviewed 31 journalists and editors in the UK, the US, Switzerland, Kenya, Zambia and South Africa. About 7% of IRIN’s subscribers work in the media. But their strategic ‘gatekeeper’ role means that they can play a multiplier role in making IRIN material available to a much wider public. Of the 31 interviewed, 12 worked for news agencies of various kinds and used IRIN among other material in their output. The remainder were in various broadcast and print media, some with solely domestic audiences, while others had audiences in many parts of the world.

23. Prominent among interviewees were representatives from media that specialise in development and emergency news from Africa and/or Asia. The thirty-one were not representative of the media as a whole, but of those who actually use IRIN or might be expected to do so. It is instructive to categorise them into these four categories:

- **International** News Media addressing audiences in different countries either directly or indirectly.  
  Examples: BBC World Service, Reuters, Channel Africa, and AllAfrica.com. There were 10 in this category

- **Advocacy** News Media – those that provide services to ameliorate present imbalances and barriers in communication in less developed areas. 
  Examples: Pambazuka, Alertnet, InfoSud, Media Action International. There were 8 in this category.
• **Domestic (IRIN Coverage Areas)** News Media addressing audiences in areas about which IRIN reports.
  Examples: *The Monitor* in Zambia, *Daily Nation* in Kenya. There were 9 in this category. The BBC Somali and Swahili services and the Swahili service of Channel Africa are also included here since they operate very much like domestic news media, addressing audiences in the same target areas.

• **Domestic (Other Areas)** News Media in Other Areas – mainly Europe, addressing domestic audiences there. Examples: BBC TV News, *Basler Zeitung*. There were 4 in this category.

• Additionally three training institutions were visited in Zambia, two of them involved in training journalists and the third in training for emergencies.

**IRIN Products and Users**

24. The IRIN products or services used most by all kinds of media were the daily stories on the four African regions. Some receive these by e-mail; others go to the web pages. Some use both. Because there are interesting and important differences in the way IRIN is used by media in the four categories, they are reported separately in this section.

**International**

25. All users in this category spoke well of the service, praising the quality of the reporting, the coverage of difficult areas and the content of the material.

  ‘IRIN is an absolutely excellent service and an anchor for so much other coverage. I’m not in the habit of praising the UN but in this case, it really is a worthwhile project. At a time when most news organisations have decimated their capacity on the ground, we really need IRIN’s overview and their orientation.’
  Executive Editor, AllAfrica.com, Washington

  ‘IRIN is especially useful for Rwanda, the DRC, Sudan and difficult areas and places to cover. We cannot cover everything ourselves. It’s good for figures on numbers of deaths, refugee statistics, movements of people, and problems of one kind and another.’
  BBC correspondent, Nairobi.

  ‘The world is a better place for having IRIN. It is run by good journalists whom we know. It is not like a UN spokesman who . . .

•
is just wasting our time by going through the motions, or is not
news sensitive.’
News Agency correspondent, Nairobi

26. Similar support and enthusiasm is also found in the editorial offices of the BBC World
Service’s African section and Channel Africa. Producers and journalists in both copy-
taste all IRIN’s African output every day. They tend to use IRIN material as a starting
point for their coverage. As radio stations they need material that works best in the
radio medium – interviews with key people involved in a story or event, or an
illustrated report from someone on the spot. News agency copy in text form is generally
used directly only in bulletins, and tends to be used far more as source material for
reporters doing their own stories or conducting interviews.

27. The BBC World Service’s use of IRIN provides a major extension to the global reach
and influence of the agency. It has the largest global audience of all international radio
broadcasters. Most of its audience listen mainly for world news, and through this
medium alone IRIN content will at times reach more than 150 million listeners in over
40 languages as well as English.

28. As we note later, with some domestic media, Channel Africa, South Africa’s external
radio service on short-wave, satellite and the Internet, uses IRIN as it would a major
news agency. It makes extensive use of IRIN, and has done so even more in the past
twenty months since major budget cuts forced them to cut back on their previously
well-established network of stringers and correspondents around Africa. They use both
the English and French material. They get stories from IRIN that they would otherwise
not be able to obtain and use it extensively for news about all parts of sub-Saharan
Africa. IRIN background pieces were also described as ‘excellent’ for Channel
Africa’s purposes.

Advocacy

29. Media in this category are specialist media that use IRIN when and where it provides
content for areas in which they have an interest. The relationship with or reliance on
IRIN is especially strong when the main reason for the existence of the agency in
question is to provide information on areas in which IRIN operates. That is why they
use IRIN and they tend to view it as a source on which they can rely for coverage of
area and subject matter of particular interest.
30. Pambazuka in South Africa uses IRIN to provide appropriate content for its service in the absence of sufficient content from their own subscribers and members. IRIN was ‘as good as subscribing to a wire service.’ And for Pambazuka it was ‘a very suitable one.’ Alertnet, InfoSud and Media Action International among others use IRIN for areas where each believes it to have special strengths. In each case they use several other sources.

‘IRIN is very focused, and very useful. Its focus derives from its concentration on two areas, Africa and Central Asia. We know it best from what it reports from Africa. Its distinctiveness comes from its geographical and topic focus.’ Editor Alertnet

31. But Alertnet tends to use IRIN more as a lead to stories than as a direct source. For some reason they thought that they were not able to use it for copyright reasons. 21

32. InfoSud and Media Action International each use IRIN more for African than Central Asian stories. For both, IRIN had special strengths.

‘IRIN is a very consistent and reliable site on the Horn of Africa, and probably the best.’ Editor Media Action International.

‘IRIN is timely and important because of its coverage of parts of the DRC that are otherwise not reported – the east and north east especially and the border with CAR.’ Editor Infosud.

Domestic (IRIN Coverage Areas)

33. Some local media in areas where IRIN is active make little or no use of its services, at least not directly. In Kenya, for example, the three major local media – the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), the Daily Nation and East African Standard appear to use IRIN rarely, if at all. The BBC Swahili Service, whose target audience is the Swahili speaking population of East Africa, seems to be the same, even though other parts of the BBC make extensive use of IRIN.

34. The Kenyan media and the BBC Swahili Service staff in Nairobi are chiefly interested in Kenyan and East African stories. IRIN is not viewed as a major source for such stories by these media. Senior editorial staff at both Kenyan daily papers confirmed that IRIN was seldom used. One of them conceded without much enthusiasm that IRIN ‘might be useful on a poor news day.’ Both newspapers were interested in some of the

21 This is probably something that needs follow up. As with some other conversations with media users, there seem to be some misunderstandings and misconceptions about what IRIN is. The Alertnet editor expressed interest in integrating IRIN content into Alertnet output. The problem, he said, with crisis and humanitarian
topics covered by IRIN – food security in countries in the Horn, for example, and items about refugees and conflict in the Horn, especially as these affected Kenya. But for the most part they relied on Reuters and AP. For emergency and humanitarian stories they tended to call the appropriate UN agency directly. One BBC Swahili reporter conceded that IRIN did sometimes have useful stories on the Great Lakes region. But, he said, IRIN was in his experience, ‘often out of date.’ This opinion is quite widespread among both regular and occasional users and is a point that is returned to later.

35. The view of the editor of the BBC Somali service was very different. For him and his colleagues, IRIN was a very important source, perhaps the single most important one for news of the Horn, and was used every weekday. The Somali language service provided by the BBC is probably the most widely listened to radio service heard throughout Somalia.

‘Any loss of IRIN would be difficult to replace. It is indispensable for Somali news and very good also for other areas. IRIN is reporting many stories that others never would have. Even when it speculates it is more reliable than other Somali sources. The only problem is that it is sometimes a day late.’ Editor BBC Somali Service.

36. Channel Africa’s Swahili service, in contrast to that of the BBC, makes significant use of IRIN especially for DRC and Great Lakes news. Channel Africa uses IRIN as a news agency. Similarly two Zambian editors of privately owned independent papers said that having IRIN was as good as subscribing to a wire service. Neither can afford to subscribe to any commercial wire service, although both receive PANA via the Ministry of Information. Both of them appreciated the humanitarian focus – it was the right tone for the region and its press.

37. Another Zambian journalist when asked to describe IRIN, gave a definition very close to IRIN’s stated intention. The focus, he said, ‘is on the human factor in development and in the crises and problems of poverty and deprivation.’ IRIN tries to answer the question: ‘What happens to people’s lives as the result both of developments and cut backs?’ The human factor is always emphasized and he appreciated that kind of journalism.

related stories was that there were many different and competing sources. If they could be integrated more it would be a benefit to many organisations.
Domestic (Other Areas)

38. A BBC correspondent working in the same office responsible for reporting from East Africa, mainly to audiences in the UK in English, said that she used IRIN a lot. Several recent BBC TV and radio stories, involving on the spot investigation, filming and/or recording have been instigated by stories first reported by IRIN. One example given of this was the story first run by IRIN about the volcanic eruption near Goma in the DRC. This had led to on the spot coverage on both TV and radio the next day from a BBC East Africa correspondent who had flown to Goma after seeing the story on IRIN. The foreign news editor of the Swiss *Basler Zeitung* typically scans the weekly e-mails in her e-mail inbox and looks at IRIN archives on the web when working on a humanitarian story concerning Africa.

39. She did not use the Central Asian material, and it was noticeable that this category of IRIN coverage was only rarely referred to by the media users we contacted. This may be because of the media included in this study, and it may also arise from the fact that this service is still relatively new.

GAPS/Geographic Distribution

40. Many users spoke of IRIN’s unique coverage of many areas, but some also wanted more:

   ‘IRIN is where we cannot be. They do not cover some areas very often – Lesotho for example. They could look at what has been under-represented and look for gaps that could be filled.’ South African journalist

41. Some regard IRIN’s coverage as uneven. Most praise was given to stories on the DRC, Sudan and the Horn, while many would like more comprehensive coverage of some other areas. One editor thought that IRIN should extend coverage to North Africa in order ‘to complete the African picture.’

42. Some said that the motivations that had led to the establishment of IRIN applied equally in areas that it did not at present cover. Examples given included Iraq, Chechnya, Indonesia, Central America, Kosovo, and the Caucasus. If IRIN provides humanitarian news that other news agencies usually don't cover, this should apply to all such stories not only those from Africa and Central Asia.
Lack of Awareness of IRIN

43. There are many problems to be overcome if IRIN is to be used more. These mainly have to do with three problems or barriers. The first is the lack of awareness of IRIN’s existence and availability among many in the media. The second is the problem of gaining access to IRIN, as it is mostly dependent on access to e-mail and/or the Internet. The third barrier or problem is the lack of awareness among many users of IRIN of the different ways in which they can receive it.

44. The Zambian Institute of Mass Communication (ZAMCOM) is the country’s top media skills training centre, and it has a good reputation for training in a broad range of relevant communications and journalism skills. Its new Zambian Director had recently been teaching journalism teaching at Durban University. He had not heard of IRIN. ZAMCOM is where most Zambian journalists go for training. It is very well placed to promote IRIN to Zambian and other journalists who are trained there. Another training institute of growing importance is the University of Zambia’s Department of Mass Communications. The most senior journalism lecturer there had also not heard of IRIN. Some active promotion to journalism training centres, especially in areas where IRIN reports, would pay dividends.

45. Awareness of IRIN is also not helped by the fact that in neither Nairobi nor Johannesburg is IRIN seen as part of the local media scene. IRIN journalists are not generally invited to the same events that other journalists are invited to. Awareness of IRIN as a legitimate and active news source would perhaps be improved if they were more a part of the press community.

Access to IRIN

46. Access to IRIN remains a serious problem for many media. Several examples can be given from Zambia. Some newspapers and magazines cannot use the Internet because of a lack of phone lines. The bi-weekly Monitor at present has only one phone line to be used for phone, fax and the Internet. The daily Times of Zambia presently has no landline at all. There are pay phones in the newsroom. As one journalist put it: ‘The digital divide prevents more knowledge and use of IRIN.’

47. The phone system in Zambia is so weak that many journalists avoid using it and instead take the easier option of going to press conferences and news events staged for the
purpose. IRIN certainly provides the kind of copy that many more would use if they had easier access.

48. One solution to these communications difficulties is provided by a journalist co-operative venture, the Zambia Independent Media Association, ZIMA, whose members have access to excellent and well-housed facilities for them to use computers, e-mail and the Internet. The service relies on a radio link provided by Coppernet, a local agency. It provides a 24-hour connection for ZIMA’s 350 members.

49. A Swiss journalist working for one of the Advocacy agencies suggested that the UN might actively get involved in providing a similar kind of facility through its Information Centres (UNICs). But independent co-operative ventures like ZIMA, with support from outside when and where necessary, are probably the most sustainable solution, not least because then IRIN would be available along with several other news sources.

50. Both problems – lack of awareness and inability to access the Internet were well illustrated by a visit to a third training institution. The National College of Management and Development Studies is due to become a university in 2003. It presently suffers from many infrastructural weaknesses, not least of which is the fact that its main campus, about 26 km north of Kabwe and 180 km north of Lusaka, has no reliable telephone connection. There is therefore no e-mail and no Internet for a college teaching economics, management, accounting, marketing, project planning, human resource development, international relations and public administration. Recently it opened a training centre of considerable potential relevance to OCHA and other UN agencies – the Disaster Management Training Centre. This trains people to manage emergencies and disasters of many kinds. IRIN’s main e-mail service of regional humanitarian news as well as PlusNews could be of major relevance to the college for this and other areas of training but no IRIN service can presently be delivered.

Lack of Awareness of Ways in which IRIN Services can be received

51. Several users complained that IRIN stories came late, all at once, or they did not receive it in the form best suited to their needs. Many said they thought that IRIN stories were often a little old. But it became clear that many users are unaware of the different ways in which IRIN can be received. They do not know that they can opt for an immediate delivery option, by which they would get the story within five minutes of it being posted to the web. It is probable that users become stuck with the service they
receive and are unaware that it can be changed. It has led some to the view that seems to be quite deeply ingrained that IRIN is often ‘out of date.’

52. There is one way in which timeliness may not be improved, and several users referred to this fact. IRIN operates only five days a week. News stories are not produced on Saturdays or Sundays. Some stories will always be delayed by this fact. From the standpoint of daily media users, any news agency needs to be running seven days a week.

Credibility and Independence

53. Most media users believed IRIN to be credible. There were differing views about its independence. One Swiss news agency user described IRIN as both independent and credible. He said that he could not remember an occasion when he had cause to doubt an IRIN story. He was as confident in an IRIN story as he was with one from BBC or Agence France-Presse (AFP). He then added, ‘Actually more confident than with AFP’, because sometimes this news agency has been seen to be under French state influence.

54. However others, while equally appreciative of IRIN’s credibility, were uncomfortable about the UN connection and believed that it should not be sustained: ‘IRIN aspires to be an independent news supplier. But it can never be this, because it is part of the UN system.’ He thought that an independent supplier that ‘can act independently and credibly’ should take over the service:

    ‘You often feel it will not go further because it is the UN. It cannot be fully critical. As an independent body it could be backed up to be independent and critical when required. If IRIN were separate, perhaps under an independent foundation, it would be superb.’

55. This journalist, editor of an agency specialising in support for news media in Africa and Asia admitted that IRIN did ‘go out on a limb’ sometimes being critical of UN or UN agency activity. But that is what it is – ‘out on a limb.’ With any other news medium it would be normal reporting. That is what it should be with IRIN and it cannot be while it is a part of the UN, in his view.

56. Journalists are trained to be sceptical about any information, especially when it comes from a source that might not be seen as independent. One foreign news editor of a newspaper in Europe agreed that IRIN appeared to be independent, but:

    ‘I always consider that it forms part of the UN. Sometimes I don't really trust the numbers, for examples of refugees, but I don't
trust numbers in general, because all the organisations need money, so everybody augments the numbers a little.'

57. IRIN’s place within the UN produced some ambiguous responses and views, perhaps not surprisingly. A correspondent for one major international news agency said:

‘IRIN often has easier access to stories and contacts than we do. IRIN gets UN material that we would not get.’

58. Most users seemed to agree with a comment by another European journalist who commented ‘It sounds credible’, and for many that was sufficient. Another editor and major user of IRIN described IRIN as ‘bending over backwards’ to be both independent and credible. She used IRIN content with little or no amendment. The agency for which she worked and several similar agencies use IRIN more or less as it is. This demonstrates a high and consistent level of trust in IRIN’s credibility.

59. There was another aspect of independence that was also very important and was viewed as being especially valuable. IRIN is seen as being free from commercial pressures. This kind of independence was very important for the quality and content of what it did:

‘IRIN puts across an alternative view of the world, especially of Africa. It’s strong on human rights, NGO activity and development. Most commercial feeds tend to put forward an establishment, conventional point of view on world issues. They tend to have a very negative view of Africa. IRIN provides a much more rounded and fairer analysis of Africa.’ Editor, African online news agency

60. A senior BBC news correspondent made the same point more strongly:

‘Agencies like ReliefWeb, IRIN and others fill a gap not filled by commercially oriented news agencies and outlets. They are also an antidote to the tabloid and 24-hour news service demand for new news, in that they continue to report stories whether or not the front pages and headline writers have become bored.’

61. This was a recurring theme from media users and repeated by a radio journalist in South Africa: ‘IRIN keeps on with stories no matter if they drop out of other’s news agendas.’

62. Another journalist made a similar point. Recently BBC Radio 4 had reported that the Ethiopian famine was going to be worse than in 1984 or 1976 and worse than the present South African one. It raised considerable media interest in Britain, but the story soon died. But he noted that ReliefWeb, World Food Programme (WFP), IRIN and
others had continued to report the story for some weeks and no doubt would continue to do so. These agencies were not led by anyone’s news agenda. The only criterion for news value was whether human lives were affected.

Value Added

63. The focus on humanitarian issues not only strengthens IRIN’s credibility and its independence from normal news agenda, it was also for many the main added value of IRIN. In this respect, the mandate of IRIN was precisely what media users expected and appreciated about it:

‘Different values, emphasis on development, human rights and AIDS. Good coverage of Africa. Fairer coverage of Africa.’
Editor online news agency Africa.

64. Some journalists when speaking about IRIN seemed to get quite close to the ethos and purpose of the agency and others with a similar mandate. Speaking about ReliefWeb through which he mainly accessed IRIN material, a senior BBC correspondent who specialises in relief and emergency stories said:

‘Shedding light on darkness is at the heart of what the media should be doing and these agencies are a vital part of that.’

65. A similar theme expressed in a different way by a South African journalist providing news for a network of Southern African NGOs and community groups: ‘Without IRIN we would be reduced to the dark dungeons of the local press!’

66. The avoidance of information overload was also an added value for many. IRIN was a ‘one-stop’ shop where news of a certain kind would always be brought together in a useable form. It meant not having to trawl through several different sources. Moreover, it provided something that was consistently good journalism.

‘IRIN always manages to cut to the chase. It is excellent.’
Channel Africa reporter.

67. Its strength was seen in its coverage, the gaps it filled, and as one user put it, ‘having its eyes on humanitarian stories that otherwise might not get any coverage.’

68. One editor at one of the many news agencies that regularly uses IRIN-originated stories, said that it often had ‘very good stuff’, chiefly because of its contacts and reach. He gave as an example a unique story in early December from South Sudan about ethnic fighting at a refugee camp. His agency used this immediately, quoting IRIN.
Another distinctive IRIN product is the regular interviews with prominent figures. These are unique and very welcome.

‘More please! IRIN has excellent contacts. It is credible.’

69. Some also saw IRIN as having an important role in the developed industrialised world. A US journalist working for several years in Africa described IRIN as a ‘positive force for good’ in the world, but thought that it would be good if it could get through to more US media and help raise awareness and interest in humanitarian issues. When it was pointed out that IRIN was widely used in North American academic communities her response was that if this were true it was very welcome. ‘This alone would make it worthwhile!’

**Humanitarian Community Interview Results: UN, NGO, IO, Donor / Government and Academic**

70. Sixty-six interviews were conducted with United Nations staff members, international organization and NGO officials, representatives of donors and governments, and academics. Twelve members of OCHA and IRIN management and staff were also interviewed. Only selected parts of each interview are represented in the analysis below.

**IRIN Mandate**

71. The majority (75%) of respondents ranked IRIN’s performance high in fulfilling its mandate. They were all committed IRIN users with the majority taking the Africa service daily. When asked whether IRIN was continuing to meet its mandate, one Senior official at the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) noted: ‘IRIN’s role is to bring news of looming and forgotten emergencies to the international humanitarian community. This it does well and consistently.’ Another respondent in this group linked IRIN’s effective fulfilment of its mandate with the UN’s commitment to donors:
The UN should not wait until after an emergency to have an IRIN in place. Effective humanitarian action is hamstrung by mandate wars between agencies. The weakness of the UN is coordination for which reliable information is the key element. IRIN has a role to play in this regard, and should be funded in order to carry it out. The UN has a role to use IRIN to fulfil its commitment to donors.”

72. One among the NGO respondents who ranked IRIN as HIGH in the performance of its mandate observed that ‘IRIN provides major background for agencies like ours that require not one source, but a variety. IRIN stories consistently give the origins and context – regional, political and humanitarian - in a timely and reliable way.’

73. Finally, as a Senior official at the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) official observed:

‘Information is a major part of the UN role...The fact is that IRIN is unique in its focus and outputs on humanitarian issues and maintains this role well. The humanitarian community will continue to need IRIN reporting on issues of human security, environment, health, water, economy, and social factors.’

74. A South African government commentator noted that ‘IRIN serves the needs of different bilateral desks and humanitarian departments with its consistently balanced mix of political and humanitarian stories. The same respondent also added that ‘IRIN provides a humanitarian information service to donors and others, especially those interested in the Great Lakes and West Africa.’

75. Because of its knowledge, outreach, in-depth coverage, an editorial policy based on rigorous guidelines and editorial standards, and a carefully monitored system of oversight, donors felt that IRIN demonstrated high performance in the fulfilling of its mandate, especially in emergency response, monitoring and updates. A spokesperson from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) observed that ‘it’s nice to know that IRIN is identifying what is important for emergency response. [IRIN’s] monitoring of the events in Northern Uganda is helpful and necessary, especially when things begin to heat up.’ IRIN’s follow-up on events is particularly important to monitoring when the mission is small, as in the case of the Australian High Commission in Nairobi, where IRIN is often the major source of information on regional humanitarian issues, and is viewed by the staff as ‘extremely useful [in supporting] monitoring of several countries.’ All missions admitted their dependency
on IRIN to keep them updated and generally alerted as to changing situations. Since IRIN information is shared with other offices or republished, the potential influence of IRIN on decision-making grows exponentially.

76. Academics who rated IRIN performance high on mandate focused on IRIN’s
- successful coverage of far-flung places
- support for research
- monitoring and early warning of conflict
- case studies for students
- the quality of IRIN staff

IRIN is a model of the fact that it is possible to have quality information on human suffering

Hugo Slim, Director, Complex Emergency Programme, Oxford Brookes University

77. Ross Herbert, Senior Researcher, South African Institute of International Affairs remarked on IRIN’s capacity to ‘provide a useful heads up on new and changing humanitarian issues.’ Commenting on IRIN staff, Jakkie Cilliers, Executive Director, Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria makes two comments: ‘IRIN has quality staff who provide an excellent market product’ and ‘the level of IRIN staff and expertise is high... the key for IRIN will be maintaining the high quality and integrity of its products and services.’

78. There was very little difference in the views of those who ranked IRIN high and medium. Only two respondents gave a low ranking. Those in the group giving it a medium ranking noted that IRIN gems were its ‘in-depth analyses, for example, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and the Sudan Peace Process.’ Another view was that IRIN does well in supporting its mandate, but that its ‘challenge is to continuously sustain a mandate that must shift its focus in line with the dynamic nature of humanitarian events, without overextending both staff and resources.’ To counter overextension of staff and resources, one senior UN official observed that ‘IRIN needs to decide who its primary users are (the humanitarian community) and concentrate on serving their needs. Otherwise, there is a continual risk of overstretch.’ By contrast, other UN and NGO subscribers were of the view that IRIN’s products and services were clearly focussed and directed towards the information needs of the humanitarian community, albeit they also voiced concerns about the potential for overstretch. As one NGO official observed: ‘It seems that IRIN is constantly asked to do more without the necessary resources.’

79. Though some saw overstretch as a potential problem, others wanted more: An NGO voice from West Africa was keen to see IRIN undertake an even greater ‘investment in research and analysis... on dedicated subjects.’ Though this respondent admitted that such an undertaking would probably be costly, it would be ‘worth considering’ as its
comparative advantage over all other providers of online news is that ‘IRIN contributes directly to programme decision-making.’ Additionally, some donors were of the view that IRIN needs to be more universally known: ‘IRIN is easily accessible, but its existence is not universally known, even within the humanitarian community.’ Concerned with IRIN’s lack of profile with the media, another donor suggested that ‘IRIN needs to do more to introduce themselves to the traditional and local media in order to be profiled more widely.’ These views were countered somewhat by those that believe IRIN does have a distinctive profile, especially in its outreach to local communities. Those who knew of IRIN’s radio project expressed high hopes for this project, seeing it as a way to link local voices to development issues and hence future programming.

80. The evaluation team found that, most often, the IRIN subscribers at senior levels do not access IRIN themselves. Nonetheless, they have a clear appreciation of its value in their work and the work of their colleagues including: savings in terms of time and research effort; personalized, easy access by e-mail; and in-depth coverage of events and humanitarian situations neglected by others. In addition, when asked what the loss of IRIN would mean: most comments were similar to that of one who said that ‘though they would make use of other sources, it would be hard to replace IRIN because it is the only source that covers humanitarian issues not covered by others, from hard facts to the advocacy of humanitarian principles.’

81. Commenting on the view by some that IRIN takes on overtly political issues that are sometimes in conflict with the views of governments, donor and local, a donor noted that IRIN should avoid controversial issues, like GM foods, as it sends a message that IRIN is not balanced in its reporting. Another donor, observed that ‘IRIN takes on large issues... [It] is dangerous to support humanitarian crises without recognizing the political implications. Can IRIN help to analyze some of the political implications? Should it?’

82. By contrast, the majority of respondents observed that IRIN’s role was indeed to address such issues and that it did so by clearly reporting all sides of an issue. In support of this view, a field officer from the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), noted that ‘The kind of reporting that IRIN does is excellent in supporting

If IRIN weren’t there, it would have to be created.
- Maxwell Gaylord, Resident Representative, UNDP, Nairobi
rights-based points of view without finger-pointing.’ That IRIN continuously strives for accuracy and objectivity is clearly articulated in its editorial policy that is elaborated in its style guide.\(^\text{22}\)

83. Some respondents perceived some bias in the way that IRIN reported news from Somalia. This is probably inevitable since it is very difficult, if not impossible, to report about Somali events and actors in the conflict in an entirely neutral way. The very language used, the definitions of the different factions or administrations imply bias in one way or another. More coverage of the north, especially that part under the administration of the Somaliland administration in Hargeisa, would probably answer most of the criticism. Already, IRIN management has addressed the perception of bias on Somalia by widening their stringer base in Somalia who supply information to IRIN core writers and IRIN Radio.\(^\text{23}\) These actions should go some way to ensuring that the views and standpoint of those not taking part need also to be reflected if perceptions of bias are to be avoided.

84. As is noted elsewhere, most IRIN subscribers rate IRIN very highly on credibility. 89% in the e-survey gave it a score of 4 or 5 out of 5 on this quality, an outstanding rating. Similarly, the interviews, both media and humanitarian community, found IRIN ‘completely credible’ and ‘independent’ as it cites its sources and corroborates its facts. One officer in UNICEF’s Situation Centre noted that he reviewed IRIN Africa dailies everyday for a year and found only one small error quickly rectified by IRIN. On the media side, the Editor of the BBC Somali service described IRIN’s service on the Horn as ‘indispensable.’ Media Action International described IRIN’s site on the Horn as ‘one of the best.’

\(^{22}\) IRIN Report Guidelines and Style, March 2002. Objectivity and accuracy in reporting are central to IRIN’s mandate and to IRIN management concerns. Accordingly, IRIN management has a strict editorial policy elaborated in a detailed style guide that is a required reference for all IRIN reporters. This guide clearly spells out exactly what is expected of IRIN reporters, especially in respect of fairness, accuracy and balance: ‘IRIN reports must be fair and accurate, and as balanced as possible. Our readers must be able to trust the information that is presented in these reports. . .we need to ensure that we are not spreading hearsay or propaganda. . .[and most importantly] IRIN must avoid commentary or opinion at all times. This does not mean a special or focus has to be bland or devoid of comment, but simply that I must be sourced. IRIN must not appear to be giving opinions or taking a stand.’

\(^{23}\) Pat Banks, IRIN editorial policy, February, 2003. In addition to ensuring the production of unbiased reports, IRIN has a complaints policy. If anyone complains about a report, IRIN encourages them to put their side across, which IRIN then publishes in either a new report or a Question and Answer format. IRIN takes
IRIN Performance on Products and Services

85. Assessing IRIN’s performance on products and services is a key indicator of subscriber satisfaction. Both the e-survey and interviews showed that the IRIN products or services used most by its subscribers are the daily stories on the four African regions and then the weekly summaries. This finding is supported by IRIN subscriber statistics that indicate that by September 2002, subscriber interest in the Africa service including Plus News was nearing 90%.24

86. IRIN subscribers have grown from 1,000 in 1996 to 17,780 in 2002 with the years 1997, 1999 and 2001 showing exponential growth as these years marked respectively: opening of IRIN West Africa, opening of IRIN-Horn and a new e-mail delivery system, dynamic website, and PlusNews. According to the e-survey most IRIN subscribers report regular use, with 94% having read IRIN within the previous week, 72% within the previous day. More than half of IRIN subscribers pass content on to others, considerably expanding IRIN’s potential outreach.

87. Subscriber perceptions as to IRIN performance mirror the statistical performance indicated above. The majority, 85%, ranked IRIN’s performance on products and services high in analytical capability, communications strategy, influence, knowledge transfer, levels of connection with key decision-makers and levels of credibility amongst key stakeholders. The radio project was another that received high acclamation by donors and NGOs. Those who ranked IRIN medium or low, were few and had only very minor complaints regarding timeliness or the lack of IRIN’s content applicability to their work.

88. The e-survey indicated that the majority, 84% of IRIN subscribers, described IRIN as timely in its reporting frequency and coverage of issues. This statistic reflected the perception of those interviewed as well, with the exception of the media. Those who found IRIN stories came late or all at once were mostly media professionals. In the view of some media users, IRIN’s timeliness could be improved if it moved from a 5- feedback from its subscribers very seriously. IRIN policy is to address bias, errors and/or mistakes immediately, and to correct them.

24 Subscriber statistics are as accurate as reporting systems permit. IRIN is still working with two systems, the old and new, as data is finally fully transferred from the old to the new system and subscribers are moved to the
to a 7-day a week schedule. The humanitarian community, on the other hand, had few complaints on IRIN’s timeliness, save those for whom poor communications links and lack of access to the Internet was still a barrier to access. For example, Save the Children, Nairobi, have very limited and slow access to the Internet.

Institutional Role and Partnerships: IRIN support for OCHA’s core functions

89. The majority of respondents (85%) gave IRIN a high ranking on its performance in establishing and sustaining institutional relationships. These were particularly positive in their views of IRIN’s support for its first institutional links with OCHA and OCHA’s core functions, especially information for coordination of emergency response and advocacy.

90. That IRIN played a central role in supporting OCHA’s core function in the coordination of humanitarian emergency response was a view endorsed by the majority and summed up below by a prominent operational NGO:

‘IRIN serves OCHA best as a tool for coordination. Coordination is about informing decisions through the provision of timely and trustworthy information and analysis. Authority develops over time. To rally agencies, OCHA has a powerful means of communication to influence agency decisions. IRIN provides that means.’ Norwegian Refugee Council, Geneva

91. IRIN has special ties with OCHA in the field and in Geneva and New York, especially with ReliefWeb. Accordingly, UN field personnel underlined how important IRIN is to their work as they found ‘IRIN was good at identifying strategic issues, hence in assisting with emergencies by providing information and analysis on the various players and their views.’ Another former field officer commented, that he used ‘IRIN everyday in Bujumbura [and] could not have done his job without it, because IRIN contextualizes, which is the first level of in-depth analysis.’

92. At the same time, it was recognized that the usefulness of IRIN in the field was linked to access. As one humanitarian affairs officer noted, ‘at first access in Eritrea was poor, and use of IRIN was also poor. But as access improved, the use of IRIN progressed new system as connectivity permits, the new system will come fully into operation and so too will reporting. For this reason, current statistics do not wholly account for all subscribers to every product and service.

25 IRIN and ReliefWeb together launch the joint appeal document as well as engage in joint planning and presentations for funding purposes. To avoid duplication, IRIN links to the ReliefWeb site and regularly links to
The value of IRIN is something that is not easily quantifiable.  
• Government Official, South Africa

IRIN is equally regarded as a primary source of information by UN field officers. A recent tribute to Pat Banks from the OCHA team in Eritrea supported the OCHA Regional Director’s view that ‘IRIN [is] the primary source of non-partisan humanitarian news in sub-Saharan countries and in Central Asia... [and for those] who work in the ever-changing environment of Central and East Africa, accurate information is essential and IRIN is a source upon which we can rely.’

93. Lewis Sida from Save the Children had this to say about IRIN’s usefulness in the field:  
‘While in the field, I used IRIN all the time. It gave me the sense of a regional roundup of information. Though I am now in headquarters, I feel there is still a lot of usage of IRIN in the field as I see it reflected in field reports... I believe that IRIN is one of the most trustworthy of all information sources on African emergencies, especially West Africa where it is viewed as a major source of reliable reporting.’

94. Another NGO respondent from Oxfam, noted that IRIN reports have an additional value-added at the field level. By sustaining interest in the drought in Ethiopia, they prompt checks on programmes resulting in return reports to headquarters on conditions in the field. This circular information flow, field-IRIN-field, fills a gap that no other information source does at the moment.

95. Equally, IRIN has supported OCHA and UN system advocacy campaigns through the production of web-based multi-media specials on issues such as the drought in Southern Africa, the internal conflict in Abidjan, HIV/AIDS and the Afghan peace process. Recently, IRIN supported both the OCHA IDP Unit and the Global IDP project in a recent Web Special on IDPs. Several respondents noted how IRIN handles advocacy well, as one put it ‘by raising and sustaining interest in areas like HIV/AIDS, while keeping humanitarian news stories coming on issues not covered by the traditional press.’ NGOs pointed out that IRIN’s PlusNews service is a major contribution to advocacy and networking as it fills an information gap on HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. Most importantly, a significant proportion of its subscribers are

documents on the ReliefWeb site. Informal and formal planning and staff exchanges are in progress and planned for the future.

IRIN has regularly supported other UN agencies, like WFP (promoting the Africa Hunger Alert site and providing links) and WHO information campaigns, like ‘Eradicate Polio.’ The Quaker Office in Geneva credits IRIN as critical to their campaign on child soldiers, especially through support of regional conferences and the promotion and distribution of information.
local NGOs based in Africa who previously did not have access to this kind of Africa-specific information. Since the vast majority of these agencies republish this information, the potential impact of IRIN’s networking effort is unlimited.

96. One West African donor described how IRIN influenced her decisions by raising issues and principles pertinent to humanitarian action and coordination on, for example, human security and IDPs: ‘IRIN informs people like [her] who can then use this information to make decisions or recommendations on funding for humanitarian action.’ Another example of IRIN’s responsiveness to its institutional role was provided by a recent request by the government of Sweden. They asked IRIN to follow up on stories of the export of children from Somalia. The results are to be found in one of IRIN’s latest Web Specials on ‘Separated Somali Children.’ In the view of many respondents, IRIN’s Web Specials are a major contribution to humanitarian response as they ‘are not just promotional, but provide the analysis the humanitarian community expect... not simply just what happened, but how events are interpreted.’ A Geneva NGO respondent described IRIN as playing a major role in supporting OCHA’s humanitarian coordination function by bringing more voices to the debate–UN, NGOs, donors and civil society.’

97. Though the majority view IRIN as fully supporting OCHA functions, some felt that IRIN was not fully appreciated for its contribution: ‘It is apparent to some that IRIN is not fully appreciated within the UN system for its contribution to OCHA’s coordination and advocacy role.’ Further elaborating this view was another posited by OCHA Geneva, whose view was that although externally IRIN is viewed as doing a credible job, the problem is that internally IRIN is not as well accepted as it might be: ‘IRIN is not as well-accepted internally as they go out of their way to be independent... [In order to counteract this impression,] they should provide more internal analysis for OCHA rather than reporting without connection to OCHA’s mandate or internal policy needs.’

On IRIN duplication with ReliefWeb:
IRIN is the source of original content on often difficult to find information on humanitarian issues which, in itself, is so compelling a fact that criticism of overlap seems almost superfluous.

- ReliefWeb Spokesperson

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27 Joanne Clarke, Consultant, IRIN, Geneva.
In contrast, another view from OCHA Geneva noted how donors were very positive about IRIN and its provision of service. According to this source, a number of them even commented that IRIN ‘sharpened their analysis.’\textsuperscript{28} A Department of Political Affairs respondent was, on the basis of her appreciation for IRIN’s products and services, promoting IRIN to ‘colleagues [who] were mostly unaware of IRIN’s excellence for the field, especially compilations that come in text for offices where connectivity is a problem. Her view: ‘IRIN needs better promotion inside the UN Secretariat.’

**IRIN’s French Service**

\textsuperscript{98} IRIN’s Readership Survey found that ‘French readers noted that the francophone output was often late and less comprehensive than the English version.’ Timeliness has improved with the launch of the French website, but the French service still reflects the lack of monies available for both translation and firsthand reporting in French. Until 2001, IRIN translated all the IRIN-Central East Africa and IRIN-West Africa services into French (41% of its output for Africa), but due to funding constraints this service was reduced in late 2001 and again in 2002 to just 14% of the Africa English service. Due to lack of funding and an substantive feedback from donors approached thus far, IRIN will likely be forced to discontinue the service altogether by the end of 2003.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{99} When a web-based French subscription service was launched in 2001 and the complementary French Web Site in 2002, both made IRIN articles more available to those outside of the humanitarian community. As of September 2001 subscribers had grown by 36% and as of December 2002 by 33% despite a dramatic drop in output since 2000. Were the coverage to improve substantively, IRIN management estimates that this number stands to grow exponentially.

\textsuperscript{28} Unfortunately, due to mission requirements, a requested interview with the Director, OCHA Geneva, did not take place.

\textsuperscript{29} See above ‘IRIN 2002 Readership Survey Results’, April 2002, p.7. According to IRIN statistics, outside of the main francophone donor countries (France, Belgium, Canada and Switzerland) many government subscribers are from francophone Africa governments (Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Cote d’Ivoire, DRC, Mauritania,) as well as non-Anglophone countries (Germany, Spain, Sweden).
The absence of IRIN – A short summary of findings from Kosovo

100. Though IRIN has no physical presence in the Balkans, the advantage of adding Kosovo to the list of interview venues was to collect stakeholder perceptions of the humanitarian information needs and response in an area a) that has no real IRIN presence; b) is in Europe, where IRIN has not before had an office with reporting capacity; and c) where humanitarian issues continue to exist, as does the potential for renewed conflict.

101. As noted in the analysis of interviews with the humanitarian community and the media, there are strong views on where IRIN should be present. In fact, the findings of the evaluation are that the majority of respondents support the expansion of IRIN services world-wide. Although not explicitly asked in the Readership Survey, it was clear that most subscribers would like to see IRIN-type coverage expanded. By contrast, the need for quite extensive coverage, worldwide as some have stated, was not clearly a finding until this evaluation. The interviews with the humanitarian community in Kosovo support this finding. Of those interviewed in Kosovo, a number knew IRIN from other duty stations, or human rights monitoring. The following are summaries of the interviews:

• Outside of UN public information and some public domain reports by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the 'Early Warning Report' by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) there is no breaking news or capacity to identify key stakeholders and follow humanitarian issues on a focused and consistent basis. According to the majority of those interviewed, there is a demonstrated need for impartial, objective humanitarian news reporting.

  ‘There is an urgent need in Kosovo to have information that rectifies uninformed, erroneous or biased views. In the absence of reporting of issues and events that is reliable, rumour prevails and creates mistrust with both locals and returnees.’
  Spokesperson, Office for Return and Communities, United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)

• Although International Crisis Group (ICG), for example, publishes in-depth analysis on the region, what is lacking is reporting on public opinion, local news on reform in the municipalities, and initiatives that support the linking of peace and security with the rule of law. (Robert Piper, UNDP Resident Representative, Kosovo)

• Within the UN and OSCE structure, each shares reports with the other. However, there is no information exchange network in place, nor is there a culture of networking on information apart from official reports. (Greg Lindon, Senior Human Rights Officer, OHCHR, Kosovo)
• What is needed is reporting that identifies key stakeholders at the local, national and international levels in the interests of creating a common medium for reporting on humanitarian issues and human rights issues, not least those associated with reconstruction and return. (Arjeta Emra, Director, British Council, Kosovo)

• In Kosovo, at the local level, no structured way exists to find information. This is made more complicated by the fact that the system is highly decentralized, and at the municipal level there is no culture of information-sharing. Reports in the public domain issuing from OSCE or the UN are known to have gone through a number of filters, making the published report questionable as to its substance, origins and purpose. (Ylber Hysa, Director, Kosovo Action for Civil Initiatives)

• According to a number of interviewees, there exists no reliable chronology of Kosovo post-NATO bombing. Humanitarian history and current events in Kosovo are subject to continual revision by both the international community responsible for peace and security, and the nationals bent on staking their own claims for future independence. Thus, there is a need for impartial, objective reporting. (Golam Mahmud, Humanitarian Affairs Officer, OCHA, Kosovo)

• Gaps in humanitarian reporting are apparent now that OCHA is leaving and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is decreasing its staff. Outside of UN public information and some public domain reports by OSCE and UNDP, there is no agency that is in place to take on this role. The Office of Returns and Communities (OCR) cannot pick up the pieces alone. Unfortunately, according to a number of views, UNMIK never took on this task in the first place, nor is it geared up to take it over now. (Peter Sorenson, Director of European Union Office, Kosovo)

• The dilemma for UNHCR is that though it has the most effective system of information-gathering and analysis from the field it has to strike a difficult balance between handover and maintaining the integrity of HCR. One of the challenges is to continue information flows by establishing various ways of sharing information, with significant input from UNMIK, on IDPs and returnees. In this regard, UNHCR would welcome an objective, third voice, like IRIN, to partner in this complicated environment, so long as territorial boundaries were respected. (Spokesperson, UNHCR, Kosovo)
Part 3
IRIN Resource Management: Current and Future Sustainability

102. During the course of the evaluation, OCHA senior management, IRIN management and some staff were interviewed. The purpose of these interviews was to collect and analyse management and staff perceptions with a view to identifying concerns regarding the current and future sustainability of IRIN. The interviews identified that the major concern was sustainability and cost-effectiveness. On the basis of these two benchmarks, three indicators were established against which to assess IRIN management performance:
- IRIN performance on products and services: end user satisfaction (already positively reviewed in Part 2 and below)
- realizing savings through progress in technology
- effectively managed planning, staffing, and resources

103. These indicators are used hereafter to assess IRIN’s sustainability and cost-effectiveness, beginning with end user satisfaction as an indicator of customer satisfaction with IRIN’s products and services.

End User Satisfaction

104. Assessing end user satisfaction rates or IRIN’s value-added to its users is one indicator by which to gauge management strength. As reviewed under IRIN’s performance on products and services in Part 2, the view of the majority of IRIN users is that they found IRIN’s products impressive, its service personal and responsive, and its scope and style unique. They further found IRIN widely accessible via e-mail and its website, useful for many purposes and at no cost. An important aspect of IRIN’s value-added, however, was that its users perceived that its content influences decision-making: from passing on important stories through the use of IRIN content for briefings and as case studies for students, to decisions on programmes or projects based on IRIN’s daily monitoring or features of often conflicting views on humanitarian situations. Finally, IRIN subscribers find it so valuable a source that two out of four pass on content to others, with the result that IRIN’s potential audience and impact are multiplied and enhanced.
Advances in technology

105. By 2000 the number of IRIN subscribers had grown to 10,000 with the result that the old system was at the limit of its carrying capacity. Under the old system, e-mail distribution was centrally controlled out of Nairobi, and the website was hosted by ReliefWeb and updated in Johannesburg. The annual cost for connectivity through the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) was US$ 60,000 annually with related staffing costs for staff dedicated to the e-mail distribution and subscriber management. Under the old system, reports went out at the end of the day, with the largest distribution on Fridays. Due to connectivity problems posed by Kenyan telcoms and UNOP not working on weekends, IRIN IT staff often worked overtime. Under the old system, daily e-mail distribution took between 12 and 14 hours, while under the new system delivery of an article to all subscribers takes less than five minutes. At the same time, the website is updated as the articles are written. The move to a new system\(^{30}\), has saved on both staff and distribution costs even though IRIN has continued to make provisions for those who are ‘digitally disadvantaged.’\(^{31}\) IRIN estimates total savings in the area of US$ 255,792 annually (see table below for breakdown).

106. Though the total benefits of the new system are not easily quantifiable, reduction in unit production costs are one indicator (as a result of the new, more visible website which translates into increased links with other websites and user hits), and subscriber increases are another. Subscriber increases were 53% in 2001 (the first year of operation of the new system), and 39% at November 2002. Based on predicted increases in subscriptions for IRIN Central Asia service, PlusNews and continuing increases in the French service if suitably enhanced, estimated yearly projected growth in 2003 on subscriptions is 35%. An additional benefit with the new system, is its capacity to support statistical analysis which permits IRIN to amass details on report production, subscriber behaviour and preferences impossible under the old system.\(^{32}\)

\(^{30}\) IRIN’s new system is hosted by a US company that provides stable connectivity at a much reduced cost (US$ 7200 annually) than previously, equivalent to an annual savings of US$ 52,800.

\(^{31}\) According to IRIN subscriber statistics, September 2002, of the 16,376 registered IRIN subscribers on the new system, some 2,300 subscribers are still on the old delivery service.

\(^{32}\) See above Joanne Clarke, IRIN Liaison Officer, Geneva, provided subscriber statistics.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type (yearly)</th>
<th>Old System</th>
<th>New System</th>
<th>Savings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distribution</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>7,200</td>
<td>52,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff costs</td>
<td>331,700</td>
<td>203,204</td>
<td>128,492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscriber management</td>
<td>92,496</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>74,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>484,196</strong></td>
<td><strong>228,404</strong></td>
<td><strong>255,792</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: IRIN’s old and new system savings in US dollars

107. IRIN’s new system has already proven its worth in cost savings, web access and reporting. However, outside its control are communication links in Nairobi that pose a continual problem and expense. Thus a reliable high-speed connection is a necessary future expenditure. ‘Down time’ occurs often (on the average eight hours per week), along with a slow link and other complications. IRIN has taken steps to right this problem through a V-SAT connection for which they have presently requested proposals from service providers. The indications of potential costs at this time for a suitable link are US$ 50,000 for installation and US$ 6,000 monthly for a high-speed connection. Though expensive, V-SAT is the recommended option in countries like Kenya where local service providers cannot deliver a reliable service. The V-SAT option is recommended solely for Nairobi as other IRIN offices have reliable connections via local service providers that are a good and less expensive option than V-SAT.33

108. Another useful indicator of the impact of the new system on IRIN’s performance can be drawn from analyzing the numbers and user preferences of visitors to the IRIN website. Website activity rose dramatically from 2000 to 2002. In 2002, IRIN received roughly four million hits per month (July 2002), against one million in 2001 and 500,000 in 2000. At the same time, sites linking to IRIN have increased exponentially: in November 2002 over 8,000 sites linked to IRIN an increase of 60% from March 2002. The e-survey of IRIN users showed that the majority of IRIN e-mail subscribers - 73% - also visit the IRIN website, and one in four IRIN users had visited the IRIN website within the previous week. Judging from this performance, the website is both a

33 Lamine Ndaye, Head IT, IRIN SA, e-mail communication, 7 February 2003.
complement and an alternative to the e-mail service, with the added value of greatly enhancing IRIN’s global visibility and access.

**Cost-effectiveness**

109. Based on its timeliness, credibility, and over-all value-added as a unique source of humanitarian reporting, IRIN has demonstrated subscriber satisfaction in the areas of products and services. To maintain this status poses a major challenge for IRIN, especially in light of expansion into advocacy through PlusNews and IRIN Outreach Radio and, on the content side, to in-depth reporting, richer in substance and analysis. Interviews with IRIN subscribers underlined some of the concerns associated with maintaining such a diverse and high quality service. Several mentioned the need for skilled staff with backgrounds in journalism and humanitarian affairs, while others pointed to the potential for overstretch in meeting the ever-increasing demands posed by rapidly changing humanitarian landscapes, not just in Africa and Central Asia, but globally. And then of course there is always the question of resources, which have expanded for IRIN core activities from US$ 997,362 in 1996 to US$ 4,324,957 in 2003 with an additional US$ 2,637,386 for PlusNews and IRIN Outreach Radio. OCHA management has called for ‘consolidation and no growth’ in 2003. The question is how far IRIN can support humanitarian community information demands for expansion in an already resource and risk-intensive funding and operational environment.

110. As indicated by the table below, showing IRIN Core Activities 1999-2003, IRIN has a cash-flow problem. At the end of December every year all national staff salaries have to be guaranteed for one year. This requires around US$ 2 million in cash. Most of the time IRIN has this amount in pledges. Unfortunately, a mechanism no longer exists which permits payments against pledges. Since 1999, when it had a shortfall of US$ 1,294,511, IRIN had yearly shortfalls of $1,600,746 in 2000 and $663,692 in 2001. Last year income was sufficient to meet the budget and the year ended with a small surplus.
### Table 3: IRIN Core Activities 1999-2003 (US dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>2,089,000</td>
<td>3,147,800</td>
<td>3,037,177</td>
<td>4,169,000</td>
<td>4,324,957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>1,605,126</td>
<td>1,479,254</td>
<td>2,526,308</td>
<td>4,159,271</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditure</td>
<td>2,899,637</td>
<td>3,080,000</td>
<td>3,190,000</td>
<td>3,998,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortfall</td>
<td>(1,294,511)</td>
<td>(1,600,746)</td>
<td>(663,692)</td>
<td></td>
<td>161,271</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Does not include additional funding for either PlusNews or IRIN Outreach Radio.

111. Since a large portion of IRIN’s income goes to cover salaries, how IRIN management is addressing this issue is reviewed below.

### IRIN Staff levels and costs

112. As at 1 January 2003, IRIN had 62 staff: 22 international and 40 national. The tables below indicate the distribution of IRIN core staff by function and location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HQs</th>
<th>Nairobi</th>
<th>Johannesburg</th>
<th>Abidjan</th>
<th>Asia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 international (Geneva and New York)</td>
<td>11 international</td>
<td>2 international</td>
<td>4 international</td>
<td>3 international</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 national</td>
<td>8 national</td>
<td>8 national</td>
<td>7 national</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: IRIN Core Staff by location**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senior Management</th>
<th>Liaison Staff</th>
<th>Editorial Staff</th>
<th>National Support Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 internations</td>
<td>2 internations</td>
<td>20 internations</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12 nationals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5: IRIN Core Staff by function**
113. When considering the implications of these tables, it is important to bear in mind that all but two of IRIN’s senior managers are also working editors and writers. Further, IRIN staff is employed on several different types of contracts (See Annex 9, Types of Contracts for IRIN Staff). Most of IRIN’s staff have either fixed term contracts or activity of limited duration contracts (ALD). IRIN’s total 2003 budget for core posts is US$2,507,496.

114. One issue that arose was the costs of hiring stringers. Stringers and freelance reporters, usually nationals of the countries where they work, are used by many media to broaden and deepen news coverage. Obviously they cost less than employing full time staff, whether nationals or internationals. Without them, many media, including IRIN, would not be able to operate as they do at present. They bring in-depth knowledge of their own countries, are indispensable to IRIN’s work and have played a vital role in its success. They were used very soon after IRIN was established and now report from several of the countries on which IRIN reports. Using stringers involves editorial effort by making what they send in meet IRIN’s style and other editorial requirements. This additional effort (and cost) may be reduced in the long term by greater experience and training. In fact to get the best value from making greater use of stringers and nationals (as against the more costly internationals) requires a considerable outlay in training as well as sub-editing. For example, on average it takes two years for a national ‘to grow into the job’ which most experienced internationals would take up in a couple of weeks. At the same time, IRIN recognizes the need for stringers while at the same time the need to use every method possible to achieve savings. The move to using nationals (away from internationals) should, over time, have the effect of bringing the advantage of widened coverage and cost-savings. In fact the move toward using nationals would appear a way for the future as demonstrated by the BBC example. This is how the BBC has been able to staff new bureaux in many parts of the world where previously the costs of using UK-based staff (whose rates of

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34 All information in the table provided by IRIN Nairobi based on information available to the evaluators at 31 January, 2003.
35 In addition to IRIN core staff, IRIN hires around 10-12 stringers on fee for service contracts and other short-term editorial staff on SSA contracts. Stringers’ fees are based on lineage rates of US$ 20/100 words published – lower rates being for news stories and higher rates for longer features. A flat rate of US$ 10 per photograph published is also paid in some cases. Short-term editorial staff salaries range from US$ 100 to US$ 250 according to qualifications and experience. For longer projects, lumpsum payments of US$ 2,500 to US$ 4,500 are made. IRIN also, from time to time, hires correspondents on retainers that are US$ 250 to US$ 1,000 per month in addition to the short-term editorial rates. Retainers are agreed upon on the basis of exclusive work for IRIN and a minimum number of stories per month. Translators are another group on fee for service contracts. For French translation, IRIN pays a lineage rate of US$ 110 per 1000 words translated, and for Kiswahili US$ 90 for the translation of each East Africa weekly.
pay, like those of the UN’s international staff, are higher) proved prohibitive. Until sufficiently qualified nationals can be found and trained then, IRIN will still need to use internationals for sub-editing and quality control. IRIN recruited two additional nationals in January 2003.

**Resource Management**

115. IRIN’s daily operations are often frustrated as a result of the fact that current administrative systems are complex and require an inordinate amount of management time. Donor contributions are irregular, and IRIN has no credit line against pledges. At times, up to 75% of managerial time of the two senior managers, who have no direct editorial and writing commitments, is spent in activities related to contracts, fundraising or covering funding shortfalls and drafting appeals. In addition, these senior managers are required to balance such demands against strategic and long-term planning, managing a multi-site operation, staff performance evaluations, and staff development at all levels.

116. To address these issues, several steps have already been taken by IRIN senior management. The first has been to develop a new information management system with subsequent savings as discussed above. The second has been to add national staff instead of internationals serving the dual purpose of widening coverage and realizing savings over time. The third has been to widen IRIN’s funding base (See Annex 10). The fourth has been to decentralize.

117. IRIN management has undertaken a process of decentralization on the basis of operating principles, standards and procedures developed over years. Managing editors are fully responsible for the day to day running of their own offices in Central Africa, West Africa, South Africa and Central Asia. This includes planning for and managing their own resources, recruiting and managing staff and identifying stories and specials to cover. Thus decision-making is shared among senior managers, liaison officers and heads of desks (eleven persons), who get together once a year to set goals and targets for the coming year. To supplement this process, the IRIN coordinator travels to each of the IRIN offices twice a year: first, when the appeal process is being drafted and thereafter to review problems or other needs. The advantage of decentralization is that
the IRIN model can be replicated cheaply and efficiently while taking into account regional variety and differences. At the same time, IRIN managers have the opportunity to advance and develop their own offices within the ambit of the IRIN corporate identity and practice. The high marks accorded IRIN products and services are testimony to the worthiness and merit of the IRIN model per se and IRIN management in particular. According to Ken Blackman, IRIN’s Editor-in-Chief, ‘IRIN offices run themselves under the leadership provided by qualified people. The editorial teams are strong, supported by IRIN senior managers who meet every six months. There is always plenty of room for independent initiative.’

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36 Ken Blackman, Interview, Johannesburg, South Africa, 10 December 2003.
Part 4    IRIN’s Management Challenges

118. This evaluation has reviewed IRIN’s various management challenges and assessed IRIN’s performance in meeting these challenges against two benchmarks and three indicators. Despite having to cope with a complex administrative system, and uncertain funding, IRIN manages to produce well-respected and reputable products whose relevance and viability are fully endorsed by its subscribers. That IRIN’s products are highly valued by its users is, as noted elsewhere, the primary indicator of good management. In this regard, IRIN’s management strengths are clearly linked to excellence in products and service. Some key challenges continue and are highlighted below.

Future Considerations

119. The evaluation highlighted some key areas of challenge for IRIN in the future. These are outlined below:

• A central challenge for IRIN is how to move beyond chronic funding deficits without compromising its credibility as a humanitarian news service and network. IRIN has already begun ‘belt-tightening’ in 2003 with a move to consolidate its products and services and a zero-based budget. Beyond its power to eliminate, however, is its predictable shortfall at the end of each fiscal year. Donor assistance to implement a revolving fund to cover the gap would help IRIN to manage more effectively this yearly dilemma.

• A related challenge is sustaining a high level of excellence without growth. This is not easy when subscribers would like to see a global IRIN. Given IRIN’s commitment to excellence, spreading its resources more thinly is not the answer to this problem of coverage. As evidenced by the attestations of its subscribers, IRIN is covering areas that are critical to their information needs. IRIN has managed, despite its many obstacles, to strike the right balance in its coverage in Africa. Central Asia, too, has had positive reviews most recently as a result of the Web Special on internal displacement. That subscribers want expansion into other areas is understandable. In some ways IRIN is the victim of its own success. Subscribers attest to IRIN’s excellence, which comes at a cost in terms of high quality staff, dedicated management and rigorous quality control. Management and subscribers acknowledge a causal link between IRIN’s success and its dynamism in identifying
gaps in reporting and having the initiative to ensure that they are addressed. IRIN’s challenge is to ensure that the dynamism continues, while consolidation around key areas to further already ongoing cost-savings are carried out. That IRIN has managed, despite obstacles, to strike the right balance is clearly supported by subscriber attestation as to the excellence of its products and services.

• IRIN’s major challenge then is to continue to introduce cost-saving measures where it can in line with strategic planning, while maintaining the quality of its products and services. The first steps towards these goals are in process, others will necessarily follow as IRIN management moves to consolidate its operations in 2003.
1. **Background**

The lack of reliable information and impartial news sources in Rwanda in early 1994 helped to create conditions in which misinformation and propaganda fuelled human rights’ violations on a previously unprecedented scale. The 1994 genocide and civil war resulted in the deaths of as many as 800,000 Rwandans and sparked off a chain of events that has left the region in turmoil. For the wider humanitarian community, the 1994 genocide underscored the need to re-evaluate the way it responded to complex emergencies and highlighted the need for improved information gathering and for a more effective way of distributing it.

The **Integrated Regional Information Network** (IRIN), which opened its first office in Nairobi, Kenya in late 1995, was borne out of the Great Lakes crisis to provide accurate, timely and contextual information from a regional perspective to humanitarian workers in the field, decision makers at headquarters and local populations. IRIN started by analyzing and synthesizing information on the Great Lakes region. It has since expanded its geographical coverage to include West Africa and Southern Africa by establishing offices in Abidjan and Johannesburg and now reports on 46 African countries. IRIN established an office in Islamabad in July 2000 to report on developments in Afghanistan and seven other countries in Central Asia. IRIN’s information products include analytical reports, daily summaries of events, chronologies, interviews, and weekly digests.

IRIN has increased its subscribers from 8,000 in September 2000 to more than 15,000 in March 2002. This translates into a daily readership of over 90,000 people worldwide as many organizations take one subscription but systematically distribute the reports to other staff through their own in-house network. More than one million users visit IRIN’s web site every month, double the number of visitors to the site only six months ago. In addition, many other sites repost IRIN articles including ReliefWeb (10 million hits monthly), AllAfrica.com (4.5 million hits monthly), OneWorld.org (1 million hits monthly).

An IRIN readership survey conducted in March 2002 revealed that IRIN reporting had clear benefits for its readers. The most tangible benefit to emerge was how much time respondents saved by using IRIN reporting. Survey participants also acknowledged that IRIN regularly influenced their work by keeping them up-to-date or raising awareness of events. Others confirmed that IRIN reports had a direct influence on funding, policy, security or programming decisions.

IRIN is currently managing two projects – a radio project and HIV/AIDS information service – which have not been included in OCHA 2002 but which dovetail very closely with IRIN’s goal of providing timely and non-partisan information to populations in need. IRIN Radio has formed
partnerships with African radio stations to provide weekly news feeds on humanitarian issues, as well as audio programmes. Two countries have been identified for the first phase – Somalia and Burundi – but the service will be expanded, subject to funding, to other parts of Africa and Central Asia. The HIV/AIDS service takes the form of a weekly news digest, as well as analytical reports, which is produced by IRIN’s office in Johannesburg with the help of UNAIDS.

2. Purpose of the Evaluation

This evaluation is undertaken to review the experience of the IRIN network to date, learn from the experience and to provide accountability to its donors, OCHA management and its constituency. The evaluation is to assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, value-added, impact, and sustainability of the IRIN.

3. Scope and Key Issues

The evaluation will look at all IRIN products and services as they have developed over the seven years of IRIN’s existence. Emphasis will be given to IRIN’s current services and organization. Furthermore, as perceptions of clients is key to assessing the effectiveness of the IRIN, the evaluation will seek to obtain a broad spectrum of user opinions and assessments, including donors, agencies, Governments and communities. While the evaluation will most likely not be able to measure the impact of IRIN, the impact as perceived by its stakeholders should be obtained.

3.1 Mandate (relevance): Has IRIN been able to fulfill its mandate? Does the current readership demonstrate that IRIN is meeting its mandate? Is IRIN’s mandate still relevant, and if not, what should it be and how could this be achieved?

3.2 Institutional role and partnerships: What is the institutional role of IRIN and what are its relationships within OCHA? What is IRIN’s contribution to OCHA and to what extent are IRIN’s management and direction in line with OCHA’s identified mission and priority objectives? Is IRIN effectively used by other OCHA offices, in particular in the field? What relationships have been built regarding information-sharing and advocacy with other primary partners in the UN system (WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP and WHO) and wider NGO and civil society organizations?

3.3 Staffing and Management: Is the IRIN adequately staffed, funded and managed? To what extent are local experts, specialist writers and independent journalists (“stringers”) used? What is the quality, quantity and reach of these stringers and to what extent does IRIN management exercise quality control? Is the IRIN office able to provide substantive guidance and ensure maintaining high standards (capacity to deliver)?

3.4 Geographic Distribution: Are IRIN locations appropriate and provide adequate coverage?
3.5 **IRIN users**: Who are the main users/clients of IRIN and for what reasons do they access IRIN products and services? How well does IRIN meet their needs? Are local populations effectively reached with current IRIN services? Are there any users outside of IRIN’s target audience? Has IRIN been able to effectively bridge the information gap between decision makers, humanitarian workers and the people it is trying to help? What has been the impact of IRIN according to its main users/clients?

3.6 **IRIN Products**: What is the quality of IRIN products as perceived by its clients? Are there any products that are not as successful or are there any products that could be added? What is the value-added of current products?

3.7 **IRIN Services**: Are all of IRIN’s services relevant to the user community? What is the quality of IRIN services as perceived by its clients? Are there any services that are not as successful or are there any services that could be added? What is the value-added of current services? Is IRIN technology in line with state-of-the-art information technology?

3.8 **Credibility and Independence**: Do users perceive IRIN as a credible and independent service? To what extent has IRIN been able to protect an independent viewpoint within the UN and external to the UN? What standards does IRIN apply to the collection, verification and analysis of its reports? Is there a need for guidelines and/or a standard reporting mechanism?

3.9 **IRIN Model**: Has the model that has been developed, been implemented successfully?

3.10 **Value-added**: Has IRIN managed to fill a niche in the information field? To what extent does IRIN overlap (or not overlap) with other information providers – mainstream and otherwise? What is its value-added to other news services (the evaluation should consider here other information providers such as WFPNews Service, BBC, EIU, Oxford Analytica etc.) Does IRIN bring value-added to the mandate and mission of OCHA?

3.11 **Regional Dimensions**: Is IRIN able to portray appropriately a regional perspective of humanitarian, political and security developments in sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia? What is the degree to which IRIN is supporting early-warning efforts through coverage of countries and situations that are not given priority by the mainstream media?

3.12 **Thematic Dimensions**: Is IRIN able to fill existing information gaps on key issues (e.g. HIV/AIDS)? Is IRIN able to effectively raise awareness of key problems affecting nations in crisis? (HIV/AIDS, land mines, child soldiers and discrimination against women and children? How effective are the advocacy partnerships established with other organizations (ECA, UNAIDS, UNDP)? What is the degree to which IRIN adheres to emphasizing humanitarian issues rather than political and security aspects? Has IRIN being able to establish a great capacity for thematic and background reporting in recent years?
3.13 **Cost effectiveness**: Is IRIN providing value for money? Are the costs of running the IRIN in line with the outputs and impact?

3.14 **Sustainability**: Is IRIN able to secure income sufficient to meet its needs? Why has IRIN not been able to gain wider financial support from donors? What is IRIN’s capacity to expand and has donor interest kept up with current expansions? What is the potential for IRIN to reduce reliance on donor funding? What other options of funding could be drawn on? What is the status of the information technology used by IRIN?

3.15 **Future**: Is there scope for IRIN to be further consolidated, expanded or, alternatively merged with other information news services? Should IRIN remain a UN information service or become independent?

4. **Method**

The evaluation method will be designed by the Team. The evaluation will be undertaken in two parts:

1. **Study Design.** During this period, background research will be conducted and a concept paper submitted that outlines the intended method and reviews the readership or users of IRIN. The concept paper would attach the designed targeted survey (purposive sampling) to be sent to a select cross section of IRIN users (except communities) including other information services that may tap into IRIN information services (e.g. WFPNews Service, BBC). The survey will then be sent out and analyzed.

2. **Field visit.** Field visits are planned to New York (briefing), Nairobi, Abidjan, Johannesburg and Pristina. The purpose of the field visit (with the exception of the briefing visit) is to verify the findings of the survey, interview key stakeholders, including community representatives.

5. **Indicative Schedule**

The evaluation is to start in on October 21, 2002 and will extend over the period of three months.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Consultant A “media expert”</th>
<th>Consultant B “humanitarian affairs and information expert”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desk Study, survey design and initial interviews</td>
<td>10 working days</td>
<td>10 working days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London-New York–London: November 18 – 21</td>
<td>(four days plus two travel day) = 6 days</td>
<td>(four days plus two travel day) = 6 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London – Nairobi – Johannesburg-London 24 Nov – 7 Dec</td>
<td>(five days each country plus three days travel) = 13 days</td>
<td>(five days each country plus three days travel) = 13 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location/Task Description</td>
<td>Estimated Days</td>
<td>Calculated Days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London-Pristina-London 16–20 December</td>
<td></td>
<td>(four days plus 2 days travel) = 6 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report writing, additional interviews and Survey analysis</td>
<td>10 days</td>
<td>10 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debriefing: London-NY-London: 24-25 January 2003</td>
<td>2 days plus 2 days travel</td>
<td>2 days plus 2 days travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finalization of report</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total # of days</strong></td>
<td><strong>43</strong></td>
<td><strong>51</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. **Team Composition**

The Team will consist of two consultants. Consultant A should have experience with emerging mass communication media (in particular with focus on development or humanitarian issues), expertise with analyzing readership and use of media coverage by major news networks. Consultant B should have sound experience with 1) humanitarian assistance (including field experience) and humanitarian policy issues, in-depth familiarity with existing humanitarian issues including information issues. Both team members should have excellent English writing skills. One team member should have working knowledge of French.

7. **Reporting Requirements**

A succinct report that includes a short executive summary of up to 2,000 words and a main text of no more than 15,000 words. Annexes should include a list of all persons interviewed, a bibliography, a description of the method used, a summary of survey results as well as all other relevant material.

The draft report is due on **January 10, 2003**

8. **Payments**

The consultants will receive 50 percent of the payment upon submission of the draft report. The remaining 50 percent will be paid upon acceptance of the final report. OCHA reserves the right to reduce the final payment should the report not be fully satisfactory or should the submission experience significant delays within the control of the consultants.
Annex 2
Framework for Analysis

A framework for analysis for the evaluation was developed that would support both quantitative and qualitative assessments on the effectiveness of IRIN. The qualitative assessment would provide the context for the application of quantitative methods used to analyse the results of the interview questions and the e-survey. The evaluation team developed a number of criteria for benchmarking performance in what would constitute an effective IRIN. These criteria were developed based on a review of IRIN background documents and reports, Creech and Willard’s book on networks, McGee and Prusak’s work, Managing Information Strategically; and the OECD/DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance Programmes whose standard evaluation criteria include (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability), and preliminary discussions with some IRIN staff.

Drawing on these sources, the following benchmarks for analysis were proposed:

1. **analytical capability** relates to IRIN’s capacity to produce timely and reliable regional information and humanitarian news products and services by conducting appropriate evidence-based investigations and analysis into conflict and humanitarian issues, drawing on multiple sources of information and opinion, and integrating local, national and regional voices.

2. **communicative capacity** relates to IRIN’s capacity to communicate through its various products and website with a view to educating its readers and other stakeholders (media, UN agencies, governments, humanitarian NGOs, civil society and decision-makers at all levels).

3. **influence** relates to IRIN’s ability to influence key stakeholder behaviours and decision-making discourse, policies and strategies on various levels in regard to humanitarian action at the local, regional and international levels. Moreover, influence relates to the extent to which IRIN has had an impact in mainstreaming methods and approaches which demonstrate a paradigm or attitude shift in key decision-makers. Though difficult to quantify, examples may be drawn from the narrative histories and interviews in relation to questions relating to the impact of IRIN on an agency or individual’s daily work or thinking.

4. **cross-network learning and knowledge transfer** relates to the extent to which IRIN over 7 years has demonstrated its ability to transfer learning to its various sister IRINs, key stakeholders and subscribers in general. It also relates to IRIN’s effectiveness in supporting cross-network training and exchange of expertise.

37 The Development Assistance Committee (DAC), Guidance for Evaluating Humanitarian Assistance in Complex Emergencies, OECD at http://www1.oecd.org/dac/evaluation
5. **connectivity within and beyond the network** relates to the extent, durability, quality and advantages accruing to institutional relationships as well as those with key decision-makers and IRIN’s capacity to make new types of relationships (information, advocacy, donor, for example).

6. **sustainability** relates to how successful IRIN has been at achieving authority in its outputs, access to and credibility among key stakeholders, and its capacity to use its extensive network to mainstream critical issues and strategies, principles and practice of humanitarian action. It also relates to how IRIN sustains its core functions including organisational and technical management (staff, processes and information technology), quality assurance, generating new knowledge; and peer relationships with the media at the local, regional and international levels. Sustainability also refers to issues of cost and funding which necessarily impact on the future of IRIN. Thus it will be important to have a sense of how IRIN prepares itself for future challenges.

7. **good governance** relates to IRIN’s capacity for accountability and transparency in operations and reporting. It is especially related to IRIN’s capacity to report on events and issues in a balanced and objective manner. It further relates to organisational culture and the extent to which it is based on inclusive or exclusive decision-making.

In developing their framework for analysis, the evaluators sought to include as many perspectives as possible: the UN, NGOs, governments, media, civil society, and academics through a combination of a literature review, interviews and an e-survey. In the absence of a visit to Central Asia, interviews were conducted in New York with key actors from the IRIN operation in Islamabad, other UN and NGO actors, and the media. Additionally, one of the team travelled to Kosovo for interviews with UN, NGOs and civil society with a view to capturing a perspective, for comparative purposes, of the humanitarian information needs and responses in a conflict area where IRIN is not present.
Annex 3
Evaluation Phases of the IRIN Evaluation

**Phase I**
Literature review, Study design, Questionnaire development and Interviews
25 October - 27 November 2002

Phase I consisted of a literature review, the development of a study design, the drafting of interview questions, an e-questionnaire and initial interviews. This phase also included three days of briefing and interview sessions in New York. The e-questionnaire was developed in late November and early December and was disseminated to IRIN e-mail subscribers on 9 December 2002. An invitation was also extended to IRIN website visitors to participate in completing a slightly modified version of the questionnaire. The analysis of the e-survey was based on 1,891 responses from the email survey and 91 from the web-based survey. More emphasis was thus placed on analysis of results from the email survey, which the evaluator viewed as providing a good representational sample of IRIN’s main users.

**Phase II**
Field Visits: Nairobi, Johannesburg, Lusaka and Kosovo
27 November - 22 December 2002

Phase II focussed on field visits and interviews. The evaluators interviewed humanitarians and media in Nairobi and Johannesburg. Abidjan was also scheduled but had to be cancelled. Instead, interviews were translated and sent out by e-mail and fax with follow-up by IRIN Abidjan. Unfortunately, the response was poor (only 2 out of 10 responded). But this disappointing result has been somewhat rectified by French service statistics from IRIN’s 2002 Readership Survey, interviews with IRIN’s Editor-in-Chief (attached to IRIN’s Abidjan office) and Joanne Clarke, an IRIN staffer formerly who kick-started the Abidjan office. Islamabad was originally scheduled and is the site of the newest IRIN node on the network covering Central Asia. Since most of the agencies had already relocated to Kabul, the Islamabad leg of the evaluation was cancelled. Interviews with a number of persons associated with the Afghanistan emergency were arranged during the New York leg. In addition, the evaluators conducted additional interviews in Lusaka (unofficially and on his own time) and in Kosovo (officially and during the period 16-21 December). Results of both these additional field visits are presented along with results of the interviews under Section 2, Findings.

**Phase III**
Additional interviews, analysis of the e-survey and interviews, drafting the report
21 December - 31 January 2002

Phase III focussed on evaluation of the responses to the oral interviews, analysis of the e-survey, and report writing. During this time, outstanding interviews were undertaken by telephone or, if not possible, e-mail. While in New York, OCHA senior management expressed an interest in the
evaluators interviewing media and humanitarians in Geneva. These interviews were duly carried out by telephone. Additional interviews were also undertaken with international NGOs with headquarters in North America, and two Washington-based donors.
Annex 4

IRIN Web Survey 2002

This is an independent enquiry into the use of IRIN and other sources of information about humanitarian crises and related development issues around the world. It has been commissioned by the UN but is being conducted by an independent research agency. As someone who has visited the IRIN site and therefore has an interest in or works in the field of humanitarian assistance and/or development aid, we would greatly value your early response. All responses are guaranteed confidentiality.

If you have Internet access and would prefer you can fill out this survey online by going to http://www.irinnews.org/survey/irin3.htm

There will be no follow-up unless you request it. If you need further information, write to Graham Mytton gmytton@gn.apc.org. Please note that this survey is distinct from a readership survey conducted by IRIN earlier in 2002 and that the closing date is January 5th, 2003.

Please press 'REPLY' to this mail and complete the questionnaire by typing an 'X' between the relevant answer brackets or by typing in the answer for open-ended questions.

Q1 What description best describes your employment, occupation or activity? Which of the following is closest to your present employer?
   421 NGO Other International Organisation
   106 UN Agency
   139 Government department
   80 Private company
   55 Media
   115 Academic
   66 Other
   25 Not employed
Please specify:
   55

Q2 Please write in your job title or what you do
   1026

Q3 What is your Age?
   1003

Q4 What is your gender?
   616 Male
407 Female

Q5 What region do you live in?
44 Central Africa
148 East Africa
63 West Africa
89 Southern Africa
16 Central Asia
392 Europe
214 North America
12 South America
25 Australasia
21 Asia
8 Elsewhere

Q6 What Internet sites or email service do you most often use for world news (Tick up to three only). We know there are several hundred possible sources and cannot list them all. Please write in the ones you use if they do not appear.
76 AFP
194 AllAfrica
10 ArabWorldNews
64 Associated Press
618 BBC
8 Bloomberg
32 CBCNews
295 CNN
7 ENN
7 FoxNews
199 Google
152 Guardian
25 InternetNews
5 ITN
96 Le Monde
19 MSNBC
3 Newsdirectory
8 Newslink
Aside from general world news, which sites do you most often visit for development and humanitarian news? (Some of these run several sites) (Tick up to three)

- Action Contre le Faim
- Africaction
- Alertnet
- AllAfrica
- BBC
- Care News
- CIDA
- CNN
- DFID
- Disaster Relief
- Earthwatch
- ECHO
- FEMA Disaster News
- Forgottencrises
- ICRCNews
- IFRCNews
- Institute for War and Peace Reporting
- IRIN
- Mail & Guardian
- Mediaaction
- MSF
Which of these would you say was the most important source to you for information about humanitarian and development news? (Tick one)

1. Action Contre le Faim
2. Africaction
5. Alertnet
8. AllAfrica
45. BBC
2. Care News
2. CIDA
5. CNN
1. DFID
4. Disaster Relief
1. Earthwatch
3. ECHO
0. FEMA Disaster News
1. Forgottencrises
3. ICRCNews
0. IFRCNews
Institute for War and Peace Reporting
485
IRIN
15
Mail & Guardian
5
Mediaaction
8
MSF
2
ODI
5
OECD
0
Open Society
13
Oxfam
8
Pambazuka
6
Panos/OneWorld
0
Plan International
152
Reliefweb
5
Reporteurs Sans Frontières
5
Sangonet
3
Save the Children Fund
34
UNHCR
13
USAID
10
WFPNewsService
18
World Vision
38
Other

Please specify:
35

Q9 How often do you receive IRIN emails?
740 Every day
252 Weekly
17 Other

Please specify:
7

Q10 When did you last read an IRIN emailed report?
741 Yesterday
220 Within past week
35 Within past month
10 Longer ago
1 Never
Q11 What do you use IRIN emailed material for?
   321 Checking progress on emergency response
   633 Getting background detail about a crisis area
   932 Keeping up to date with particular country or countries
   406 Learning about the major humanitarian and relief stories in certain countries
   247 Looking at further developments in a story previously told by IRIN
   223 Looking for more information about a story first learned elsewhere
   302 Looking for material for something I am writing
   280 Using one source to save time and effort in bringing information together
   36 Other
   Please specify:
   437

Q12 What do you do with the material you get from IRIN? (Tick any that apply)
   624 Background information for my organisation
   146 For academic research, university or college studies etc
   524 For general interest
   358 Forward to colleagues at the place where I work
   393 Forward to others who I know are interested.
   350 Use in material that I am writing
   95 Regularly share with others through an email list
   23 Reposting of articles to our website
   27 Other
   Please specify:
   444

Q13 Thinking back over stories that you have received from IRIN recently, can you recall an example of an IRIN item that made you aware of a humanitarian situation/crisis/event before you read about it elsewhere?
   619 Yes
   331 No

Q14 If Yes, please write in example
   757
Q15 Does IRIN provide information not available in other agencies or news services?
   603 Yes
   248 No

Q16 If Yes, please give some examples
   700

Q17 Does IRIN provide a view of events, people, organisations etc that are
not available elsewhere?
   453 Yes
   328 No

Q18 If Yes, please give some examples
   606

Q19 The next question is not a prelude to making a charge for IRIN, but we
are trying to see if it is possible to estimate what the value of IRIN
is to you or your organisation. If you were to put a value on IRIN as
far as you or the organisation you work for, what would the annual value
be? (Please answer in US dollars) If you cannot say, please leave blank.
   170

Q20 Please give a score to IRIN's news and information service for the
following characteristics - credibility and accuracy, relevance,
timeliness, and depth of coverage and detail. Please tick the relevant
box in the column, from 5 (Excellent) to 1 (Poor).
Firstly, Credibility and Accuracy:
   322 5 (Excellent)
   550 4
   107 3 (Average)
   7 2
   1 1 (Poor)

Next, Relevance:
   389 5 (Excellent)
   485 4
   108 3 (Average)
   10 2
   0 1 (Poor)

Next, Timeliness:
Finally, Depth of Coverage and detail:

Q23

- 182 (Excellent)
- 448 (Average)
- 8 (Poor)

In addition to receiving emails from IRIN have you ever visited the IRIN website?

Q24

- 688 Yes
- 314 No

On average how often do you go to the site?

Q25

- 23 Every day
- 121 At least once a week
- 234 At least once a month
- 332 Less often
- 173 Never

When did you last visit the site?

Q26

- 51 Yesterday
- 128 Within past week
- 263 Within past month
- 296 Longer ago

You will not be contacted after you submit this questionnaire if you do not wish it. However if you would be interested in taking part in further research enter your email address here:

Q27

- 521

If you have any other further comments, please type them below.

Q28

- 533
Thank you for taking part in this survey.
Date

Place

Interviewer

Interviewee

Title/Position

Organization

Interview Questions FOR MEDIA (local, national and international)

1. How would you describe IRIN?
   1.1 Can you give examples of IRIN reports, or products?
   1.2 In what ways do you or your colleagues use IRIN stories, reports, products?
   1.3 In what ways is IRIN distinctive or different?
   1.4 Where would you go for information in the absence of IRIN?
   1.5 What gaps in information or news does IRIN fill?
   1.6 Are there advantages to IRIN being a network? What are they?
   1.7 What is IRIN’s comparative advantage over other providers of online news, information, and contextualized reporting such as BBC, AFP, WFPNews Service and Oxford Analytica?

Interview Questions for IRIN staff, UN, NGO-IO, Gov’t, Academic and Business

2. IRIN has been described as a humanitarian news service, yet it is called a regional information network? Which is it and why?
   2.1 Who are the network members of IRIN? What are the main benefits of being part of a regional information network?
   2.2 Which IRIN products or services do you use and for what purposes?
   2.3 How far is IRIN a credible and independent source of humanitarian reporting?
   2.4 In what ways are IRIN products and services useful at the field level? And, as support for humanitarian coordination during a large-scale humanitarian emergency?
   2.5 If IRIN were no longer available, would it matter? Why?
   2.6 In what ways has the IRIN network helped you to make an impact? Explain

3. How far does IRIN’s area and thematic coverage and analysis meet subscribers’ needs?
   3.1 If there are gaps, what additions would enhance IRIN’s area and thematic
coverage and analysis of issues or events? Why?

3.2 Should IRIN subscribers be involved in decisions as to area and thematic coverage? To what extent? How?

3.3 Would you continue to subscribe to IRIN if you were charged a customisation charge for specialized thematic and geographic coverage? What level of fee would be acceptable?

4. In the light of advances in online news services, information management and technology, in what ways does IRIN add value?

4.1 How far does the current IRIN model of specialized information units in regions of conflict fill a gap in humanitarian information?

4.2 What would enhance IRIN’s current information management capability?

5. How far does IRIN contribute to OCHA’s core functions: policy development, advocacy and coordination of humanitarian emergency response? To what extent has IRIN successfully

5.1 Raised issues and principles pertinent to humanitarian action such as human, food and environmental security; IDPs, humanitarian access, and principles of humanitarian action?

5.2 Identified, raised awareness and sustained interest on issues such as HIV/Aids, child soldiers, land mines, women and children?

5.3 Provided timely and reliable information to the humanitarian community in the interests of conflict early warning, preparedness and appropriate response to complex humanitarian emergencies?

This last question is for senior level staff in OCHA, IRIN and donor governments only.

6. Given resource constraints within the UN system, how far can IRIN sustain itself?

6.1 Is IRIN’s current level of funding sufficient to the maintenance of high levels of management, delivery and quality control?

6.2 What in your view are the constraints to IRIN’s financial independence?

6.3 What level of staffing and expertise does IRIN require to support its products, service offerings, and planned future development?

6.4 Is the current IRIN model redundant given the growth of online information services? What elements of the IRIN model should be considered in assessing its overall cost-effectiveness?

Annex 6
Interview List

1. United Nations Organization
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alta Haggarty</td>
<td>UNOCHA</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binta Dieye</td>
<td>UN Office of the SG</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob Turner</td>
<td>UNOCHA</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda Barton</td>
<td>WFP</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolyn McAskie</td>
<td>UNOCHA</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Maxwell</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig Duncan</td>
<td>UNOCHA</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed Tsui</td>
<td>UNOCHA</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Morris</td>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriella Waaijman</td>
<td>UNOCHA</td>
<td>Pretoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxwell Gaylord</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly Tellor</td>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn Jones</td>
<td>UNDPA</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Kennedy</td>
<td>UNOCHA</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khaled Mansour</td>
<td>WFP</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew MacGregor</td>
<td>OSCE</td>
<td>Pristina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golam Mahmud</td>
<td>UNOCHA</td>
<td>Pristina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg Lindon</td>
<td>UNHCHR</td>
<td>Pristina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon Haselock</td>
<td>UNMIK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misco Mimica</td>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>Pristina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Borg-Olivier</td>
<td>UNMIK</td>
<td>Pristina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter Irvine</td>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>Pristina</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter Sorenson</td>
<td>EU Office</td>
<td>Pristina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peggy Hicks</td>
<td>ORC Office, UNMIK</td>
<td>Pristina</td>
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<td>Nick Booth</td>
<td>UNMIK</td>
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<td>Robert Piper</td>
<td>UNDP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marcus Werne</td>
<td>UNOCHA</td>
<td>New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nick Taylor</td>
<td>UNOCHA Sudan Programme</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opiah Mensah Kumah</td>
<td>UNOCHA</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kenzo Oshima       UNOCHA        New York 
Ramesh Rajasingham  UNOCHA        New York 
Stephanie Bunker    UNOCHA        New York 
Steven Gleason      UNOCHA        New York 
Tullio Santini      UNOCHA        New York 
Valerie Julliand    UNOCHA        New York 
Francois Dureau     UN Department of Peacekeeping  New York 
Tom Hojbjerg        UN Department of Peacekeeping  New York 
Magda Ninaber       UNOCHA        Geneva 
Kirsten Geldorf     UNOCHA        New York 
Brian Grogan        UNOCHA        New York 
Oliver Ulich        UNOCHA        New York 
Sheldon Yett        UNOCHA        New York 

2. Non-Governmental Organizations

Andrew Lawday       Norwegian Refugee Council       Geneva 
Anthony Kariuki     Save the Children, Kenya        Nairobi 
Francoise le Gof    IFRC                        Nairobi 
Joel Maclellan      Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response       Geneva 
John Prendergast    International Conflict Group       Washington 
John Mitchell       CARE                        Nairobi 
Bersant Disha       Kosovo Initiative for Democratic Society       Pristina 
Ylber Hysa          Kosovo Action for Civil Initiatives       Pristina 
Arjeta Emra         British Council                 Pristina 
Marco Donati        Italian Concern                 Gracanica 
Gazmend Musa        Kosovo Community Information Centre       Pristina 
Manisha Thomas      Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)       Geneva
Amanda Bookstein  Oxfam      Oxford, UK
Andy Bonwick  Oxfam      Oxford, UK
Rachel Brett  Quaker Office to the UN  Geneva
Lewis Sida  Save the Children UK  London, UK
John Rempel  Mennonite Central Committee  New York
Melissa Winkler  International Rescue Committee  New York
Trudy Brower  WFP  Accra
Jane Gibreel  Save the Children  Abidjan
George Bennet  IFRC  Lagos
Anna Jefferys  Save the Children  London, UK
Miles Murray  Care International  Lusaka
Paul Mylrea  Oxfam, UK  Oxford

3.  Donor/Government

Beth Wilkins  Canadian High Commission  Pretoria
Peter Riley  USAid  Nairobi
Anita Menghetti  USAid  Washington
Larry Roeder  US State Department  Washington
David Wikings  Embassy of Sweden  Nairobi
Jack Jones
Gaynor Whitley
Michael Penrose  Department for International Developent  London
Kevin Brennan  Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Marnie Wright
Government of South Africa  Pretoria
Johan Heffinck  European Commission Humanitarian Office  Nairobi
Nina McBratney  British Embassy  Abidjan
Steve Graham  British High Commission  Lusaka
4. **Academic**

Dr. Emmanuel Kasongo  
Director, Zambian Institute Mass Communication  
Lusaka

Joseph Mwanza  
Lecturer, Economics Unit and Development Studies  
Mulungushi

Billy Nkunika  
Lecturer, University of Zambia  
Lusaka

Hugo Slim  
Oxford Brookes University  
Oxford, UK

Jakkie Cilliers  
Institute for Strategic Studies  
Pretoria

Randolph Kent  
King’s College, University of London  
London, UK

Ross Herbert  
South Africa Institute for International Affairs  
Witts University  
Johannesburg

5. **Media**

Raymond Akamby  
Channel Africa  
Johannesburg

Akwe Amosu  
AllAfrica.com  
Washington

Charlie Bartlett  
BBC Monitoring East Africa Unit  
Nairobi

Peter Biles  
World Affairs, BBC News

Fabrice Boule  
Journalist, INFOSud  
Lausanne

Matthew Buckland  
Editor, Mail and Guardian Online  
Johannesburg

Dominique Burckhardt  
Foreign News Editor, *Basler Zeitung* Basel

Jenine Coetzer  
Specialist Reporter, Channel Africa  
Johannesburg

Laureen Dietrich  
Current Affairs, Channel Africa  
Johannesburg

Andrew Dobbie  
Deputy Editor, AlertNet, Reuters  
London

Alan Finlay  
Information Services, Africa Pulse  
Sangonet and Pambazuka  
Johannesburg
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yusuf Garaad Omar</td>
<td>BBC African Service, Head Somali Section</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine Gicheru</td>
<td>News Editor, Daily Nation</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed Girardet</td>
<td>Executive Editor</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Hobbs</td>
<td>English Reporter, Channel Africa</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominique Jaccard</td>
<td>Desk Officer, Fondation Hirondelle</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Jones</td>
<td>Editor, AlertNet, Reuters</td>
<td>London</td>
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<tr>
<td>Izak Khomo</td>
<td>Swahili Producer, Channel Africa</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Koech</td>
<td>KBC Radio Programme Manager</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susanne Linnee</td>
<td>Chief of Bureau, ASP</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Loyn</td>
<td>Developing World Correspondent BBC News</td>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier Lugaga</td>
<td>Deputy News Editor, <em>East African Standard</em></td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill MacLean</td>
<td>Chief Correspondent, East Africa, Reuters</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Dotsei Malor</td>
<td>Chief Correspondent, East Africa, Reuters</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ishbel Matheson</td>
<td>East Africa, Correspondent, BBC News</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kariuki wa Mureithi</td>
<td>Reporter, BBC Swahili Section,</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda Ndhlovu</td>
<td>Journalist, Africa Pulse, Sangonet and Pambazuka</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan Pekmez</td>
<td>UN Correspondent for INFOSud News</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur Simuchoba</td>
<td>Editor of bi-weekly <em>Monitor</em></td>
<td>Lusaka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Warungu</td>
<td>Editor, BBC Swahili Section</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nkonkomalimbe Kafuna</td>
<td>Editor of the Investor</td>
<td>Lusaka</td>
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6. Business

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ben Parker</td>
<td>AfricaOnline</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Currion</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>London, UK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. **IRIN Staff and Stringers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pat Banks</td>
<td>IRIN EA</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire McEvoy</td>
<td>IRIN EA</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken Blackman</td>
<td>IRIN Editor-in-Chief</td>
<td>Abidjan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olu Saar</td>
<td>IRIN EA</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Bidder</td>
<td>IRIN EA</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamine Ndaye</td>
<td>IRIN SA</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obinna Anyadike</td>
<td>IRIN SA</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corinne Archer</td>
<td>IRIN EA</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Conway</td>
<td>IRIN EA</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia Conway</td>
<td>IRIN EA</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricardo Dunn</td>
<td>IRIN SA</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jenny Evans</td>
<td>IRIN SA</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayden Horner</td>
<td>IRIN SA</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Lucy</td>
<td>IRIN EA</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marvin Meintjies</td>
<td>IRIN SA</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanya Ndaki</td>
<td>IRIN NewsPLUS</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Carden</td>
<td>IRIN</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne Clark</td>
<td>IRIN Consultant</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Annex 7**

**Sample Interview**

Date: 9 December 2002

Interview Academic
Interviewee: Jakkie Cilliers, Executive Director, Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria

Interviewers: Graham and Sharon

Background: ISS is a regional applied policy research institute with 50 staff and offices in Pretoria and Cape Town. They have another regional office in Zimbabwe. Their main purpose is the monitoring and analysis of conflict with a view to supporting efforts around conflict early warning. Their mission is ‘to conceptualise, inform and enhance the security debate in South Africa. The institute undertakes research and analysis; supports policy formulation; awareness-raising; collecting and interpreting and disseminating information on national, regional and international levels; and capacity-building’. (‘Preface’: *Scarcity and Surfeit: The Ecology of Africa’s Conflicts*, ISS publication). They use IRIN and have close links with it as part of a larger information network. They do lots of work with the OAU and NGOs. Their general interests are NEPAD, Regional Organisations and conflict tracking. They process 40-50 information requests per day. Their website provides access to a repository of their opinions, publications and promotion for their sponsored seminars and conferences. It receives 2 million hits a year. All their publications are free of charge. Their donors include Soros, MacArthur Foundation, USAID, Gov’ts like Sweden and Switzerland.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Relation to Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Network</td>
<td>Sees IRIN as part of ISS network. IRIN is a network of informal exchange between informateurs, those whose business is research and information exchange.</td>
<td>High impact on 2.1.9 communications 2.2.1 cross-network learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2 Products and uses</td>
<td>All ISS use IRIN. Most subscribe to daily SA, West, Great Lakes, Horn and East Africa. They are concerned with non-mainstream information, which IRIN provides. They use IRIN to beat information overload. Believes IRIN provides timely, accurate and contextualized information. He personally does not subscribe to dailies or use regularly but rather uses IRIN to update himself. They also subscribe to FACTIVA(Reuters); EIU; Newsedge; Jane’s; Oxford Analytica and ICG.</td>
<td>HIGH positive impact on 2.1.8 analytical 2.1.9 communications 2.2.0 influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.3 Credible and Independent</td>
<td>He believes IRIN is credible and reliable. Moreover, they are objective in how they relate and analyse events. He finds that in comparison to ICG, IRIN is not self-congratulatory nor are they advocates for political action. Views ICG’s recommendations on their reports as ‘over the top’. But so long as IRIN continues as project of UN it cannot be independent.</td>
<td>High positive impact on 2.2.4 governance on credibility LOW 2.2.4 governance on independence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 2.1.5 No IRIN

Since IRIN is the single source he most uses, he would not like to see it disappear. He would, in its absence, have to begin to piece together other sources, like OAU Daily Bulletins culled from BBC Africa. But no single source would replace all that IRIN now provides.

### 2.1.6 Impact

If IRIN were outside UN it has the potential to be Africa’s early warning system. This is the potential impact based on Jakkie’s view that IRIN has quality staff which provide an excellent market product. He is also a passionate supporter of the OAU early warning unit.

### 2.2.0 Influence

- Medium impact on 2.2.0 influence
- 2.2.2 connectivity

### 4. Value-added

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8.</th>
<th>Targets important issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>automatic updates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>permits one-stop shopping for info</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>follows up on often forgotten issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Medium
- 2.1.8 analytical capability
- 2.1.9 communications
- 2.2.0 influence
- 2.2.1 knowledge transfer
- 2.2.2 connectivity
| 6.1 Funding       | Takes issue with IRIN staff earning UN salaries. On the other hand, he believes that IRIN is the product of its excellent staff. Believes that IRIN is so important and produces such quality products that it should not be short of funding. IF it is, then there must be a mgmt or fundraising capacity problem. If IRIN were outside UN, he would personally raise funds for it. In fact, he believes if IRIN went independent, it would have no trouble raising all the funds it needs in Africa alone. | High impact on
2.2.2 connectivity
2.2.3 sustainability |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 6.1.3 Staffing    | The level of IRIN staff and expertise is excellent. IRIN’s strength is its staff. IRIN needs good and qualified staff to maintain its credibility. In fact, the key for IRIN will be maintenance of the quality and integrity in its products and services. Technology is no substitute for good people. | High impact on
2.2.0 influence
2.2.1 knowledge transfer
2.2.3 sustainability
2.2.4 governance |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6.1.4 Measuring effectiveness</th>
<th>Have to look at who subscribes, the demand and what subscribers say about the product. How else does one judge other than on the basis of subscribers’ comments.</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3 sustainability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex 8
Survey of IRIN Users

1. Introduction and Purpose

How well is IRIN meeting its objectives? And what do its users think about the service it provides? One way to find out is to ask its principal users, the email subscribers. And this is what IRIN did in early 2002 when it carried out its own readership survey in February. This was conducted by email and via the IRIN website.

The main findings were as follows:

1. The primary service for the majority of respondents was the African content supplied by IRIN.
2. 70% used the service on a daily basis, and a further 23% weekly.
3. Most respondents forward IRIN material to others.
4. The main reason given for using IRIN was to keep up to date with events. The service was valued by users for its coverage of areas and subjects not adequately covered by other agencies.
5. IRIN content is widely used as source material for stories, reports and briefings in media, academic and humanitarian contexts.
6. For many, IRIN was a major time saver in providing a single source for a wide range of humanitarian news.
7. The majority expressed satisfaction with IRIN’s service.

That survey put some emphasis on readers’ and users’ views and opinions. And the results have been used to guide IRIN policy.

For the purpose of this study, we needed to carry out a similar survey but with a different emphasis and focus. The main objectives were as follows. In addition to checking on IRIN’s geographical spread and organisational use, as the readership survey had already done, we aimed:

1. To establish the use made of IRIN’s content by different categories of user.
2. To examine IRIN’s importance as an information provider to its users and to compare it with other news suppliers.
3. To determine what IRIN information is used for.
4. To determine if IRIN is viewed as a unique or distinctive service and in what ways.
5. To measure the quality of IRIN as viewed by its users.

A similar method was used to that of the February IRIN readership survey and the experiences of that project were very helpful in the planning and preparation of this one. All
email subscribers to IRIN were sent a questionnaire on 9th December 2002. At the same time, all visitors to the IRIN site were invited to take part in the same survey, with a slightly different questionnaire for them. Between December 9th and January 6th, when this analysis was begun, 1,891 responses were received from the email contacts. Only 91 responded to the web-based questionnaire, probably because of the relatively short time and because the survey link was insufficiently prominent on the IRIN pages. Also, experience has shown elsewhere that response rates to web-based surveys are very much lower than for targeted emailed ones.

The response was strikingly similar to that of the IRIN February 2002 readership survey. That received 1,898 responses to the email questionnaire and only a small number from the web-based questionnaire.

The following analysis will concentrate mainly on the email survey, which we believe gives a good representation of IRIN’s main users. Reference will also be made to the web survey results when appropriate, although caution needs to be exercised in using the latter, given the relatively small numbers involved.

2. IRIN Users

According to its mission statement, IRIN aims to provide information principally to two categories of audience. The first is what it describes as “the humanitarian community” which includes chiefly the UN’s own agencies, various NGOs and Government departments. There are also, of course, many others who are involved in humanitarian efforts and activities – in private companies, academic institutions, religious organisations and others.

The second audience category is the general public, principally in areas of humanitarian concern. The IRIN Mission Statement says that it aims to “strengthen universal access to timely, strategic and non-partisan information by all levels of society so as to . . . assist local communities to participate in formulating policies and making decisions that affect them”.

IRIN cannot at present reach this second target directly through email or Internet. If it is reached at all it can be only through other media, especially radio. So the category “Media” is important in this report because it is through media users of IRIN that its content may reach the general public beyond the humanitarian community, including the general public in areas of crisis and difficulty.

All respondents were asked first to describe their present employment category. The single largest group of users work for NGOs – organisations outside governments and the UN system.
These response rates and categories are very close to those obtained by the IRIN 2002 readership survey. IRIN users working for NGOs were also the largest group (20%) among those who responded to the web based questionnaire, closely followed by Academic (18%) and Private Companies (16%).

We then asked everyone to write in his or her job title or a description of what they did so that we might be able to tell what kinds of people IRIN reaches within the various categories of organisation. This provided almost 1,891 different job titles and descriptions. But reading through them all, it is obvious that the majority of users work in the humanitarian and development field.

Where in the world do IRIN users live and work?
More than half of the respondents live in North America and Europe. But users in Africa come a close third behind Europe. It also needs to be remembered that most of the headquarters of the major NGOs and UN agencies that operate in areas of humanitarian emergency and crisis are in North America and Europe, and also most of the major donor governments are there. Further examination of the responses from these two continents shows that the majority of respondents are involved in humanitarian, development or associated work in Africa or elsewhere.

The Africa group breaks down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Africa</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Africa</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Africa</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most web user respondents were also from North America (31%) and Europe (25.%) and most of the rest were from Africa (31%).

61% of the email respondents were male, 39% female. The web user respondents were 67% male. Their age distribution was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 25</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 and over</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Web user respondents were of a broadly similar age distribution.
3. **News Sources**

(a) World News

In order to set the use of IRIN in context, we first asked respondents to say what website(s) they most often used for world news.

The BBC is the dominant world news site among IRIN users. It led among all categories of employment and in all regions. Use of the BBC was highest among the UN and media categories, and in East and West Africa. The BBC was also the prime source of world news for the web questionnaire respondents, 67% of whom named the BBC.

Only 8.2% of the email respondents do not use the web at all for world news. IRIN users are for the most part major users of the Internet as a news source. And they use a very wide range of information sources. Even though the questionnaire asked respondents to list up to only three web sources, a very large number of web sites was named. Aside from the leading web news providers listed in the chart about, more than 100 different news sites were named. This is an important finding. IRIN is being used by people who make regular use of similar services from other media, and especially from mainstream specialist news providers. Note however the strong emergence of the relative newcomer to world news – Google – which is ahead of most other well-established news providers.
Respondents were asked to say what Internet sites or sources they most often visited or used for development and humanitarian news. The following chart shows the leading web sources for this kind of news.

As with world news, a very large number of sites or sources was named as sources for humanitarian and development related news – as with world news, over 100 were named. IRIN was clearly far in the lead, as one might expect in a survey of its email subscribers. IRIN was also in the lead with the web respondents, 70% of whom use IRIN as a main source for humanitarian and development news. Many of these respondents also use the BBC, ReliefWeb, AllAfrica and UNHCR sites.

There are regional and organisational differences in the use of the different sources. IRIN’s use does show large regional or organisational variations. The BBC has a stronger following in East and West Africa, and among Media and UN respondents. ReliefWeb use is lowest in West Africa, and highest in Asia and Europe. AllAfrica’s highest level of use is in West Africa and among Media and Government respondents, and lowest in East Africa and Asia and among NGO respondents. UNHCR’s site is used at its highest level in Europe and Asia and among UN respondents, and at its lowest in Southern Africa and among Government and Academic respondents. More than half of those who named Alertnet are in Europe. It was used much less among respondents in Africa and Asia.

Respondents, having named their three most used sources for humanitarian news, were then asked to select the single most important one from among them. As the next chart shows, IRIN was by far the most important site or source for the email respondents.
33 other sites were named by respondents as their one most important source for humanitarian and development news. Some of these reflected special interests as would probably be the case with a regionally or subject specific site or source.

The results for web site visitor respondents were a little different. 39% of them reported that IRIN was the single most important source, followed by BBC with 19% and ReliefWeb with 11%.

There were some variations by region and organisation. IRIN led in all categories of region and organisation. It was at its highest level in Africa, and among Government, Private company and Academic users. ReliefWeb found strongest support among respondents from Europe and among NGO and UN respondents. The BBC showed little geographic variation but was strongest among Media users.

4. **IRIN Usage**

74% of the email respondents receive the IRIN service on a daily basis and 24% weekly. The remaining small number reported other frequencies or arrangements. 72% had read an IRIN report within the past day, and 22.0% within the past week. The web visitors were somewhat less frequent users. 40% had accessed the IRIN site within the past day while 26% had done so within the past week.

Respondents were asked what they used IRIN material for. They could state more than one category.
“Other” included a wide range of uses, including briefing colleagues, for teaching purposes, for posting to other websites and email lists, and others. The web visitors reported slightly fewer uses of IRIN material but the uses to which they put it were very similar.

Further analysis shows differences between different categories of user.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keeping up to date with particular countries</td>
<td>89.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting background detail about a crisis area</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about major humanitarian and relief stories</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking progress on emergency response</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for material for writing</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using one source to save time and effort</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking at further developments in IRIN-based story</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for more information about a story first learned elsewhere</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What IRIN material is Used for by Different User Groups (n=1891)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Private Co's</th>
<th>UN</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Govt.</th>
<th>NGO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keeping up to date with particular country or countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting background detail about a crisis area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about major humanitarian and relief stories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking progress on emergency response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Looking for material for writing</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using one source to save time and effort</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking at further developments in IRIN story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for more information about a story first learned elsewhere</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is little difference between user groups in the top two categories of use of IRIN material. For all types of user, keeping up to date with particular stories and getting background detail are the two leading uses to which IRIN material is put. Thereafter some major differences emerge between different user categories. Academic and Media users are more likely than others to be using IRIN material for something they are writing, while NGO and UN users are more likely to be checking on emergency response. Having a single source to save time and effort was more important for users from private companies than others. Media users mentioned this least. Further analysis showed little variation on a regional basis. Respondents were then asked what they did with the material from IRIN.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Respondents do with IRIN material (n = 1891)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For general interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background information for my business or company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forward to others who I know are interested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use in material that I am writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forward to colleagues at the place where I work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For academic research, university or college studies etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularly share with others through an email list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reposting to a website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four of the categories are similar – forwarding to colleagues or others, emailing or posting to a website. Eliminating duplication here, just over 58% of respondents pass IRIN material on to other people. Forwarding in one way or another to others is strongest among NGO, Private Companies and UN users, and least among Media and Academic users.
The following chart shows how uses compare among the different categories of user.

Some significant differences emerged here and a rather different picture from the previous chart. With all categories of user, general interest and forwarding to others is common. As was noted from the readership study in 2002, there is a significant amount of forwarding and reposting of IRIN material among all user categories. This must considerably extend the reach of IRIN and the people reached in this secondary manner are not, of course, included in this survey.

Although General Interest and Forwarding are in the overall lead, they are not the primary use for any one of the categories of user with only one exception (Private company users – General Interest). As would be expected, Academic Research and Study is the primary use declared by Academic respondents. Media respondents’ primary use of IRIN material is for use in writing stories. NGO, UN and Government users’ primary use of IRIN material is as Background Information

5. Views on IRIN Content and Service

A series of questions was asked to elicit users’ views about the value and quality of IRIN services.

(c) Originality

We wanted to find out how much IRIN was viewed as a primary source of news and information.
Thinking back over stories that you have accessed on IRIN recently, can you recall an example of an IRIN article that made you aware of a humanitarian situation/crisis/event before you read about it elsewhere?

68% of the email respondents said that they could recall such an example while the equivalent figure among the web visitors was 55%. Respondents then gave several hundreds of examples.

Very encouragingly, the media users were strongest here. 76% recalled a recent IRIN story that they saw first from IRIN. Academic users were similar with 74% recalled a recent original IRIN story. Geographically, users in North America (77%) were most likely to have seen a recent IRIN originated story.

(d) Exclusivity or Distinctiveness of Information

Does IRIN provide information not available from other agencies or news services? This was the next question. 74% of the email respondents believed that it does. Among the web users, the figure was 55%. As with the previous question, several hundred examples of exclusive IRIN stories were given.

Breaking this response down among the different categories also showed some important and interesting differences. 82% of Media users reported that they obtained information from IRIN that they could not find elsewhere. Again, Academic users were very similar in their responses with 80% of them saying that IRIN provided unique information. North American users were most likely among the different geographic categories to see IRIN as a unique news source – 86%.

(e) Exclusivity or Distinctiveness of IRIN’s View of Events, People, Organisations

Does IRIN provide a view of events, people, organisations etc that is not available elsewhere? Most respondents believed that it did – 64% of the email respondents and 54% of the web visitors. As with the previous two questions, Media and Academic users were the most likely to view IRIN as providing distinct and unique views of events, people and organisations, with 75% and 71% respectively. This also applied to 75% of North American users.

For this also a large number of different examples of IRIN’s uniqueness in providing views was given.

(f) Perceived Monetary Value of IRIN

Respondents were asked to attempt to put a value on IRIN as far as he/she or the organisation they worked for were concerned. They were asked to give an annual figure in US$.
Most email respondents did not answer this question. Of the 315 who did, more than half gave a figure between $10 and $200. A significant minority – 14% - gave IRIN an annual value greater than $500. The median figure was $100 as also was the mode.

6. Users’ Assessment of IRIN’s Qualities

To measure users’ assessment of IRIN’s qualities, respondents were asked to give a score to IRIN’s news and information service for the following characteristics:

- credibility and accuracy,
- relevance,
- timeliness
- depth of coverage and detail

They were asked to assign a score to each quality from 5 (Excellent) to 1 (Poor).

*Note: The last figures on the right of the chart show the percentages of those who gave the score of 2 to each quality. The percentages giving a “poor” score of 1 are too small to show.*

In the face-to-face interviews with media users of IRIN, timeliness was a frequent criticism, but among the respondents to the email questionnaire it was the least criticised factor. Further...

The mean ($45,000) is distorted hugely by a couple of respondents who, possibly in error or humour, entered figures in several millions. Even eliminating these two figures one still gets a misleadingly high mean. The median figure is one in the middle with half the respondents giving a figure above and half below this amount. The mode figure is the one given by most respondents. In this case the two are the same.
analysis shows that media respondents gave timeliness a lower score, while academic, government, private company and NGO respondents were the least critical of this aspect.

The website visitors gave scores of 4 or 5 as follows: - 67% for depth, 84% for timeliness, 89% for relevance and 89% for credibility.

7. **Email Subscribers’ use of the IRIN Website**

(a) Use of IRIN Web Pages

All email subscribers received the questionnaire by email. They were informed that they could, if they wished, go to the website and use an html form as an alternative to the emailed text. 45% of email respondents did so. Both these and those who used the email text version were asked if they ever used the website to access IRIN material, in addition to what they already received by email. 73 % reported doing so. It is interesting to see how this breaks down between the different categories of user.

![Email Respondents' Use of IRIN Website (n = 1824)](chart)

The lowest use of the website was among UN respondents, but even so, nearly one in three of them use the website.

(b) Frequency of IRIN Web Page Visits

What was perhaps more important is the frequency with which the web site is used. Very few email subscribers (3.3%) use it every day and only 15.0% reported using the website less than
daily but at least once in a week. The differences between the categories of users is worth showing:

It is interesting and perhaps surprising to note that although fewer UN respondents than others use the website, those that do, use it more often than most others. But few of the responding subscribers make regular use of the website, presumably finding all they usually need from what they receive by email.

When did the respondent last visit the IRIN site? 7.5% had visited the IRIN site on the previous day, and 17.5% in the previous six days – a total of 25.0% in the past week.

8. Conclusions

The main findings of the survey among email respondents can be summarised as follows:

1. IRIN’s users are mostly in the field of humanitarian relief and related activities.
2. IRIN subscribers use the Internet for world news and the BBC is the most used news source. IRIN is for most of them the prime source for humanitarian and development news, far ahead of any other source.
3. Most users who responded to the survey report very regular use, with 94% having read IRIN content within the previous week, 72% within the previous day.
4. IRIN material is used in a wide variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. In most cases, users wish to keep up to date with particular countries, areas or stories. Many also use IRIN for background material on a crisis.
5. More than half IRIN users pass content on to others, thus considerably expanding IRIN’s reach.
6. More than two in three IRIN users recalled recent examples of stories that they had seen first from IRIN, and were able to quote examples.
7. Three in four IRIN users believed that IRIN had information that other agencies and sources did not have. Examples were also given.
8. Nearly two in three IRIN users thought that IRIN provided views of events, people and organisations that were not otherwise available. And examples were given.
9. Media users, the journalists who use IRIN chiefly to write stories for their newspaper, radio stations and other media, were most likely of all to view IRIN as original and exclusive with respect to some of what it provided. Four out of five Media subscribers believed IRIN provided exclusive information.
10. Few respondents were willing to put an annual; value on IRIN’s services. The median figure given by those who did was $100
11. Users gave IRIN high scores for Credibility. Relevance, Timeliness and Depth of Coverage and Detail.
12. 89% gave IRIN’s Credibility a score of 4 or 5 out of 5. The equivalent figures for Relevance, Timeliness and Depth were 89%, 84% and 67% respectively.
13. Most IRIN users – 73% - also visit the IRIN website, although not nearly as regularly as they read or use the email service. The most frequent users of the website were Media users.
14. One in four IRIN users had visited the IRIN website within the previous week.
Annex 9  
Types of Contracts for IRIN Staff

Senior management and technical staff (internationals) are employed on series 200 fixed-term contracts issued and administered by OCHA New York. These posts are formally established with the approval of OCHA senior management and are budgeted by IRIN using the standard UN pro-forma costs. Thus, a L5/6 level post is costed at US $130,000 and an L4 post at $111,000. The contracts attract all the usual benefits but are project-based and linked to the availability of funds. Monitoring expenditure on these contracts has been problematic for IRIN management as New York have not been able to provide regular, accurate information, making forward planning very difficult.

IRIN is beginning to make more use of the Activity of Limited Duration (ALD) contract for junior international staff and where budgetary or operational reasons mitigate against the establishment of a regular fixed-term post (i.e., Asia). ALDs come under the series 300 set of staff rules and appear to be a compromise between the regular fixed-term contract and the SSA type of consultants contract (see below). Staff on ALDs have most of the usual entitlements (post adjustment, hardship, medical, pension) but these are mostly monetised when the contract is negotiated. The advantages to IRIN are: local control - authority to issue and administer ALDs has been given to UNDP offices in the field and so funds are allotted by New York to those UNDP field offices that support IRIN; flexibility - posts do not need to be established, terms and conditions are determined by IRIN, effective period can be 6 months to 4 years; and cost - ALDs are generally 10-20% cheaper than fixed-term contracts.

Special Service Contracts (SSAs) are short-term consultancy contracts issued locally by UNDP on behalf of IRIN based on funds allotted by OCHA New York. These are normally used to hire both international and national consultant staff, freelancers on special assignment, and stringers. They are simple to prepare, can cover a multitude of activities and provide a range of lump-sum payment options (daily rates, monthly fee, piece rates). They are limited in that they can apply for a maximum period of 11 months only, thereafter a break of three months is mandatory. In the past, SSAs were used by IRIN to employ junior editorial staff, ALDs are now used when possible.

Reimbursable Loan Agreements (RLA) are used for securing services from companies and individuals. They operate and are administered in the same manner as SSA contracts but are not time bound. On the advice of UNDP, as of January 2003 IRIN will be introducing the RLA to secure the services of stringers and translators.

IRIN national staff are employed on contracts issued and administered by UNDP locally, this is because OCHA itself currently has no mechanism to issue contracts for national staff in the field. In addition to using SSA contracts for short-term staff and consultants, UNDP issues fixed-term contracts against either the general service (for junior support staff) or national professional officer terms and conditions. Such contracts have all the usual benefits (medical insurance, paid leave, pension) enjoyed by regular national staff with other UN organisations
in the field, however, UNDP does not uniformly issue fixed-term contracts to national professional staff working for IRIN. In Nairobi, where IRIN is administered by UNDP Somalia, for example, fixed-term contracts are provided only on an exceptional basis, the preference being for the Service contract, another form of contract and one that is being introduced by UNDP world-wide for nationals (and in some cases locally contracted internationals) who are employed by non-UNDP agencies or projects administered by UNDP. Service contracts are currently being used for IRIN radio project staff (one Burundian and one Somali) and the IT support person in Nairobi. Service contracts provide limited benefits (medical insurance and paid leave) but the holders are technically not considered as "UN staff".

IRIN is also beginning to make some use of self-financing interns on short-term (3-6 month) assignments. No formal contracts are involved, with IRIN only providing support where needed for grant/fellowship applications. The experience has so far been positive and there is hope that the initiative can be formalised as part of overall IRIN strategy and expanded to include nationals.
Annex 10

Widening IRIN’s funding base

Since 1996, donors have given IRIN a total of US$ 14,212,072.00. Though clearly the majority are happy with IRIN’s products and services, they would like to know that their donations are effectively utilized and, as one donor observed, ‘it would be useful to have a creative approach to IRIN’s future funding’. This same donor was ‘keen to test IRIN’s value’, since it is a major donor of IRIN, given also that it provides a fifth of ECHO funding as well.

Based on the interviews, donor perceptions were overwhelmingly clear that IRIN had begun to widen its funding base with the addition in 2002 of some new donors (ECHO, Finland, and a portion from the Afghanistan Fund) and moves on the part of IRIN to plumb the private sector and foundation network. Added to this is the fact that IRIN will be part of the CAP in 2003 which means they will have a project number to which funds can be allocated. This is in itself an important move, as some donors have been unable to support IRIN in the past as they require the project number provided through CAP for their own reporting requirements.

Since 1999, IRIN has been receiving earmarked funding (amounting to nearly a million dollars) as part of an institutional strategic plan or ISP. Participation in the ISP is a major advantage for IRIN even though additional amounts of US$300,000 April 2002-December 2002 and an emergency contribution of US$711,000 in April 2002 had to be requested. The advantage is that as a participant in the ISP, IRIN is viewed as part of the organisation’s strategic planning arguably ensuring better and more systematic operational functionality within the organisation. Strengthening organisational links, through strategic linkages in planning, and promoting IRIN’s products and services with Humanitarian Coordinators and Resident Coordinators is important to all. Ensuring that IRIN is centrally included in OCHA’s own strategic and financial planning is key.

Despite these efforts, IRIN continues to face a predictable cashflow problem at the end of each fiscal year. To remedy this, when questioned about their willingness to support a revolving fund to relieve the situation, donors were not against the idea. They wanted, however, to have a broader basis upon which to consider options, an evaluation, for which there was wide donor support. In their view, an evaluation should provide a clearer picture of
IRIN’s value-added and its overall management capacity.

Other ways to extend IRIN’s funding base are arguably commercial. For example, many companies are trading in IRIN office locations. They will have a need for risk analysis type information for investment purposes. Some donors and OCHA management felt there might be a future there for additional resources which IRIN should investigate. Other donors were of the view that though ‘they do not have the impression that IRIN is overloaded with personnel, improvement in management systems and cost-effectiveness are needed in every institution’, not least IRIN. As this evaluation attests, IRIN has gone a long way to addressing cost savings through improvement in its information management systems that have already proved cost-effective. As for generating additional income, the strengths and weaknesses of several options are discussed below.

Fee for Service
A slight majority of those interviewed in the humanitarian community (around 45 %) said they would in principle pay a fee for IRIN products and services, with estimates of anywhere from US$20.00 per month through US$ 75-100 to US$10,000 per year. 39 Despite supporting a fee in principle, however, this group attached conditions to charges for services. For example, they pointed out that were a fee levied they would either request specific customization of their service or, as some donors suggested, deduct the fee from funding. This group further observed that a fee would require a parallel administration that could itself prove costly.

The next group, around 40%, were opposed to a fee. Several noted that IRIN’s central value-added was that it was freely available to everyone. Putting everyone, as one respondent put it, on the ‘same playing field’. Charging a fee would simply contribute to an elitism that is fundamentally opposed to humanitarian principles, and has the potential for abuse through republishing. The comment that sums up the opinion of those against fees was that IRIN is ‘so important and produces such quality products that it should never be short of funding’. Or, as a donor put it: IRIN is ‘providing a public good’, has ‘done well this year in extending its funding base’, and is ‘a source of democratised information that is worth funding fully’.
The third group, around 15%, had no real opinion about whether a fee was advisable or not. But wondered how far IRIN could and should compete with wire services to which most major agencies now subscribe. The view of this group was that IRIN is a humanitarian news service comprised of a network of humanitarians whose job is to inform other humanitarians, not move the hottest news stories to tight market deadlines.

Based on comparisons with existing news services with volumes similar to those of IRIN, income generation from IRIN’s services is summarized below. When reviewing these options, however, it is useful to keep in mind that charging for services has several major weaknesses that include:

- Loss of subscribers, a large percentage of NGOs, civil society and academics, who simply cannot afford to pay for the service
- Charging will also preclude making IRIN available for free through other services, like ReliefWeb
- The IRIN model will necessarily change, becoming something other than what it is (for which it has demonstrated subscriber support and loyalty), a provider of universal access to impartial, accurate and relevant information which raises certain ethical issues.
- IRIN’s current network, UN, NGO and other sources, would change in direct proportion to its income generation
- IRIN would have to invest monies to develop an income generation capability.

Thus, both fee for service and the private enterprise model are ones that should be approached with caution, especially in the light of mandate, corporate identity, information networks and ethical issues that would inevitably follow on IRIN’s becoming a commercial venture.

**IRIN and Consolidation with other OCHA Information Services**

Some donors felt that IRIN would benefit from the consolidation of its services with those of OCHA’s other information services like ReliefWeb, OCHAOnline and its GIS services supporting humanitarian information centres. One respondent was keen to emphasize that such consolidation would more effectively ‘tie in’ the linkages between emergency and

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39 39 As earlier indicated, the majority of media respondents would not pay a fee. The high end figure came from a humanitarian affairs officer. The majority of those who would in principle pay a fee offered in the area of
transition where much useful information is lost once the emergency phase is ended. Another saw the immediate budgetary benefit of ‘all these services sitting down together to rationalize their content, coverage, linkages, overlaps, constituencies and resource needs’. Rather than any particular gaps in the IRIN model, these respondents saw information overload as a consequence of separate information services requiring of rationalization. In some minds, such an approach has advantages for planning and provision of information, not to mention direct impact on budgets as well. Technology would then follow to support content planning and design structure, not the other way around.

Those in favour of consolidated services noted that they do not know of a single portal for humanitarian issues. In their view, humanitarian information officers have a need to progress organically through various sites when trawling for information for a report. These officers have many areas to cover and no coordinating body to turn to that permits thematic searching across sectors and service providers on a theme like famine in the Horn. For this group, the need is for a way to make links to summaries and archives available in a single search so that deeper analysis is more easily supported. Hence, their support for consolidated services and an integrated service model as opposed to separate services.

Consolidated services could first provide the means for a more effective user interface characterized by common points of entry, cross service and archival search capabilities, and complementarity if not compatibility in systems’ architecture. And second, such a service might arguably permit greater capacity for critical analysis of special issues, and often contradictory sources on rapidly changing situations as a result of more effective exchange mechanisms, integrated information networks and more efficient information management practices. And third, consolidation could support overall strategic planning which would encourage donor support and future planning by promoting a more coherent overall information policy and practice for IRIN.

Consolidating services has drawbacks: IRIN is field-based and faces content, country and communications issues which are different from her sister systems within OCHA. Certain activities, more easily than others, admit of cooperation. Each of OCHA’s information units have their strengths, which are linked in many users’ minds to what makes IRIN distinct and valuable in its own right. What one risks in consolidation, is the diminution of the vital spark

$US75-100 per year.
that makes IRIN unique in filling a definable information niche.

Comparing IRIN with commercial news services
Comparing IRIN with likely commercial interests, as well as other fee generating possibilities already existing in the UN system, yielded useful data and interesting observations:

The United Nations System Electronic Information Acquisition Consortium

- The first group investigated was the United Nations System Electronic Information Acquisition Consortium (UNSEIAC) through the Dag Hammarskjold Library. The Consortium comprises UN agencies as subscribing members and the vendors of electronic services. Membership privileges amount to significant volume discounts, while vendors profit from negotiating/dealing/billing with one central office. The value of participation is obvious, when one compares a subscription to NewsEdge at US$ 10,000 per individual per year, while through UNSEIAC the 2003 subscription rate is US$2602. Oxford Analytica, another premier product, charges US$ 35,000 per individual per year and limits users to 5. Through UNSEIAC, the amount is US$3200 with at least 20 users permitted.

**Strengths**  Reviewing the service provided by UNSEIAC was important on two counts: first, it provided a standard for commercial rates of both a leading news provider and think-tank analytical institute, and second, revealed a venue for IRIN products already operational within the UN system. On the other hand, this option is worth investigating further simply because the administration is already in place.

**Weaknesses**  UNSEIAC operates solely within the UN system for UN agencies. Were IRIN to join UNSEIAC as a vendor, only a portion of its subscribers would be eligible, creating a tiered system that would pose challenges operationally and politically.
Wire Services

- When asked to put a dollar value on IRIN, IRIN senior management sought a comparable service. What they found was finding a comparable service was not easy, as IRIN offers more analysis than a wire service, but less analysis than the *Economist*. While many of the wire services specialize in economic/business issues with some general news, IRIN focuses on humanitarian/development stories with business and economy as it relates to humanitarian issues. IRIN provides more analytical pieces than most wire services (focus articles, interviews, special reports, web specials and chronologies) that are not part of a general wire service output, but are found in weekly and monthly magazines like *Times, Newsweek, Africa Analysis*. Also, few subscribers to wire services buy everything, but select according to need and preference and are billed accordingly. Moreover, prices vary depending on the licensing agreement—personal, corporate or news provider usage.

Corporate and News Provider Services

- Corporate and news provider usage prices are highest, and some are staggering, for example:
  - *EIU County Risk* US$ 63,500 per corporate user per year
  - *LexisNexis* US$ 252,000 unlimited searching
  - *NEWSEDGE with Reuters* US$ 125,000 (25 users)
  - *Reuters Business Briefing* US$ 9,360 (based on $39 per hour local costs)
  - IRIN currently sells an IRIN Africa feed to AllAfrica.com for US$2,000 annually

At the same time, most news services make a significant portion of their revenues from advertising sales. As a possible source of revenue, notwithstanding the ethical implications, a market survey might support the assumption that both businesses and other humanitarians would probably pay to have their advertisements appear on the IRIN website. As part of the UN system, however, IRIN is prohibited from advertising, so this potential revenue is out of reach as long as IRIN remains a UN
entity.

- Services comparable to IRIN, according to IRIN staff, include:
  - *Africa Intelligence* which charges per article from 5.5 Euros for a *Scoop* article, through *News Brief* at 1Euro to *Biography* at 9 Euros.

  At these rates a comparable IRIN charge would be US$ 368.56 per country per individual subscriber. Or, if all IRIN products were subscribed to the cost would be in the area of US$22,782.35.

- EIU Website contains articles comparable to IRIN’s daily news and has an online service from which subscribers can link to a special e-mail feed. The cost is around US$400 per country. If IRIN were to charge in a similar manner, and one subscribed to all 54 IRIN countries covered, the revenue generated would be around US$21,600 per subscriber per year. This price is roughly the same as *Africa Analysis* which provides a bi-weekly hardcopy and web access service on the basis of a staggered fee schedule over one or two years for corporations, academics and registered charities.

**Strengths**

IRIN is comparable to some first-class wire services, and provides more in-depth coverage than most. The most likely comparison for IRIN income generation is *Africa Analysis*. Assuming that IRIN developed a similar income generation model to Africa Analysis, a modest prediction of potential revenues would be in the order of US$7,200,000.00 (based on 18,000 IRIN subscribers at US$ 400.00 per subscriber per year). As evidenced by the survey and interviews, IRIN’s subscriber base is strong, and its product is unique, making it a potentially highly marketable brand.

**Weaknesses**

IRIN would have to invest substantial monies in a system to administer such a model, as well as meet subscriber demand for various types of services. Donors might well decrease funding in line with charges. At the same time, according to the interviews, the majority of smaller agencies and some academics would find even US$400 too high to meet, and that solely for one country. These disparities could lead to a potential discreditation of IRIN, or
abuse through illicit republishing. It would inevitably lead to IRIN’s having to compete in a tough marketplace, which could easily impose pressures for IRIN to ‘go where the money is’ hence losing its focus and changing its content in favour of the most commercially viable option. This would be most critical if IRIN were to become a commercial venture, outside the UN system. All of the above concerns would hold. Importantly, IRIN would lose its access to the UN and the privileged information network it now inhabits. More importantly, it could lose touch with local populations with whom it shares a sort of quid pro quo arrangement of information-sharing and advocacy based on free access. As a consequence, it would have to face an even tougher task of trying to gain access to information and situations for which it has a considerable following, reputation and expertise.