

Annual Progress Report

ICT-KM electronic-publishing project

Reporting period: March 15, 2006–March 15, 2007

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For the project core team: Anthony Collins, CIP; Paul Stapleton, CIP; Paul Moncada, CIP.

Target Audience: CIO's office, Bioversity management, project team members and their immediate stakeholders, and all stakeholders in the CGIAR e-publishing process.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Financial highlights. The main expenses during the year were US\$ 31 000 to Konnect Soft for the second tranche payment for the software development (25% of £56 000) and third-party software licences, \$ 9000 for travel and expenses related to product testing, development and demonstration (Rome, Lima and Washington) and \$ 5000 to CIP towards their expenses in testing the system.

Learning highlights. Several key lessons were learned during this phase. First, lack of human resources – people’s time dedicated to the project – prevents progress. Second, when dealing with technical projects like this one, there is a danger of getting wrapped up in the technicalities (especially when faced with many problems to solve) and of overlooking the need for communication among the team and with its constituencies. Third, there is no substitute for face-to-face interaction with team members in getting things done; virtual teams working across time zones are fine in theory but not when the team needs to interact in depth.

Shortcomings and challenges. The major problem faced by the project during the past year was the competing demands on the time of project team members from their ‘day jobs’. This resulted in less time than necessary being available to dedicate to the project, especially for testing and feedback to the software supplier. There were also numerous ‘teething troubles’ with the software and delays in delivery of the alpha and beta testing versions of the platforms. This hampered testing, and mounting delays and hold-ups diminished the engagement of team members in the project. Some key functionality, in particular the ability to track changes in texts, has still not been developed, despite being expected by late 2006.

2. Project performance

2.1 Progress of the e-publishing project

Following problems in testing in the 2005-06 cycle, a “pre-beta release” of the eCMS system was released to the project on 1 March 2006, thanks to concerted pressure on the suppliers by Anthony Collins (CIP).

This version of the software was subject to extensive testing of the publishing features by Paul Neate (Bioversity) and of Web publishing features by Paul Moncada (CIP). Metadata screens were tested in March by Prasanna Sambandamurthy and her colleagues at IWMI (including Chandima Gunadasa) - hampered by poor connectivity - and by Jai Haravu (consultant) and Gauri Salokhe and Johannes Keizer (FAO).

Unfortunately, these tests found extensive ‘high-level’ problems - documents not importing completely, Internet Explorer ‘crashing’ repeatedly while using the system, dialogue screens not fitting viewable area (e.g., ‘OK’ button not visible when trying to add a user in the workflow module). These rendered the system virtually unusable and led to frustrations in testing. As a result, no complete publication could be produced using the system. Difficulties were also experienced with administration modules, such as user and roles management.

Other problems with ‘styles’ included the inability (at present) of CG users to modify the ‘mappings’ that are used in importing Word documents into the system. If authors or editors find the need for a style that is currently not ‘recognised’ by the system, this is not picked up in the import. The process for modifying the import process and for modifying styles within the system need further elucidation.

The problems also precluded involving people at other CG institutes in the testing, as the basic functionality could not be verified by the core team.

Testing of the system was thus effectively suspended pending release of a true ‘beta’ version of the platform. Following further pressure from Anthony Collins, this was released at the end of April.

Paul Moncada resumed testing of Web delivery in early May and made some promising progress. However, it was clear that there were differences in understanding on what was expected from the system, within the team and with Konnect Soft. As part of an effort to resolve this, Paul Neate visited CIP in late May and worked with Paul Moncada (CIP) for 2 days on Web delivery of publications. During this time Paul Neate demonstrated the Word and InDesign templates he had developed for use with the eCMS and their application in the Bioversity workflow.

Paul Neate and Anthony Collins (CIP) then travelled to IFPRI, where they spent 2 days discussing the project and demonstrating the system to Web and publishing staff. Melanie [Web master] was very favourably impressed by the system and was strongly supportive of the need for it to be implemented and used at IFPRI. Evelyn Banda (publishing manager) did not seem to understand the system or its benefits. Uday Mohan (chief editor, IFPRI) was also positive about the system, but insisted that it would have to have ‘track changes’ functionality similar to that in Microsoft Word before he would start using it with his editors (this functionality was not included in the original requirements specified).

This last requirement was relayed to Konnect Soft, who confirmed that they were working on it and indicated that they hoped to have this developed by the fourth quarter of the year.

Paul Neate continued trying to test the system as time permitted, but faced continuing difficulties with the system, which slowed the process and made it impossible to release it to anyone else for hands-on testing.

Konnect Soft continued to work on the issues developed, including strengthening the metadata handling, but input from the IMs on the latter was limited, which hampered progress.

Starting in August discussions started between the project team (Collins and Neate), Enrica Porcari (CIO) and Joanna Kane-Potaka (Bioversity) on how best to move the project forwards, recognising the constraints of time available to staff at CIP and Bioversity to dedicate to the project.

An initial suggestion recognised the need for the full-time, hands-on services of a publishing professional who understands the full range of publishing operations, from text origination through delivery in various forms. They would need the skills and knowledge of a traditional desk editor, of a production editor, and a broad understanding of layout processes, and print and Web publishing. They will also need a knowledge of metadata.

Steps identified included:

- Setting up eCMS to implement and test a full cycle of workflow for a 'publication', including text origination/upload, editing and revision, approvals process, handling of graphics and images, with output to hardcopy and to Web
- Assessing the current Web output capabilities of the eCMS to deliver Web 'publications' and integration with online publications catalogues
- Testing the metadata system, including sample cataloguing, and work with the Virtual Library project to develop the metadata output/harvesting component

This would provide a realistic assessment of what would be involved in adopting and implementing this system in an institute, including some of the costs in both financial and staff terms.

A workplan for this approach was developed (epub_workplan_Oct-March.doc), a potential candidate for running the testing was identified and briefed and suitable material for the test was identified. However, before testing could start it was decided that this approach did not address the problem of lack of in-house staff time available to follow up on the project and an alternative approach was sought.

In October a second approach was outlined (Needs_assesment_consultancy.doc), which focused on a new assessment of the need for an e-publishing platform for the CGIAR, rather than on completion of testing of the platform developed. This caused some consternation with the supplier and with members of the core team. CIP, in particular, felt that this was a retrograde step, and made a counter proposal for completion of testing and roll-out (CIP_proposal_Nov2006.htm). CIP maintains confidence in the Konnect Soft e-publishing software so far developed. Its counter-proposal, which required substantial funding, would have resulted in a complete, functioning system deployed in two or three centers.

After considerable discussion, a decision was taken to pursue a modified version of the needs assessment approach; terms of reference were drawn up (E-Pub ToR-NEW PLAN-2.doc) and an agreement made with IWMI to assign a staff member to this activity (Chandima Gunadasa).

2.2 Challenges, constraints and shortcomings

- The major problem faced by the project during the past year was the competing demands on the time of project team members from their 'day jobs'. This resulted in less time than necessary being available to dedicate to the project, especially for testing and feedback to the software supplier.
- Numerous 'teething troubles' with the software and delays in delivery of the alpha and beta testing versions of the platforms hampered testing, and mounting delays and hold-ups diminished the engagement of team members in the project.
- Demonstration of the platform to IFPRI highlighted the need for additional functionality, specifically the ability to track changes in texts, that would be required before the system could be rolled out to more centres.
- The 'track changes' functionality has still not been developed, despite being expected by late 2006.

2.3 Changes made to project intentions

The project has had to reassess work plans, deliverables and timelines at several points over the past year. Several alternative scenarios were developed, starting in August 2006, aimed at completing testing and delivery of the e-publishing platform. An agreement was reached in February 2007 for a staff member from IWMI to dedicate time to the project, starting from March 2007 until September 2007. A further extension to the project will be needed to cover this activity.

2.4 Conclusions and future plans

Progress with development and testing of the e-publishing platform was disappointingly slow, constrained by shortage of staff time dedicated to the project. The new plan calls for several steps to capture the knowledge and benefits generated by the project to date and to move the project to completion. These steps include:

- Documenting publishing practices and lessons learned from the E-Publishing project activities to date.
- Finalizing, developing and demonstrating sample templates created by the E-Publishing project to facilitate publishing processes and streamline workflow in CG centres
- Facilitating the formulation of a self-archiving policy for all staff publications in the centres in support of opening access to centres' research output
- Validating developed application profiles and metadata guidelines
- Reviewing and testing the Konnect Soft application in light of addressing the need to facilitate the production and dissemination of publications and provide recommendations on best way to proceed.

A request is made for a no-cost extension of the project to allow these steps to be completed by the end of September 2007.

3. Financial Report

See attached chart.

4. Annexes

Specifications for types of Web publication to be delivered from the e-publishing platform (P. Moncada and P. Neate)

- Types of publication.doc
- Types of publication_example_with_abstr.doc
- Types of publication_examples.doc
- Types of publication_popular.doc

Review of outstanding issues in addressing pilot implementation requirements (Konnect Soft, August 2006)

- Requirements_Analysis_Questions_2006-06-27_01a.doc

CGIAR Konnect eCMS Pilot Implementation – Status Report (September 2006)

- CGIAR_Pilot_eCMS_Status_03a.doc

Proposed workplan developed by P. Neate for delivery of e-publishing project objectives

- epub_workplan_Oct-March.doc

Alternative proposal developed by CIO office

- Needs_assesment_consultancy.doc

Konnect Soft's comments on CIO office proposal

- Needs_assesment_consultancy_02a.doc

CIP's proposed workplan and budget, November 2006

- CIP_proposal_Nov2006.htm

Final Terms of Reference developed for IWMI staff member to pursue closure on the e-publishing project

- E-Pub ToR-NEW PLAN-2.doc

Project financial report generated by Bioversity Corporate Services