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Benchmark for the DG Devco web site redesign

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Introduction

Purpose of the benchmarks is to get a good understanding of the competitors and other relevant sites: what are the trends, best practices, what can be learned and what to avoid. Focus in the benchmarks is on the overall impression, look & feel, information hierarchy, usability and relevancy for the target audiences.

Sites visited

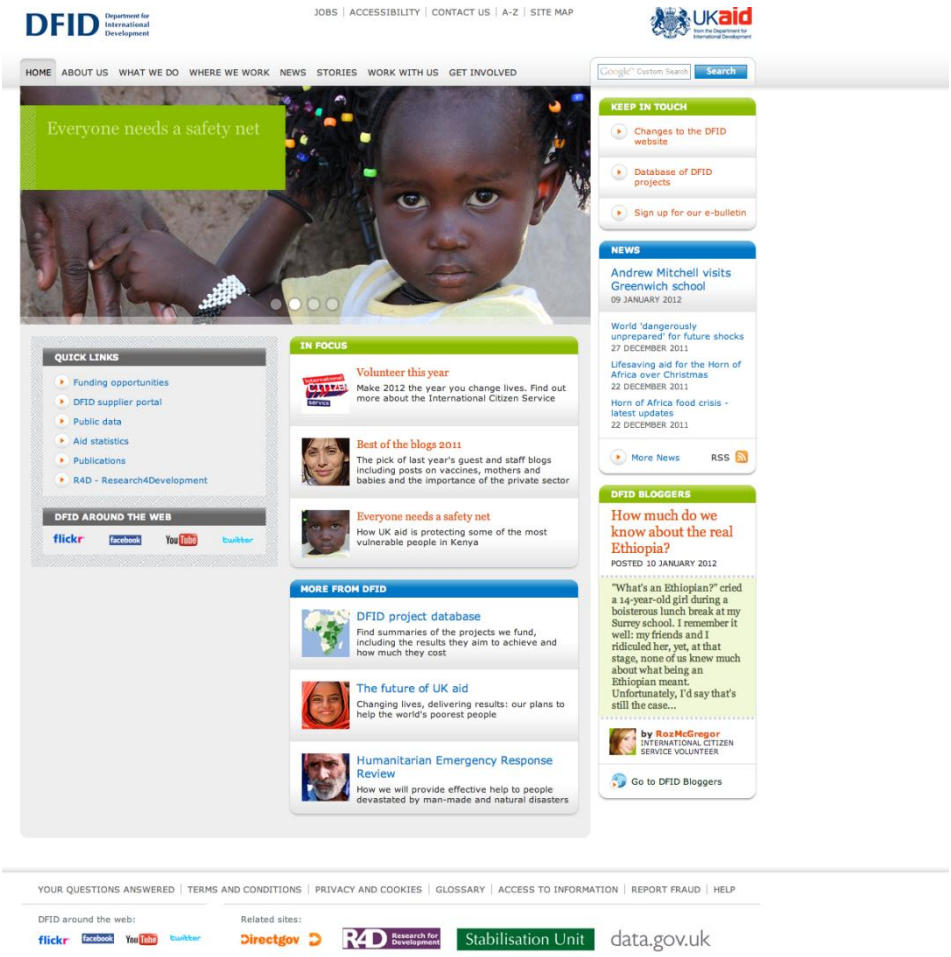
The list of sites for this benchmark was provided to us by the DG Devco team:

- World Bank: http://www.worldbank.org/
- European Investment bank (EIB): http://www.eib.org/
- International Monetary Fund (IMF*):* http://www.imf.org/external/index.htm
- World Trade Organization (WTO): http://www.wto.org/
- DIFID (the UK development agency): http://www.dfid.gov.uk/
- SIDA (Swedish development agency): http://www.sida.se/English/
- USAID (The USA development agency): http://www.usaid.gov/
- Recovery USA: http:www.recovery.gov/
- World Wildlife Fund (WWF): http://www.worldwildlife.org/home-full.html
- World food Programme (WFP): http://www.wfp.org/
- Norway embassies around the world
- United Nations Development Programme: http://www.beta.undp.org
- Oxfam: http://www.oxfam.org
- Red Cross: http://www.icrc.org
- World Neighbors: http://www.wn.org/
- OECD: http://www.oecd.org

Individual site evaluations

Benchmark: DIFID

http://www.dfid.gov.uk/



First impression:

Clear and appealing site. User gets good understanding of the organization, and the content provided in the service in just few glances. It is easy to identify the sections and access points to relevant content for different target audiences. Latest news is easy to spot. Quick links on the left side, under the main banner, could be generated automatically based on most visited content or pre-selected based on actual issues. You get a feeling of a professional and up-to-date service, where you would check back for latest news or in-depth information in a digestible package.

DIFID / Navigation and usability:

Good combination of text and images. Images and videos are supporting the experience, without making the site look too entertaining, and in some sections images are also offering alternative access to information.

Structure: content categorization is clear on section main page level; you can immediately find access to relevant information. Projects and country data can be accessed from a map, continents (text), themes, etc.

Projects/stories: there is a separate stories section. There are different ways to access and study the projects, e.g. through the complete case studies, browsing through a Flickr photo stream or by reading the staff blogs.

Communication is result driven; you get a feeling of efficiency by reading topics like "how we measure progress", "achievements", "research and evidence" and "how UK aid is spent".

***Get involved* section** informs how public audience or civil society groups can influence and help people in need. This is yet another way of delivering the message that progress is being made an all levels.

News material is well categorized to help in finding the relevant content in a relevant format.

Social media is used relatively well. YouTube channel, Flickr and Facebook pages and Twitter account are branded and there are relevant and regular updates.

Content pages: On content pages internal and external links are clearly separated and positioned on the page (“More from DFID” versus “Around the web”). Quote and table of key facts are help in understanding the essential information quickly. Tabs are helping the navigation and keep the content page shorter.

There is separate portal for suppliers with detailed information on projects and funding.

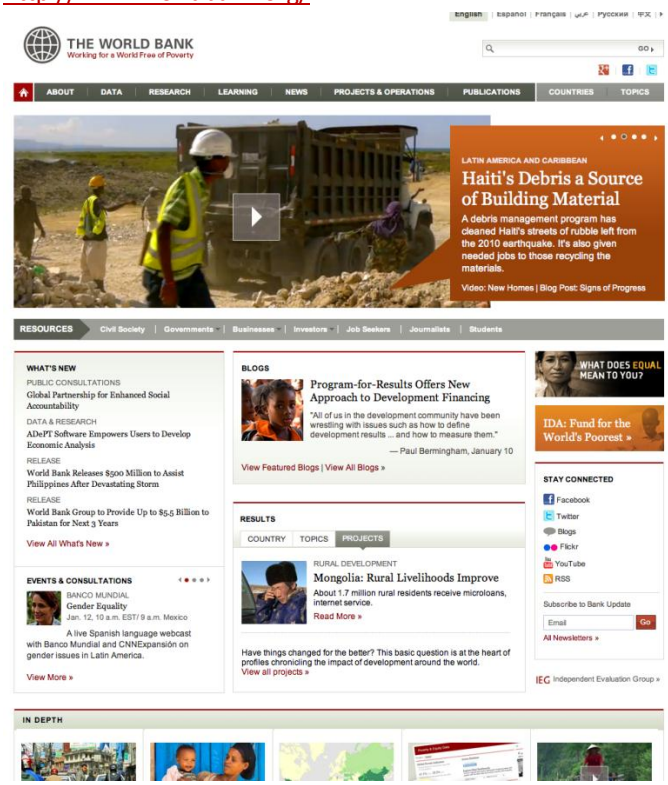
Key learnings:

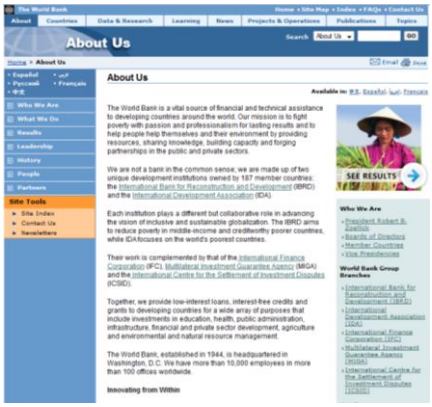
+ Clarity
+ Sober look & feel that fits DIFID
+ Clear information hierarchy
+ Easy and intuitive navigation
+ Good search functionalities
+ Social media is utilized well

+/- Separate portal (password protected) for professionals/suppliers
- Even though the information is structured well, the look & feel especially on section main pages is a bit boxy (colored boxes).
- No thematic/topical entry point in the classification

Benchmark: World Bank

http://www.worldbank.org/





First impression:

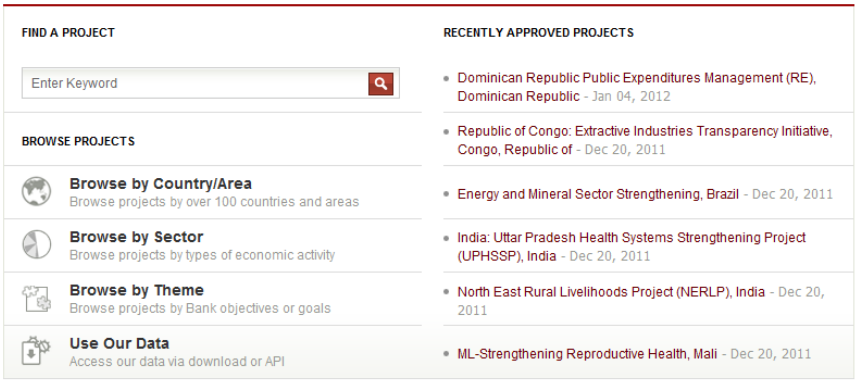
Clear, understandable, information-rich homepage that contains entry points to many different types of content. Sober, newspaper-like visual design. Content raises the interest quickly. Video in the main banner invites to click, and offers latest content via a Carousel. There are two horizontal navigation bars on top and below the main banner. Upper is the main navigation for the site and lower is offering quick access to content for different target audiences, and is visible only on homepage. There are two site generations in parallel, and that is confusing, even though the main structure is mostly the same.

World Bank / Navigation and usability:

The new site structure seems to be bringing big improvements to site navigation, hierarchy and content. There are several ways to navigate to and within the content: through highly interactive maps, text/topics or graphs.

In the section projects and operations, you can look for projects in different ways:

- A project-specific search
- Browse via different facets: Country/area, Sector, Theme…
- Recently approved projects



Data is categorized and displayed well. Graphs and figures that are shown can also be downloaded in Excel or XML format.

Tabs, summaries and images are used to help structure content. Unfortunately, in some cases the tabs do not have any content (better not to show them at all such cases).

World Bank has a lively Facebook page with frequent updates, e.g. links to articles, videos and activation to live events. Their YouTube channel is like a microsite and alternative channel for those, who like to consume information quickly and in video format. YouTube is clearly targeted to public audience, but there are also content and live events for professionals.

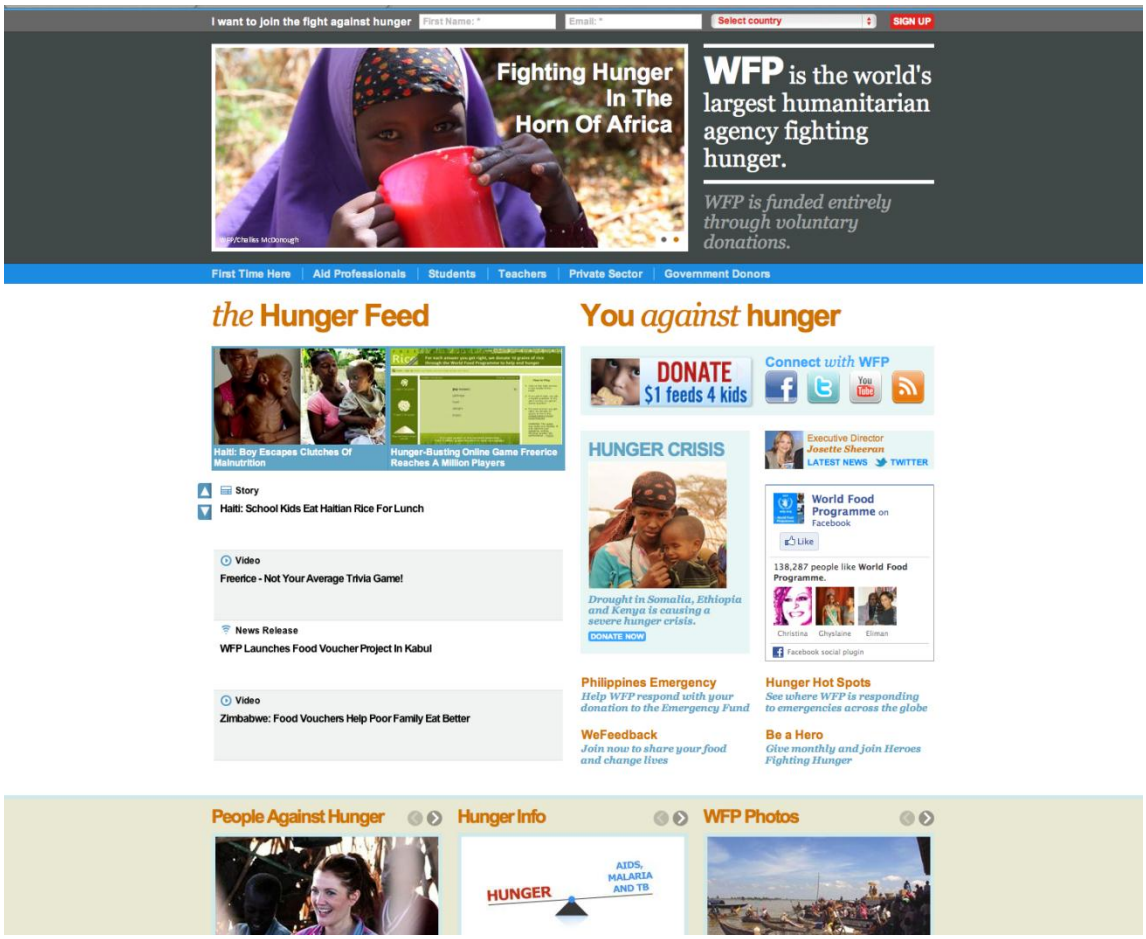
Key learnings:

+ Clarity (new site)
+ Mostly clear and intuitive navigation (new site)
+ Interactive project map is intuitive, informative and pleasant to use
+ Good search functionalities
+ Social media is utilized well

- Two sites with different look & feel is confusing, easier to get lost
- Some links were not working properly
- Bread crumb navigation on the bottom of the page is not always easily accessible (new site)

Benchmark: The World Food Programme

http://www.wfp.org/



First impression:

It is immediately clear what the organization does, thanks to the variety of content shown on the home page. Subject and mission are communicated well already in the main banner (“WFP is the world's largest humanitarian agency fighting hunger”). Images are supporting the message and are chosen discreetly. The dynamic news feed “Hunger Feed” catches the eye and it is interesting that there are links to videos, Tweets and related news in other media. There is an activation banner to donate, but on the other hand the site is also informative and educational, not a campaign site. Homepage is quite long, and could have been tightened up without compromising the clarity and readability. Font size is also bigger than on most sites, but the loose space on the page indicates that it is more visual design, than usability issue. The page is not responsive or scalable (although the colored background blocks are liquid and use the full width of your browser screen).

The World Food Programme / Navigation and usability:

The **navigation** structure is very similar with World Bank; there are two horizontal navigation bars: the bar on top offer the main sections, is visible on all pages, and is of a hybrid nature (mixture of thematic (hunger), information type (news) etc.). The lower level bar offers an entry point by target audience, and is visible only on the homepage.

The **main sections** can be immediately explored on to the deeper levels, via the use of mega dropdowns.

The "I want to join the fight against hunger" sign up on the homepage is confusing as there is no information available on what the user is signing up for. The user has to enter personal contact data without knowing what it is for: for a newsletter, address or to some campaign.

Video, image and social media content is integrated to the site and individual content pages well. This gives the user an alternative way to consume and share information. Heavier images and videos are not run automatically.

Publications, e.g. policy papers, are easy to find and there is a **document search** (by type, year and topic) on the pages.

Key themes and content can also be accessed via a **rich footer**.

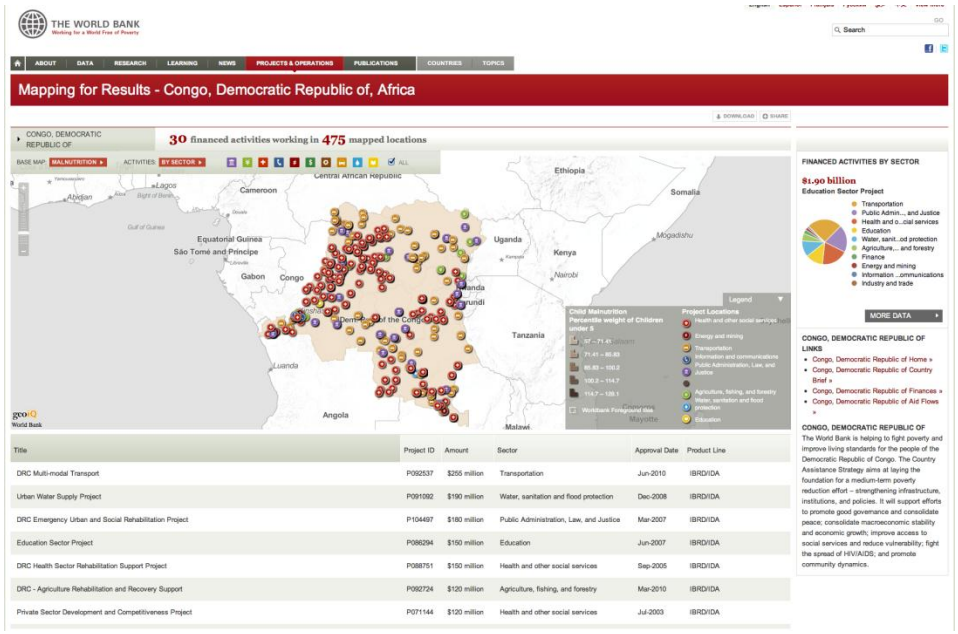
Key learnings:

+ Clarity
+ Excellent information hierarchy, different target audiences find their content easily
+ Good search functionalities
+ Social media is utilized well

- There were several broken links on the site, even in navigation bar
- Homepage could use the space more economically and reduce the scrolling need

Main findings benchmarking

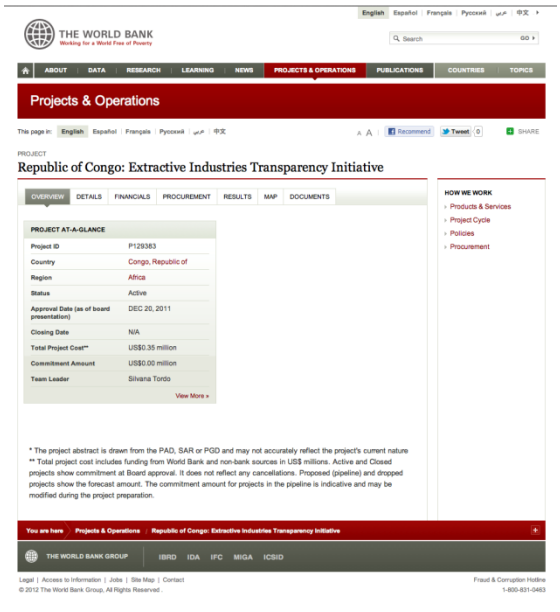
Interactive maps and tools

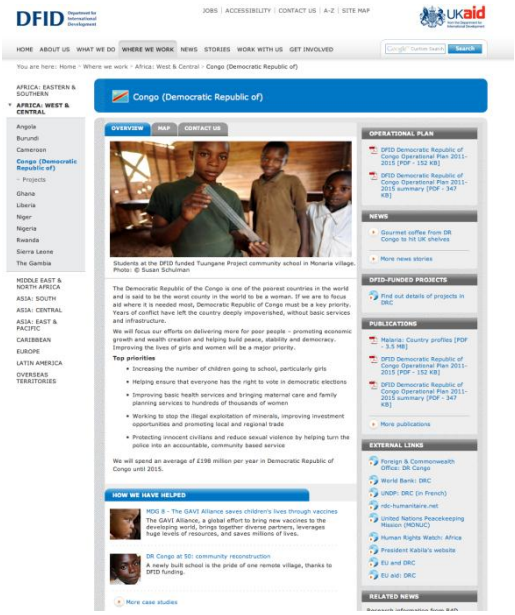


Visual, intuitive and very interactive map to access project information: http://maps.worldbank.org/

Another example of visual and interactive content. It shows how to view statistics on developments in the world. Separate application lessens the overall user experience (application is not integrated to the main site). Link to the tool can be from: http://www.sida.se/English/Countries-and-regions/

Content organization on project pages (tabs)

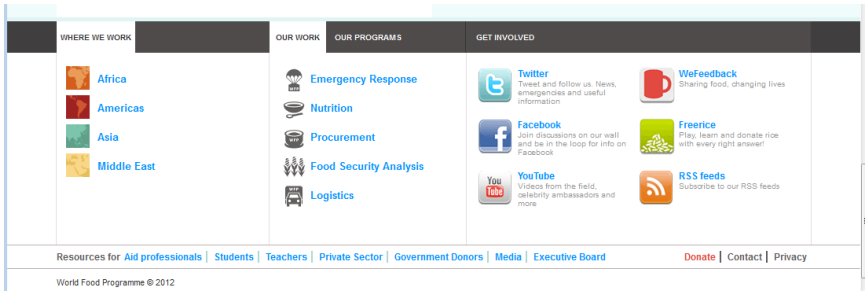




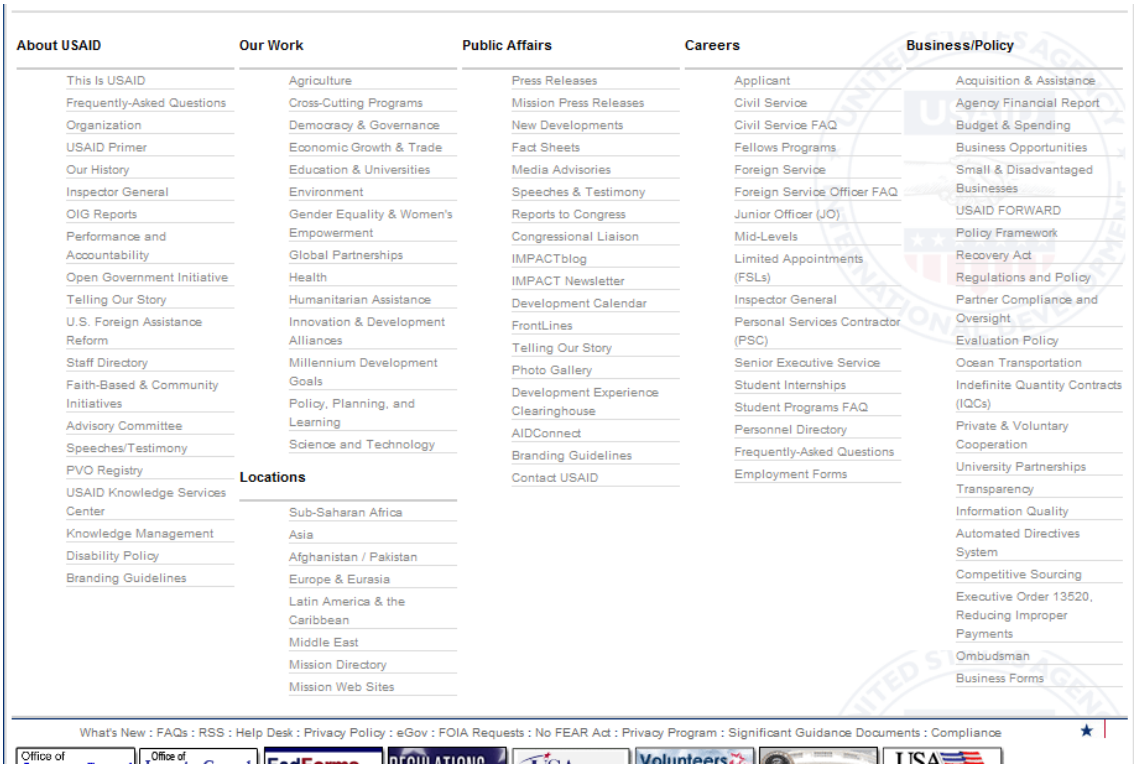
For project / case study pages, the challenge is organizing sometimes large amount of information, documents and links on a page. The use of tabs is good way of splitting up the content and documentation into logical and digestible groups.

On the left: www.worldbank.org/projects, on the right: http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Stories/Case-Studies/

Rich footer, with a sitemap and other navigation elements



The rich footer on http://www.wfp.org: a sitemap that consists of the key content areas, not the whole site. This can support the main navigation, increase usability and findability in search engines. Icons are informative and help understanding the content areas.



The rich footer on http://www.usaid.gov.

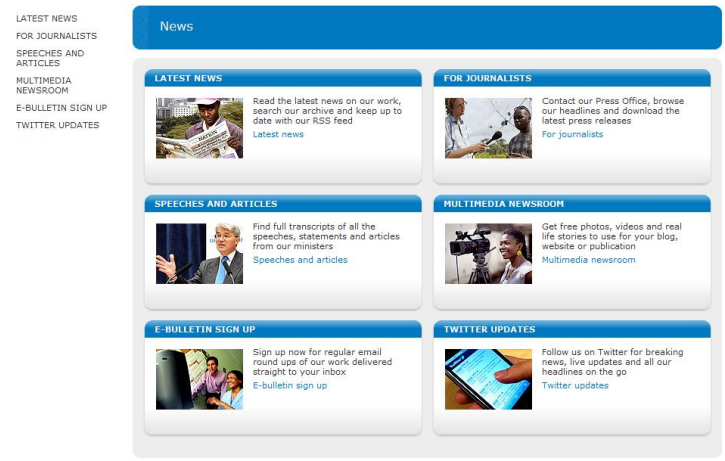
Sharing in social media

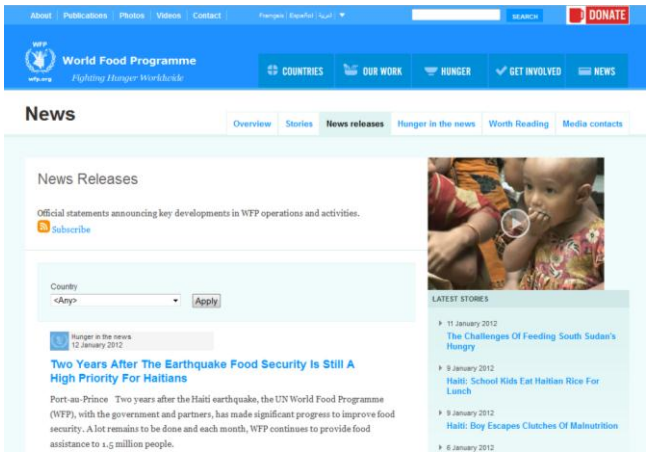
Social media sharing links have become a standard on all organization and commercial websites. Having the sharing links does not yet require having other presence in social media, e.g. in Facebook or Twitter.

Search

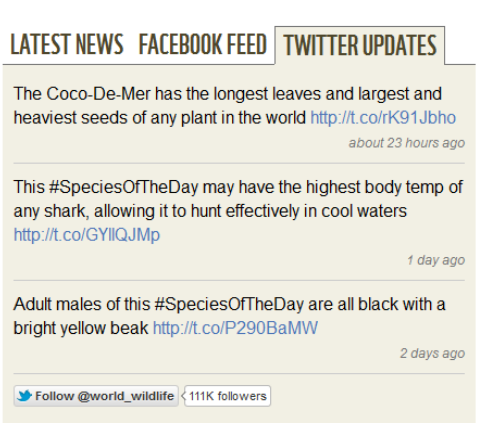
All benchmarked sites have search functionality as part of the global navigation (visible on all pages)

News (categorization of news topics)





News categorization on http://www.dfid.gov.uk/News/ and http://www.wfp.org/news/news-releases
News are categorized to serve different target audiences and to ensure quick access to relevant releases. News search is useful on large site.

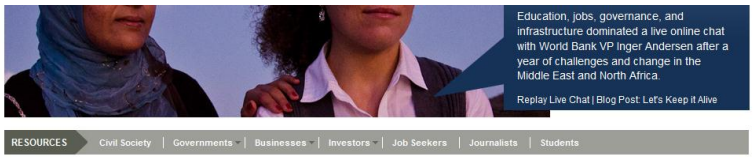


Example on how social media is incorporated to news feed on the homepage at http://www.worldwildlife.org/. Facebook and Twitter posts are often different from the "official" news releases and can link to other interesting content within the site or in other media.

Quick links

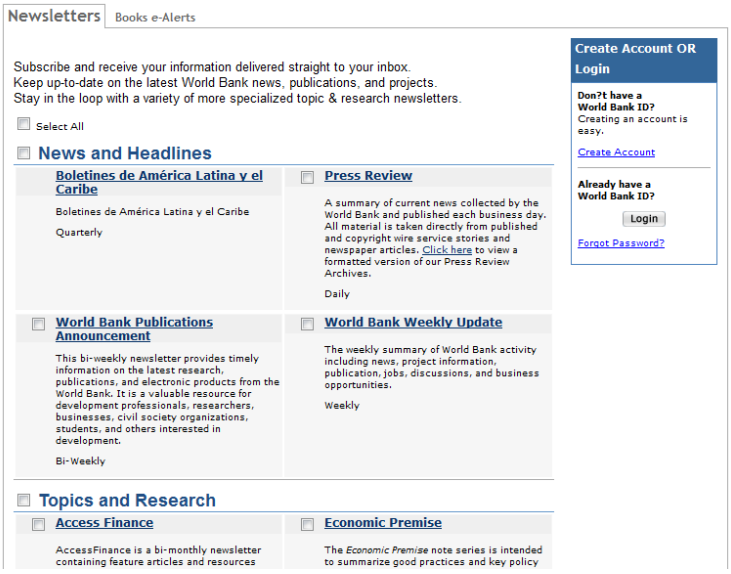
Quick links on the home page to relevant/popular/crucial content.

Navigation by target audience



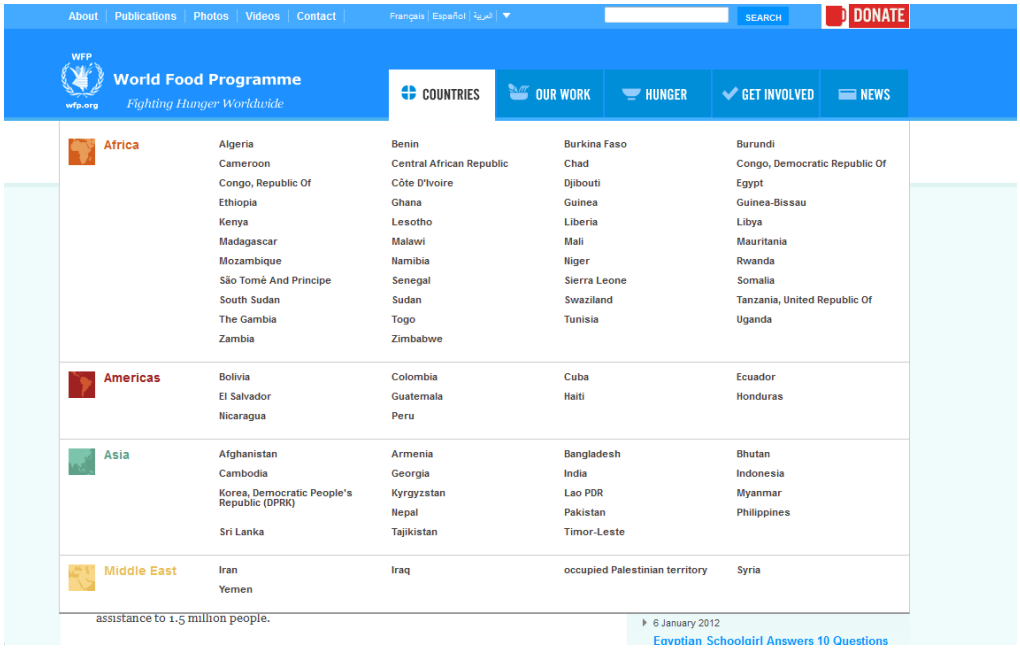
Offer a separate navigation per target audience, with a selection of content specific for that target audience.

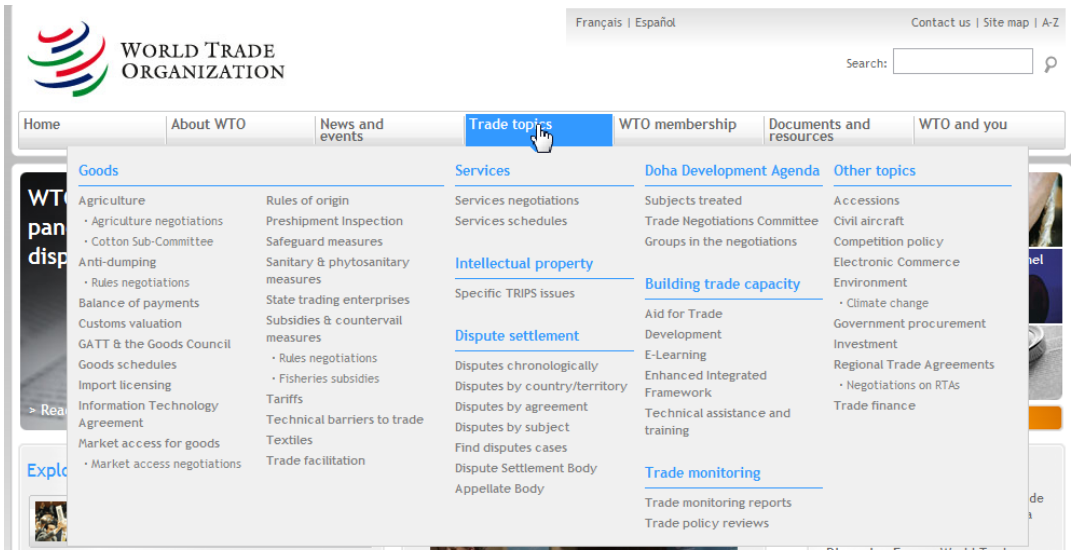
Personalized newsletters and reminders



Subscription to personalized newsletter at http://newsletters.worldbank.org/newsletters/list.htm. Personalized newsletters can inform the recipient of new relevant content. It can generate more quality traffic to the site and make communication with different interest groups more efficient.

Mega dropdown menus



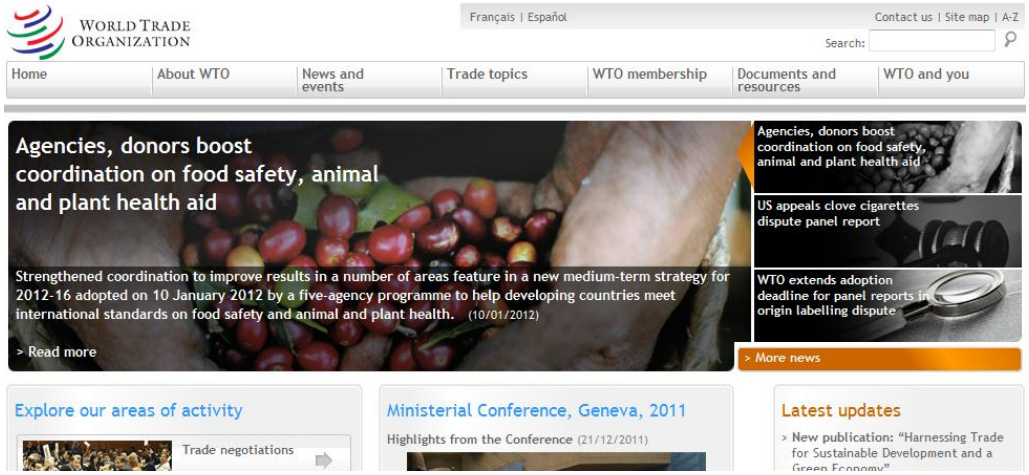


Mega dropdown navigation menus (containing the deeper level content of a main section) can be economical and user friendly in terms of space and readability. This navigation type is not the most search engine friendly, but if the site otherwise optimized well it should not be a major problem. Example from http://www.wfp.org and World Trade Organization

Accessibility

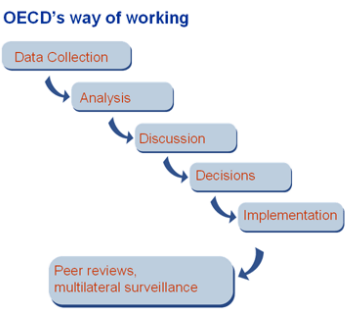
European Investment Bank has a link on the homepage to a separate accessibility page. Apart from a list of access keys, this page is more a justification of their accessibility approach, rather than helping a user access the site.

Carousel / multiple image banner



Most of the sites are using a **carousel/multiple image banner** on the homepage. Typically 3-5 different images/videos are shown. Example from http://www.wto.org/

Visual and rich media storytelling



Visualization and video format can help understand important or complex information quickly. Visual format can also trigger emotional associations and help in memorizing the key messages.
Examples from left:
http://www.imf.org/external/about/whatwedo.htm
http://www.worldwildlife.org/what/howwedoit/index.html
http://www.oecd.org/pages/0,3417,en_36734052_36761681_1_1_1_1_1,00.html

No separate, mobile version of the web site

None of the sites in the benchmark have separate, dedicated mobile versions of their web site (Worldbank, DFID, WFP, WTO, EIB.org, USAID, WN.org)

Conclusions

Most sites had clear, clean and light look & feel. They all look professional.

In most cases, the key messages (what the organization does and how they work) are clear and are well communicated on the homepage.

Content is well structured; navigation in most cases straightforward and intuitive. The web sites often use a similar structure classification:

- Who we are, What we do, Where we work…
- Our work/what we do
- About (us)
- News as one of the main sections
- Get involved
- Projects/case studies/Projects & operations

Most sites offer **different ways to access information**: by themes or location, by using textual navigation, search functionalities or interactive maps. The sites sometimes offer search functionalities with possibility to select different search criteria's in relevant places on the sites.

All the visited sites are very informative and large, but **homepages were kept quite simple** with clear information hierarchy. Recent and actual information is shown first. Key themes/content is promoted in a way that gives quick and visual access to most important/visited content.

News and media content is well displayed on the homepages. All sites give an impression of being up to date, active, and offering the latest news. News/press pages have often filtering options by content category, topics, date or other criteria. RSS feeds and newsletters are offered. Some organizations publish news and links to new content also in Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites.

Different target audiences are sometimes identified on the home page, and guided to relevant content from the homepage via a quick link. This can make the first step faster, but none of the sites were personalized deeper in the structure.

Social media services are mostly well branded and regularly updated. Sharing links (see example on page 14) are often placed to footer or side columns and content pages.

Most sites have large amount of **videos and images**, and rich media elements are nicely integrated to the relevant content pages. Heavy images or videos are linked with static thumbnail images.

Funding with detailed instructions and project lifecycle can be found easily on most sites. Sometimes there is a lot of information and downloadable documents, but not step by step guides or wizards to help in information search and application process. On most sites, the application service/database requires passwords. There is always contact information available to ask further assistance or information.