



**communicating with
disaster affected
communities**

Typhoon Bopha Learning Review

A Review of UNOCHA's
Communicating with
Communities (CwC)
Work

Executive Summary

December 2013

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For further information on the content of this review, contact Nicki Bailey, Research and Learning Officer, CDAC Network Secretariat: nicki.bailey@cdacnetwork.org.

For more information on the CDAC Network, visit www.cdacnetwork.org #commisaid

Any opinions expressed in this report are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of UNOCHA, the Director of the CDAC Network Secretariat, or CDAC Network Members.

About the CDAC Network

The goal of the CDAC Network is that communities affected by crises are supported to better withstand, and recover from, humanitarian emergencies through active engagement in decisions about the relief and recovery efforts in their country.

To achieve this, CDAC Network Members are committed to mainstreaming the provision of life-saving information and communication with crisis affected communities into emergency preparedness and response. They do this by supporting humanitarian response through coordinated communication that makes use of appropriate media and communication tools and platforms. Members also focus on how partnerships, particularly with new humanitarian actors such as media development organisations, telecoms companies and the private sector, can deliver more effective and locally appropriate outcomes.

The CDAC Network is unique in terms of who it convenes: humanitarian and media development organisations and, increasingly, technology providers. By collaborating across traditional boundaries, CDAC Network Members increase mutual understanding of the challenges they face and identify opportunities for partnership in order to bring about innovative and effective field practice and, ultimately, a more sustainable and improved response. Members seek to build capacity together, share learning and research, and advocate to ensure that two-way communication with affected communities becomes a predictable, consistent and resourced element of crisis resilience, response and recovery.

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Background

Typhoon Bopha struck the east coast of the island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines on 4 December 2012, flattening houses and infrastructure and destroying huge areas of agricultural land, which the majority of the population depends upon for their livelihoods. The typhoon, known locally as Pablo, was the strongest of 16 typhoons to hit the Philippines and the world's deadliest storm in 2012. It affected 6.2 million people, leaving at least 1,000 people dead and displacing close to 1 million.¹ At the time it was the costliest typhoon ever to hit the Philippines: the overall damage was estimated by the Philippine Department of Agriculture to be US\$750 million, with an estimated 14,176 hectares of banana plantations and 101,000 hectares of coconut farms destroyed.

As part of the emergency response, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) established a Communication with Communities (CwC) Working Group. This was intended to function as a cross-cluster support service and communication coordination mechanism. UNOCHA worked closely with government of the Philippines (GPH) departments, humanitarian agencies and national telecommunication companies, with the aims of improving access to vital information for affected communities and ensuring that their voices were heard and considered in the response. The objectives of the UNOCHA CwC project were:

1. To improve access to information for survivors of Typhoon Bopha
2. To improve the capacity of responding agencies to listen to disaster-affected

communities at the agency and system levels

3. To coordinate communication work undertaken as part of the emergency response to the typhoon

Objectives of this Review

This learning review, which was conducted between July and September 2013, examines the CwC response to Typhoon Bopha. It outlines what happened, documents enabling and impeding factors to CwC work, and highlights examples of good practice and lessons learned. It also discusses the added value of the CwC coordination and activities undertaken, and examines perceptions of the UNOCHA role in CwC coordination at field level.

The review is intended to inform UNOCHA CwC work in future emergencies, as well as provide insight on implementation of CwC for other humanitarian actors. Recommendations are provided to UNOCHA, both in the Philippines and worldwide, and to the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network. UNOCHA is a member of the CDAC Network.

Methodology

Following a desk review, qualitative interviews were undertaken with 47 key informants employed during the response by UNOCHA, other humanitarian actors, local government and local media. This information was then triangulated and analysed using framework analysis.

Overview of the CwC Response

When Typhoon Bopha made landfall, the UNOCHA Global CwC Coordinator was already in Manila establishing a pilot CwC project, and

¹ UNOCHA, Philippines (Mindanao) Humanitarian Action Plan 2013: Typhoon Bopha/Pablo Response – An Action Plan for Recovery (Revised January 2013).

so was able to deploy to Davao almost immediately, putting in place the foundations for a coordinated response. During the first 10 days after the typhoon, the Global CwC Coordinator ensured communication questions were included in the Rapid Needs Assessment tool, initiated and contributed to a CwC section in the daily UNOCHA situation report, and worked with two agencies to develop CwC project proposals that were successfully included in the emergency Flash Appeal.

By mid-December 2012, the Global CwC Coordinator had established the CwC Working Group, which was co-led by the GPH Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and which brought together a variety of actors, including the Philippine Information Agency (PIA), local and international NGOs, UN agencies and local telecommunication companies.

By mid-January 2013, a number of CwC initiatives were being coordinated through the CwC Working Group, initiated by different agencies but predominantly supporting DSWD activities. These included collating information needs from affected communities, supporting clusters with messaging, supporting management of a DSWD helpline, and cluster participation in DSWD radio programmes. The collection of frequently asked questions – FAQs – from affected communities, proved to be a particularly valuable component of the response effort.

At the end of January 2013, the scope of the CwC Working Group expanded to include a local media lunch event and UNOCHA humanitarian system orientation sessions for local government and frontline NGO staff.

And in February 2013, DSWD, SMART Telecommunications and a number of UN agencies held a 'Baranguay Fiesta Caravan' event that facilitated dialogue between government and humanitarian agencies and the community in one affected area, along with an additional inter-agency consultation with another of the affected communities.

As the response proceeded, CwC work moved into a different phase, with the Global CwC Coordinator handing over to a National CwC Officer. At the end of March 2013, the original CwC Working Group concluded its work, replaced by a new Provincial Communication Technical Working Group (PCTWG) that was established in Davao Oriental in April 2013 at the request of the Provincial Government. Activities of this provincial Working Group, led primarily by IOM (who were supported by ECHO funding for a common communication project), included technical training for municipal information officers and local media, communication of cluster messages and beneficiary criteria to the affected population, and distribution of radios to affected communities.

In addition to these group activities, UNOCHA co-led an After Action Review (AAR), which for the first time included the participation of affected communities. The National CwC Officer also supported Humanitarian Response Consortium (HRC)-Oxfam 'Affected Population Forums' that aimed to facilitate discussion between affected communities and their local government units. And UNOCHA also helped develop weather warning training for communities and included CwC in its standard information management and coordination training with local government.

More detailed information about CwC activities, working groups, UNOCHA and other actors can be found in the body of this review.

Enabling and impeding factors to carrying out CwC work

The response to Typhoon Bopha illustrates some the problems encountered by national and international organisations working to communicate with disaster affected communities. While capacity, experience, coordination and advance preparations were all key to the perceived successes of the CwC work, the size and strength of the storm and destruction of communications networks, and the scope and complexity of wide array of

actors and agencies working to reach those in need, combined to create significant challenges.

Enabling factors

Key informants highlighted seven significant enabling factors to the CwC work:

1. GPH capacity in humanitarian response and CwC
2. Articulated need by GPH for improved communication with the affected population
3. Strong capacity of telecommunication companies
4. Developed networks through UNOCHA CwC pilot project preparation
5. International and national staff experienced in CwC
6. Inclusion of communication needs questions in the Rapid Needs Assessment
7. Dedicated CwC staff in UNOCHA and other agencies

Impeding factors

Key informants highlighted 10 significant impeding factors to carrying out the CwC work:

1. Government agencies in Eastern Mindanao were overwhelmed
2. The DSWD and the PIA were not accustomed to working together at local level
3. Lack of information about how best to communicate with affected communities
4. Cluster level staff could not speak the languages used by the affected population
5. Location of CwC Working Group meetings
6. Local elections held less than five months after the typhoon hit

7. Wariness by humanitarian organisations of engaging with local media
8. High staff turnover within UNOCHA, and disparity in experience and understanding of CwC
9. Confusion over the role of the Global CwC Coordinator
10. Difficulty obtaining funding for CwC work

Conclusions

Added value of the CwC Working Group

Overall, the key informants interviewed for this report felt that the CwC Working Group added value to the emergency response to Typhoon Bopha in two key ways: by maximising the sharing of information and expertise, and by avoiding duplication. Furthermore, working group members felt they had succeeded in raising the profile of CwC within the GPH, within certain humanitarian agencies and within the typhoon response as a whole.

Elements of an effective coordination mechanism

The 2012 CDAC Haiti Learning Review² identified the six key elements of an effective communication coordination mechanism as: credibility; establishment and maintenance of appropriate coordination mechanisms; strategic leadership; integration with the existing humanitarian system; training and capacity-building; and advocacy. The body of this review discusses how closely the UNOCHA CwC project met each of these elements according to the key informants, highlights where improvements could have been made, and notes 'Good Practice Points' for future responses.

² C. Ljungman, CDAC Haiti Learning Review: Final Report (Belgium 2012)

The UNOCHA role in CwC

UNOCHA's mandate in humanitarian response is for coordination, information management, advocacy, humanitarian financing and capacity-building. There was some confusion among UNOCHA staff and other key informants about where CwC fits within the UNOCHA mandate, and whether UNOCHA has the capacity to be involved in CwC work.

Opinion was divided among the key informants as to whether UNOCHA should take a leading role in CwC. Some participants felt other agencies with greater expertise in CwC were better positioned, while others felt that UNOCHA, as the only agency with a mandate to neutrally coordinate information sharing between agencies and local government, was best placed to lead on coordination of CwC.

Although part of UNOCHA's role is to fill gaps where required, it does not have a mandate for implementation. Some key informants saw a clear role for UNOCHA in advocating for CwC as a priority for governments and clusters in an emergency response, and in supporting agencies to obtain funding for this work. However, others raised concerns about UNOCHA conducting community consultations, since it is not a service delivery organisation and therefore risks raising community expectations without the ability to implement any changes. These respondents felt UNOCHA should advocate for other agencies to fill gaps where required, and concentrate on coordination, information sharing, advocacy and capacity building with local actors.

Meeting the CwC project objectives

Overall, key informants felt that the UNOCHA CwC project succeeded in raising the profile of communication with disaster affected communities in the humanitarian response to Typhoon Bopha.

The project's objective of 'improving the capacity of responding agencies to listen to affected communities' was addressed well, for

example, through the FAQ initiative and inviting members of the affected population to contribute to the AAR. The objective to 'coordinate communication work undertaken as part of the response' was met to a certain extent by bringing government, humanitarian and private sector actors together under the CwC Working Group while it was active. However, it is not possible at this point to ascertain whether the objective to 'improve access to information for survivors of Typhoon Bopha' was met, as CwC initiatives were not monitored for their success in reaching affected people. Feedback from the AAR, indicating that communities did not have access to enough information, suggests this objective was not met, and that CwC still needs to be more effectively mainstreamed within humanitarian responses.

10 lessons learned

1. CwC is not the same as external communication, and different staff may need to be involved
2. If the UNOCHA CwC Focal Point is also acting as PIO, this can lead to confusion about the focus of CwC
3. Pre-crisis planning enables a more effective response as interested networks are already developed
4. CwC needs to be linked with agendas and priorities already identified by partner agencies
5. Experience and certain skills of CwC staff and their management is important
6. Monitoring and evaluation of information provision is often overlooked and should be prioritised
7. Inter-cluster community consultations require clear agreements and buy-in from all clusters

8. In-depth communication needs assessments are beneficial to understand appropriate communication channels
9. Appropriate communication channels should be used at appropriate times
10. Agencies engaged in CwC work at field level are not necessarily the same as those involved in global conversations on CwC

Recommendations

Based on suggestions and comments made by key stakeholders, this review makes a number of recommendations.

For UNOCHA Philippines

Build on interest in CwC and resulting initiatives

UNOCHA should capitalise on the interest in CwC work generated by the response to Typhoon Bopha and build on initiatives developing as part of its ongoing pilot project in the Philippines. Examples include the CwC Technical Working Group set up in Davao Oriental Province and a Humanitarian Communications group recently set up by UN agencies in Manila. There seems to be interest at the national level to create a CwC coordination mechanism within the Philippines cluster system that would bring together GPH agencies, humanitarian responders, the media and the telecommunication companies. This group could develop systems of working together and prepare materials to facilitate a more effective CwC response during future emergencies.

Relationships should be built with the PIA, which holds the mandate within the GPH for information provision and collecting information from disaster affected communities. The PIA already expressed an interest in the message library during the UNOCHA CwC pilot project set up in Manila. Protocols for working with telecommunication companies and the Philippines National Union of Journalists could facilitate a more effective

CwC response in emergencies and would build on strong existing capacity within the Philippines.

UNOCHA could play a lead role in bringing these actors together and sharing lessons learned and technical expertise as part of the Manila CwC pilot project.

Develop required tools

UNOCHA should develop tools in preparation for the next humanitarian response in the Philippines. Participants suggested the following would be useful:

- Guidelines on establishing a helpline and CrowdMap in an emergency.
- Localisation of the Infoasaid message library as a key part of preparedness work into all local languages where there is a risk of disaster occurring. There was high demand for this from participants, as it would save time during an emergency response and ensure materials are available in the correct languages. However, given that at least 120 different languages are spoken in the Philippines, these would need to be prioritised, and the task will likely need to be conducted at the local level.

For UNOCHA worldwide

Determine UNOCHA role in coordinating CwC and train staff accordingly

UNOCHA should consider how to proceed with mainstreaming CwC as part of its humanitarian response work. To facilitate this, UNOCHA should review its role and parameters in CwC according to its current mandate. If it does continue to provide system-wide coordination support to CwC, UNOCHA should decide where this capacity sits within its structure, as well as within the cluster system. Greater clarity within the humanitarian system on UNOCHA's role and parameters in this work will help other actors to better engage with it.

Once UNOCHA has made decisions about its role and priorities in CwC work, UNOCHA

emergency response staff should be briefed, guided and supported in undertaking and managing this relatively new area of work for the agency.

Mainstream three of the Typhoon Bopha initiatives into standard UNOCHA emergency response

CwC initiatives will always be context-specific and should be determined by information and communication needs assessments. However, UNOCHA should consider mainstreaming three initiatives that were considered the most useful activities undertaken by the CwC group, and are in line with the current UNOCHA mandate:

1. The FAQs exercise
2. Including representatives from the affected population in an After Action Review
3. Including CwC in UNOCHA standard technical training on information management and coordination

For the CDAC Network

(The CDAC Network Secretariat and CDAC Network Members, which includes UNOCHA)

Develop an advocacy strategy around mainstreaming CwC in humanitarian preparedness and response

This should include advocacy for:

- **Inclusion of CwC in standard cluster guidelines and other system level mechanisms**

Regardless of what form a CwC coordination mechanism might take in a humanitarian response, since this will likely differ depending on the context and scale of the disaster, the CDAC Network should advocate for CwC integration into IASC guidance on effectively running clusters³, as well as other IASC guidance such as the

³ IASC, Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response (Geneva 2006)

operational framework for accountability to affected populations.⁴

- **Systematic monitoring and evaluation of CwC initiatives in order to determine their effectiveness**

Previous work undertaken by Infoasaid, the International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent (IFRC)⁵ and other agencies in developing indicators and methodologies to measure CwC should be consolidated, tested and built upon. Clear field-level guidelines on how to monitor and evaluate CwC work should be created and widely disseminated to support humanitarian actors.

- **Mainstreaming of CwC as a budget line in UNOCHA-managed pooled humanitarian funding mechanisms and other donor funding mechanisms**

The CDAC Network should also lobby donors to encourage CwC as part of their funding criteria. Although CwC work is not particularly expensive, it requires dedicated capacity and resources in order to be effective as part of an agency's response.

Consider how to enable effective field level collaboration

The CDAC Network Secretariat should consider, along with its Members, how it can more effectively enable collaboration between CDAC Network Members at field level. Examples of this collaboration might include further development of the Field Coordination Community of Practice (CoP) and leveraging funding for joint initiatives by Members at field level.

Develop a series of tools and resources for use in future disasters

The CDAC Network, through the work of its Field Coordination CoP, as well as work

⁴ IASC, Operational Framework for making programming more accountable to affected populations (Geneva)

⁵ IFRC and Infoasaid, Generic M&E Framework for measuring impact of communications interventions

managed by the CDAC Secretariat, should collate and build on existing documents to develop a series of tools in advance of future disasters. These will be for adaptation locally and should include:

- A one-page leaflet about CwC
- Briefing packs on CwC for Cluster Leads
- ToR for CwC working groups at regional/country level
- ToR for CwC Coordinator role
- A free downloadable 'how to' practitioners guide to CwC
- A modular, quality-assured training programme on CwC for humanitarian practitioners
- Templates for inclusion of CwC work in flash appeals/funding proposals, including budget and narrative outlines for different scenarios
- Guidance on effective monitoring and evaluation of CwC initiatives

This Learning Review was written prior to Typhoon Haiyan (known locally as Yolanda), which struck the central Philippines in November 2013. A number of the recommendations made in this report were taken into account during the response to this disaster.

A Learning Review of the Typhoon Haiyan response will be undertaken in mid-2014. This will examine UNOCHA's role in that response, as well as the role of the wider CDAC Network, including Network Members and the Secretariat.

Every effort has been made to verify the accuracy of the information contained in this report. All information was believed to be correct as of December 2013.

Communicating with Disaster Affected
Communities (CDAC) Network Secretariat
196 Old Street
New City Cloisters
London, EC1V 9FR
United Kingdom
info@cdacnetwork.org

www.cdacnetwork.org
[facebook.com/commisaid](https://www.facebook.com/commisaid)
twitter.com/CDACN