CDAC NETWORK | communicating with disaster affected communities

CDAC Network Simulation Report
December 2012

Who is this document for?	*This document is primarily for CDAC Network Member agencies and other simulation participants who attended the Network's first simulation at World Vision's offices in Milton Keynes, UK, on 30th and 31st October 2012.*
Document purpose?	*This document represents the main substantive output from the CDAC Network's first simulation. Its primary objective is to **capture key reflections and learning points** from simulation participants and the simulation Observer team. It also **acts as a record** of the two days by describing what was planned; what actually happened and why; and the learning generated by this. In addition, it provides some detail about the different communication platforms and tools introduced in order to act as a **reference guide** for participants. It does <u>not</u> address the structure or design of the simulation. This information is captured in the Network's After Action Review and an Evaluation Report from the SurveyMonkey conducted with participants after the simulation.* *In developing this document, the following were consulted:* • *Simulation Inception Report (aims and objectives)* • *Observers' feedback received during the course of the simulation, as well as the Observer debriefing session held at the conclusion of Day 1* • *Observer notes from group debrief sessions held on Day 2* • *Written outputs from the plenary debriefing sessions held on Day 2* • *The CDAC Network's After Action Review* • *Individual agency Communications Strategies (used to triangulate what was observed)* *The Network Secretariat requests that similar Simulation Reports are written each time Network Members run such a simulation. This will contribute to the Network's learning in this area, and help identify issues of importance for Network members and colleagues throughout the humanitarian sector vis communication as aid.*

Contents

Section 1: Overview

1. Introduction

On 30th and 31st October 2012, over 40 different agencies across the humanitarian and media development sectors gathered at World Vision's offices in Milton Keynes, UK, to take part in the first ever CDAC Network simulation. This two-day crisis simulation aimed to build the capacity of mid- to senior-level staff in the diverse group of CDAC Network Member agencies, and partners, to be prepared for and plan a coordinated, collaborative, multi-agency response to an emergency, with a focus on supporting communication and a particular emphasis on the use of media and technology.

1.1 Objectives

The simulation was designed to achieve objectives at two levels.

For the Network:

- A more common understanding of the concept of two-way communications;
- Trained staff that understand the strengths and behaviours of other Network members and key partners in order to be better able to explore and promote possible collaboration at field level;
- A series of ideas and questions around the process, mechanisms and tools of collaboration and coordination that can be taken forward for development by the Network.

For individual staff members/organisations:

- An understanding of the concept, importance and requirements of two-way communications;
- An understanding of Network members' approach and strengths in two-way communications, and so a better understanding of how collaboration might be possible in the event of an emergency;
- Practical exposure to a range of mechanisms that *enable* two-way communications in different contexts (low and high-tech) that organisations may be able to use to augment their current ways of working;
- Exploration of the need for multi-channel approaches to two-way communications, and the issues of appropriateness of use in a given context.

Section 2: What Was Planned and What Actually Happened

2.1   Day One

2.1.1 What Was Planned

Day One was split into four events, each intended to cover different aspects of a first-phase response in relation to communicating with disaster-affected populations. The simulated disaster was a flood affecting the fictional country of South Seedac.

Participants were divided into agency teams, in their own organisation where possible. However, the large number of organisations represented meant that it was necessary to form some mixed teams of participants from different agencies to allow for manageable running of the scenario.

Three days before the simulation, participants received their first information about the disaster in the form of a notification from their organisational HQ to prepare for deployment, and a situation report (sitrep) compiled by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator.

When participants arrived on the morning of the simulation it was five days into the emergency, just after the South Seedac government had called for international assistance. Several time jumps were incorporated into the simulation – one following Event 2, to jump 5 days further into the response (taking participants to Day 10 of the

emergency); and one following Event 3, to jump another 5 days into the response (to Day 15). After each time jump an updated situation briefing showed the increased extent of the flooding and highlighted new/increased issues faced by the affected populations.

The design intended that each event begin with a briefing session in the form of an interagency meeting (or similar) and finish with a specific output/activity, as described below.

Event 1: Collaboration and Coordination

This event was designed to explore how agencies might begin to work together in the absence of a formal coordination structure for communications. UNOCHA was present, but with no coordination capacity due to visa problems. An interagency meeting was led by the Humanitarian Coordinator to request that organisations begin to think seriously about their approach to communicating with disaster-affected populations. A designated government official was also in attendance. The intended activities were:

- For each agency group to introduce themselves and their anticipated response plans, specifically in terms of communications with affected populations;
- To discuss and determine a suitable coordination mechanism.

Event 2: Technical Working Groups

This event was introduced by the government official who invited participants to divide into three groups, each to work on one of these issues:

1. Begin development of an interagency communications strategy.
2. Explore how a crisis mapping platform – Ushahidi – might be set up and used to enhance communications and understanding during the response.
3. Determine how to assess the information needs of those affected by the flooding in South Seedac, with the option to use smartphones and the online EpiSurveyor questionnaire tool.

The event was to end with a rapid needs assessment using smartphones and an online questionnaire.

Event 3: Communications Strategy

An inject in the form of a simulated television news report was designed to mark the first time jump, to 5 days into the response (Day 10).

By this point, a UNOCHA coordinator had arrived in country and led the interagency meeting. Information needs assessment data has been collected by agencies and new information made available through the UNOCHA sitrep and a draft Infoasaid Media Guide. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) was also represented at the meeting, and offered various resources including items to assist communications (solar radios, smart phones, generators and broadcast kits).

After the meeting, each agency was to receive an email from their own HQ requesting an outline of a strategy for communicating with the disaster-affected populations. The requirements of this strategy were designed to:

- Ensure discussion of interagency communications strategies and plans;
- Encourage agencies to engage in collaborations and partnerships with other organisations;
- Encourage participants to analyse all their information to date and make context-appropriate decisions to form multi-channel, two-way communication plans;
- Ensure participants thought about the resources required to fulfil those plans (budget, staffing, timelines, etc).

Event 4: Progress through Injects

Another television news report marked the second time jump to a further 5 days into the response (Day 15). Participants were informed that by this point, communications mechanisms were up and running. A series of events were due to be presented which would test whether participants had made appropriate choices regarding

communications mechanisms, and encourage them to respond appropriately to changing circumstances using a variety of mechanisms (radio broadcasts, SMS, community mobilisers, etc.).

A series of injects were developed for possible inclusion, depending on the progress of the simulation and the decisions taken by participants. These included:

- More heavy rainfall and fear of further flooding in areas which were out of communication with the government;
- A riot at a food distribution in the urban centre;
- Large population movements;
- A sudden spike in morbidity rates due to diarrhoeal diseases;
- Reported confusion over how to use water purification tablets;
- A journalist misreporting aid agency activities.

Participants were also intended to continue to feed new information to the mapping platform.

Finally, the Sultan of an affected area (who had encountered issues with aid organisations in the past) asked to know how the agencies would communicate with his people during this disaster, inviting all organisations to present their strategies at a meeting with the community the following morning (Day Two of the simulation).

2.1.2 What Changed

For the most part, Day 1 followed the events as planned. However, several changes were made following observations about how the participants were progressing with their tasks.

- The tasks related to determining a suitable coordination structure proved too ambitious, given the stipulation of an initial lack of coordination support from UNOCHA. A structure did begin to emerge throughout the day, but took longer than anticipated and so did not provide the setting for establishing a successful communications strategy until the end of the day.
- Participants decided between them that only some participants would undertake the rapid information needs assessment, rather than everyone taking part. Others chose to continue working on the mapping activities and the strategy discussions.
- As it took much longer than expected for participants to determine a coordination mechanism, and to get to grips with the initial tasks presented (information needs assessment, communications strategy and mapping), those tasks continued into Event 3. Thus the submission of the agency-specific communications strategies to HQ was pushed back by an hour. Mapping activities were eventually called to a halt to push participants into engaging in other aspects of the simulation.
- Following the delay to the submission of the agency communications strategies, participants did not get as far as anticipated in Event 4 with regards to setting up radio broadcasts and engaging in SMS messaging. Only the injects concerning further heavy rainfall and the riot at the food distribution point were used.

2.1.3 Observer Team

A team of eight Observers was responsible for observing the actions and behaviour of the participants during the simulation event, in line with detailed learning objectives and observation categories developed by the simulation design team.

The Observer team used a system of post-it notes to feed information to the simulation control room in real time, with the intention of enabling the simulation facilitator to set the tempo, course-correct and provide appropriate injects. These same notes provided a rich source of learning material to be fed back to the entire group during the course of Day Two.

In each note, the Observers were asked to separate their direct observations (evidence) from their opinions of what these meant (inference). This was designed to maximise the effectiveness of feedback to the group while ensuring that the wealth of experience within the Observer team was utilised.

The Observers (and some of the actors) attended a detailed debrief meeting with the facilitation team at the end of Day One. This provided an opportunity to draw out the key themes from the day and exchange thoughts about how best to ensure participants, and the Network, learned as much as possible from the experience. Details of the Observer team's reflections are included below.

Note: While the Observer team had a wide view of the simulation as it unfolded, and included some very expert individuals, their understanding of the situation was inevitably incomplete. This should be borne in mind when reviewing their feedback in each section.

2.2 Day Two

2.2.1 What Happened

The simulation was planned to run until mid-morning of Day Two, finishing with the scheduled meeting of all the participants with the Sultan and members of his community. Following this meeting the simulation was to be called to a close.

The remainder of Day Two was allocated for debrief and discussion sessions, the aim of which was to move as close as possible to a shared understanding of what is good practice in two-way communications. Each of the sessions was designed to reflect one of the primary learning objectives involved in the simulation: collaboration and coordination; two-way communications; and exposure to communications mechanisms. In each session, participants debriefed from Day One through a combination of looking at what they perceived to have happened, and what was actually observed to have happened (fact-based feedback). The detail of each debrief session can be found at the beginning of the relevant following sections.

The final session of the day focused on conclusions that could be drawn from the previous discussions, as well as identifying what questions remained to be pursued and what actions could be taken.

2.2.2 What Changed

Rather than all participants attending the meeting with the Sultan, as had been intended, participants decided amongst themselves to allow some people to continue their work on strategy and mapping activities. Because of this, and perhaps also because the actors who were playing the Sultan's community did not have full clarity about what was expected of them, this event did not go according to plan.

Therefore after the meeting ended, the facilitation team divided the participants into groups, each containing two or three agencies with two observers/facilitators, and reviewed and discussed the communications strategies they had produced during the previous day. This provided space for the participants to report and reflect on their work during the simulation, and allowed for discussion of what they had done well, what they might have done differently, as well as an opportunity to consider what other agencies had chosen to do.

The remainder of Day Two proceeded broadly as planned.

Section 3: Observations and Reflections

3.1   Collaboration and Coordination

3.1.1   Simulation Objectives for Collaboration and Coordination

- Trained organisational staff that understand the strengths and behaviours of other Network members and so are better able to explore/promote possible collaboration at the field level in the next emergency.
- A series of ideas and questions around the process and mechanisms/tools of collaboration and coordination that can be taken forward for development by the Network.

3.1.2 Observer Reflections

Action in the Absence of Leadership

During the first event of the simulation, when no OCHA coordination capacity was present and the participants were asked to coordinate between themselves, there was an extended period of confusion.

Some observers said that this was probably rather true to life, and the SurveyMonkey evaluative responses confirmed this. However, it was also noted that this set-up impeded learning. It was noted that no INGO regards the coordination of all actors as its responsibility, and to take on this work might impact unhelpfully on their main work. As the simulation progressed, Thompson Reuters Foundation took on an important role in coordination through creating a central information hub – and did indeed find its intended work suffered as a result.

Observers noted an apparent unwillingness from participants to step up and take a lead in this difficult situation. For example, the actor who was playing a tourist volunteering her help was identified as a potential leader for the group. As the leadership vacuum continued, simulation facilitators and observers were frequently asked for information, help and guidance: their impression was that participants were finding it difficult to work effectively in the absence of leadership. As Event 2 began, with the government official issuing instructions, participants appeared visibly relieved and allowed themselves to be directed by him.

The arrival of the UNOCHA representative was greeted with considerable relief. Participants' comments suggested a renewed appreciation for the value of UNOCHA's role as a result of the morning's experience.

Strategy

No effective strategy for communication with affected communities was observed to be devised in the early part of the simulation. However, the representative from UNOCHA noted that this probably reflects the reality of disaster response: the strategy emerges in the first few days in response to the situation.

It was noted that participants did not seem to draw on the experience of CDAC Haiti, an initiative which (according to an independent learning review) succeeded in providing services, coordination, strategic leadership, capacity building and advocacy for better communication with affected people. In this regard it was also observed that agencies present in the simulation and involved in the Haiti initiative did not come forward with suggestions about what to do.

Later in the simulation some deeper thinking emerged in the creation of the agencies' communications strategies and the MDOs pulled together to create a joint bid for funding from the Flash Appeal.

Collaboration vs Silo Working

Observers noticed that the majority of participants tended to interact mainly with people in their immediate group. This appeared to be true of the three working groups formed on the morning of Day One, and in the single-agency groups in the afternoon. One Observer remarked that this "silo working" was all the more surprising because most participants were well aware that collaboration and coordination were central to the simulation.

A particularly striking example was the "mapping group", which showed great determination in pressing on with the task they had given themselves, resisting any injects intended to divert them to other tasks. From one point of view this could be seen as an example of effective collaboration: this was a multi-agency grouping working together on a valuable task. However, the relative lack of interaction between the mapping group and others – such as the team which went out to interview disaster-affected people – meant that opportunities for even more useful collaborations were missed.

In the agencies' communications strategies, some evidence of wider collaboration did emerge. The "South Seedac Communications Group" was created, listing all participating agencies as members. Many of the individual agency

plans referred to proposed collaborations: the Red Cross with BBC Media Action; Save The Children with Thompson Reuters Foundation; Plan and the Red Cross; Plan with Save The Children, World Vision and Frontline SMS, etc. Observers were unclear as to whether these collaborations were backed up by detailed conversations.

Integration of Communication with Operations
During the initial coordination meeting, it was observed that participants did not discuss the integration of communications into programming. This could have been the result of participants' pre-occupation with the lack of an active UNOCHA. Substantively, however, it may represent agencies' lack of experience in explicitly integrating communications activities into operations.

For example, many participants were unclear about where responsibility for communicating with crisis-affected communities sat (or would sit) within their organisations, and the Observers perceived a general lack of understanding about how to integrate communications into operations. There was an overall sense that the operational agencies did not seek the expertise of the media development organisations (MDOs) either in terms of understanding their technology know-how or their experience in humanitarian messaging.

On the other hand, the operational agencies noted their concerns that their media development colleagues don't sufficiently understand humanitarian response, especially issues related to accountability. For example, it was observed in the 'mapping group' that those on the 'tech' side did not have a comprehensive understanding of the different components and complexities of humanitarian response programming.

3.1.3   Debrief Session

3.1.3.1 *Debrief Structure*
First came a short plenary session. Then, in their single-agency groups, participants were asked to take turns to speak about what they had done well and what they could have done better/differently in terms of collaboration/coordination, from a personal point of view. Then, as a group, they were asked to answer the same questions from an organisational point of view. The groups were then shuffled to form nine groups, each with a mixture of INGO, UN, Red Cross and media development people. These groups then considered what they had done well, what the issues were, and what the gaps were that needed to be addressed around collaboration and coordination. The output from these discussions was recorded on flipcharts which were displayed for everyone to review and discuss during the lunch.

3.1.3.2 *Plenary Session Outputs*
Leadership in coordination
The lack of inter-agency coordination around communication with affected communities in the absence of UNOCHA was a central theme. Several participants proposed that there was a need for a deployable CDAC-N person to fulfill this role if UNOCHA is not present in a particular situation – perhaps with an emphasis on the interface with affected communities at the needs assessment stage. Questions were also raised about the lack of defined channels for collaboration, especially entry points between media development actors and aid agencies, and the need for a central information point (e.g. Humanitarian Information Centres).

The need to raise awareness of the benefits of communication with affected communities within INGOs was stressed. The lack of organisational buy-in for the concept in terms of dedicated human and financial capital were recognised as possible obstacles to ensuring communication with affected communities becomes mainstreamed into INGO projects.

Who's Who?
It was acknowledged that there was still a general lack of understanding between INGOs and media development organisations – in particular, the mandates of the latter are not widely understood. Also, and as mentioned above, there appeared to be some lack of understanding within agencies about the concept of communication with affected communities, and therefore a lack of any dedicated capacity for this. In turn, this led to a lack of

pro-active outreach to the media development organisations.

3.1.3.3 *Mixed Group Outputs*

Collaboration

Participants felt there was a great spirit of collaboration. The establishment of the Communications Steering Group in the absence of a formal coordination mechanism was felt to have been a success, although it was acknowledged that it was not fully representative.

The lack of a formal coordination function with appropriate links with clusters was felt to have frustrated progress: some participants noted that they felt forced into pursuing collaborative initiatives without fully establishing their individual agency activities.

Collaboration Gaps/Suggestions

- Participants felt that models or case studies of coordination would be useful, to be imitated or adapted for other real-life situations.
- Support and incentives were needed to encourage organisations to prioritise collaboration and coordination.
- In order to secure funding, it is important to quantify the impact of coordination and collaboration. How can this best be done?
- Participants suggested that the CDAC Network and its members might seek to clarify decision-making mechanisms and set up pre-agreements to support the coordination of communications with affected communities. This would be particularly relevant in the absence of UNOCHA.

INGOs and MDOs Working Together

Participants from INGOs appreciated sharing ideas with the MDOs at the simulation. Good practice was noted in some collaboration between INGOs and BBC Media Action in particular, but on the whole there was relatively little cross-fertilisation. Participants noted that there was:

- Little understanding of how aid agencies and MDOs should best work together;
- Lack of proactive outreach to and from the MDOs;
- Lack of knowledge about mandate and remit of MDOs, with a tendency to work in silos;
- Lack of a shared language between the different stakeholder groups.

Some participants would have liked to see greater leadership from the MDOs, especially those people who had been involved in the Haiti response. Others felt that the MDOs were operating 'outside the system'.

In group discussions, INGOs expressed the need for MDOs to be present at cluster meetings and to be approaching INGOs for partnerships. In response, MDOs highlighted their much smaller staff capacity at field level (often there will be one or two staff members present) and the need for the bigger INGOs to use their capacity to collaborate. The cross-cutting nature of communication with affected communities was also emphasised, meaning it affects all of the cluster areas.

INGOs and MDOs; Gaps/Suggestions

There was a clear need for greater mutual understanding between the INGOs and MDOs. INGO participants felt that the MDOs need to better understand humanitarian principles around impartiality, neutrality, etc. Similarly, MDO participants felt aid agencies need to better understand the mandates of the MDOs and how they can support INGO communication.

There was a clear knowledge gap within the INGOs about the expertise available within the MDOs, especially regarding technology and other tools. It was felt that a mapping of the media and technology sectors would be helpful. (*The CDAC Network is currently doing this and the results will be available online in 2013.*)

Participants identified the need for a clear definition of the channels for collaboration, especially with regard to

effective entry points between media development and aid agencies.

Communications Strategies

There were some good efforts to create communications strategies in collaboration – for example, Plan and World Vision – and participants demonstrated a great willingness to share ideas and develop joint proposals. The Red Cross was seen to collaborate well with local partners.

Participants said that attempting to introduce communication with affected communities, and the coordination of communication, is a big ask given that organisational demands are already huge. In addition, there is a lack of clarity within agencies about who is responsible for such communication.

Communications Strategies Gaps/Suggestions

Participants felt that specific bespoke support is needed to support agencies in their communications work, and also in coordination of communications. A need for much improved integration between communications and operations was also identified.

Using Technology

Some participants appreciated the opportunity to use Smartphones for needs assessment work, but there was recognition that the use of technology sometimes risks impeding effective interviewing. It also became clear that effective mapping of data is reliant on effective information management.

Using Technology Gaps/Suggestions

Participants noted that the interface with affected communities during assessment is critical, and wondered if this could this be handled at an inter-agency level.

Flash Appeal

The MDOs' coordination of their Flash Appeal request for funding was regarded as a success. However, this was not known about by the aid agencies.

3.1.4   Key Learning

- UNOCHA's critical role in coordinating agencies' communication with affected communities has perhaps been under-appreciated by INGOs. There may also be an important role for a deployable CDAC Network staff person in disaster situations where UNOCHA is not present, or to supplement its work.

- "Silo working" appears to be the default mode of operation in a disaster situation. Specific action to encourage collaboration is likely to be needed to overcome this tendency.

- The CDAC Network may be well placed to encourage collaboration in communication with affected communities by providing:

    o   Models and case studies (CDAC Haiti's Learning Review did not seem to be widely read)

    o   Support and incentives for collaboration

    o   Defined channels for collaboration and pre-disaster agreements

- There is a lack of mutual understanding between INGOs and MDOs, of each other's roles and strengths. Specific action to address this would be likely to increase collaboration in future disasters. (The CDAC Network has already held a 'collaboration and partnership workshop' and intends to do more in the future. Once members have the tools to help them collaborate better, they need to take responsibility for greater collaboration.)

- Many INGOs are limited by a lack of organisational buy-in – and thus resources – around communication with affected populations. Work to address this may increase the uptake of communication activities.

3.2   Two-Way Communication

3.2.1   Simulation Objectives for Communication Mechanisms

- To gain an understanding of the concept, importance and requirements of two-way communications (with affected populations), as well as an understanding of other organisations' approaches and strengths in two-way communications, building up to effective coordination and collaboration between different stakeholders.

3.2.2   Observer Reflections

Messaging

Observers reported that a great deal of "out of the box" thinking took place, which was very positive. For example, INGOs showed good initiative in terms of coordinating their messaging, especially those working in health and nutrition. This was considered to reflect an understanding of the issues surrounding messaging and the importance of consistency and lack of duplication.

An interagency Communications Steering Group was formed, co-led by WFP and IOM. The objective of this group was to coordinate the communications strategies of all organisations active in South Seedac. Initial agreed key messages included: Weather Forecast/relocation/evacuation needs; Health/Sanitation Messages; Family Reunification; Aid Effort Underway (Gov. + relief agencies). Plans were to utilise the following channels: short wave radio, local FM stations, mobile radio stations; SMS, face to face communication, print media, television and internet for urban areas.

Individual INGO communication plans reflected a strong understanding of different communication platforms and how these could be used to disseminate messages. However, the feedback and/or listening elements of the communications strategies, although present, were not as strong. Unsurprisingly, MDOs displayed greater knowledge and experience in this area, and while coordination and collaboration between them and the INGO and Red Cross groups did not occur immediately, many organisations did seek out MDO expertise towards the end of the day. This is reflected in the partnerships outlined in the agency communication strategies.

Needs Assessments

As part of Event 2, actors played people affected by the South Seedac flood and participants were asked to carry out a series of needs assessment interviews, recording their results using EpiSurveyor on smartphones. Participants were generally successful in doing this. However, it was observed that interviewers tended to stick quite rigidly to the set of questions laid out in the questionnaire. In contrast, at least one participant chose to use a pencil and paper rather than the smartphone, in order to avoid the perceived restrictions of the technology.

Observers noticed that the field interviewers had a tendency to stay together and spoke primarily with large groups of affected people rather than isolated interviewees. While this could suggest that vulnerable individuals or more isolated communities might be overlooked; it could also be a consequence of the design of the exercise.

It was observed that many of the field researchers did not take the time to explain what their agencies did, apparently operating on the assumption that affected communities would be familiar with their agency's work. They also gave very little explanation about how the information gathered would be used, or fed back to the communities. In this respect, the two-way component of communication was missing.

The actors playing affected people noted that, during the exercise, the process had felt very "extractive", as if they were being mined for information rather than taking part in a conversation.

In participants' interactions with interviewees, Observers perceived a lack of cultural sensitivity. In some instances, women interviewers did not wear headscarves; in others, male translators were used to translate for women interviewees. In the latter case, the translator was a friend of one member of the affected community,

which led some Observers to have concerns about the accuracy of the translation provided. An alternative explanation for these apparent failings, however, might simply be that participants did not regard such matters as relevant to the simulation, and/or did not play along with the simulation to the extent the Observers expected.

Feedback versus "Listening"

There was a concerted effort on the part of INGOs to coordinate their messaging and establish channels for feedback from affected communities. However, there was a perceived lack of distinction between "feedback" and "listening". Operational staff were seen to focus on feedback mechanisms (for example, systems for handling complaints) rather than including listening as a part of their communication plan. Again, the implication of this is that the "two-way" element of communications was not central to agencies' thinking.

Issues Arising From Tools

Concerns were raised about the security of the Ushahidi mapping platform, as well as the political implications of open data-sharing of what could be considered sensitive information in certain contexts. In addition, there was an observable lack of familiarity with information and access needs assessments as well as the different tools and mechanisms that can facilitate two-way communication. The conversation about assessments focused primarily on assessments of programme areas, which may point to a general lack of familiarity with information and access needs assessments and how these can be used to support wider response activities.

The information collected during the needs assessment seemed to corroborate this lack of familiarity with information and access needs assessments. Key pieces of information which would have been important in planning communications with communities were not collected. For example, while the majority of field interviewers asked questions about whether or not members of the affected community listened to or owned a radio, they did not seek out information about who controlled the programming within a household or the times during which their key targets would be listening to the radio.

A failure to coordinate with the Ushahidi mapping group meant that the majority of the data collected during this exercise was unsuitable for inclusion on the map, due to a lack of specific details of where each interview had been conducted.

3.2.3 Debrief

3.2.3.1 Debrief Structure

Participants were invited to engage in a series of two-minute two-way conversations on the topic "How well did you manage to establish two-way communications?" This enabled them to have a real-time experience of structured two-way communications. However, it did not generate written outputs for inclusion in this report.

3.2.3.2 Plenary Debrief

Technology: Enabler Or Barrier?

In reviewing the Observer reflections above, participants highlighted the way in which technology could potentially act as either an enabler or a barrier to effective two-way communication with affected communities.

Ideally, technology-enabled communications solutions would enable an excellent flow of information leading to effective programme delivery. Communications would be fully integrated with programmes, with INGO staff on the ground asking the right questions, gathering the right kind of information to feed into shared systems (such as mapping) and being kept comprehensively up to speed with information to share with affected communities as they conducted their other work.

The experience of the simulation suggested that the reality could be somewhat different to this. Both INGO staff and affected communities might be wary of technology that they do not fully understand, and might have very real concerns about how information they supplied might be used. Effective listening might also be disrupted by technology – for example, by the need to complete a rigid form on a PDA.

Key questions therefore remained around how appropriate a particular technology might be for a particular context; what its potential benefits might be and how to measure them; and what the opportunity costs might be.

3.2.5 Key Learning

- Technology can potentially act as either an enabler or a barrier to effective two-way communication with affected communities, and needs to be used in ways appropriate to a particular context.
- Some technologies present significant challenges to established INGO conventions. For example, data-sharing on a mapping platform raises issues about privacy.
- There seemed to be a general lack of familiarity with information and access needs assessment among INGOs, and no coordinated approach to ensure that information is systematically collected by all stakeholders.
- When conducting needs assessments, care should be taken to provide information (for example, about the organisation collecting the data and what it is to be used for) as well as to gather it from affected individuals.
- Agencies should be aware of the distinction between "listening" and "feedback" in planning the return path of two-way communications.
- Increased collaboration between INGOs and MDOs would be likely to enhance two-way communications because of the latter's expertise in this area.

3.3   Communication Mechanisms

3.3.1   Simulation Objectives for Communication Mechanisms

- Practical exposure to a range of mechanisms (low and high-tech) which *enable* two-way communications in different contexts that organisations may be able to use to augment their current ways of working.
- Exploration of the need for multi-channel approaches to two-way communications, and the issues of appropriateness of use in a given context.

3.3.2   Platforms Introduced/Deployed During The Simulation:

Crisis Mapping (Ushahidi Platform)
The Ushahidi mapping platform was introduced by a member of the Stand-By Task Force who was role-playing someone who was on holiday in South Seedac. She offered to put together an Ushahidi map of South Seedac, mapping events crowdsourced through reports collected on social media, as well as inputs from agencies (through needs assessments). She requested that organisations provide her with specific categories to be mapped. For example: food distribution sites, telecoms towers, radio stations which were working or not, etc.

The final version of the Ushahidi Map for South Seedac showed information based primarily on the sitreps which were used to compile a number of fictitious "reports" prior to the start of the simulation. For example, reports of infrastructure damage such as damaged bridges, damaged roads, and roads impassible.

Input from agencies during the simulation was limited although not altogether absent. As noted earlier, it was observed that there was very little coordination between the mapping group and the wider response effort. Information collected by INGOs during the needs assessment did not provide sufficient detail to be included – specifically location data – however agencies, specifically Red Cross agencies and those providing food or medical relief, reported their activities back to the mapping group which was then able to include these (for example, food distribution points, medical relief facilities, etc) on the map. The final version of the map is available for viewing here: https://southseedacfloodsim.crowdmap.com/

SMS options (Frontline SMS)

FrontlineSMS allows the same text message to be sent to large groups of people from a computer linked to a mobile phone line. It also allows incoming messages to be monitored and the numbers of all those who have sent texts to be logged and captured for future use. FrontlineSMS can be used for both closed user groups and open communication systems that are available to the wider public. FrontlineSMS was introduced into the simulation during the plenary by an actor (the Radio Projects Manager from FrontlineSMS) who was role-playing as an INGO worker who was experienced in using FrontlineSMS.

Overall awareness about the platform among simulation participants was mixed; some were active users whilst others were introduced to it for the first time. This was also reflected in the level of understanding of its capabilities. The MDOs (Internews, BBC Media Action), alongside some INGOs (Save the Children, Action Aid) have successfully deployed FrontlineSMS in the field (in reality); other participants had no prior knowledge of the platform's capabilities. It was observed that there was some misunderstanding around what exactly can be achieved using FrontlineSMS and how, especially surrounding issues such as bulk messaging, securing numbers, feedback loops, etc.

Smartphone-based assessment survey tools (EpiSurveyor)

EpiSurveyor is a mobile phone- and web-based data collection system which is freely available online. Users can create an account, design forms, download them to phones, and begin collecting data. Participants were introduced to EpiSurveyor during the needs assessment activity, during which they were asked to conduct a needs assessment with community members (actors).

This tool was picked up quickly by participants, most of whom had never used it before. However, its use created problems "in the field" during the needs assessment exercise. Participants struggled to maintain conversation with members of the affected community whilst trying to get the information required by the survey in conjunction with using PDAs. The inability to move around within the questionnaire meant that most surveyors simply asked the questions as they appeared, which led to a feeling of "information extraction" as mentioned above. It was observed that basic skills in social research and survey design were lacking.

Radio Broadcasts

Participants were introduced to the possibility of radio broadcast messaging in the first UNOCHA meeting on Day One, through a representative from First Response Radio, which uses a radio-in-a-suitcase that can be set up ready to broadcast within 72 hours (broadcast permit permitting). While First Response Radio was not successfully deployed during the simulation, radio broadcasting featured prominently in agencies' communications strategies. In addition, BBC Media Action made it clear that they could assist agencies with communication via radio.

infoasaid Message Library

The infoasaid Message Library is an online searchable database of messages that acts as a reference for those wanting to disseminate critical information to affected populations in an emergency. It has been developed in collaboration with a number of different clusters/sectors in humanitarian response including Health, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Nutrition, Food Security, Protection (Child Protection, Gender-based Violence, Mine Risk Education), Education and Camp Coordination Camp Management. The message library can be used both as a disaster preparedness tool and following the outbreak of an emergency.

The infoasaid library, although not used during the simulation itself (as the simulation did not progress to this point), was mentioned in a number of communication strategies pertaining to health and nutrition messaging.

infoasaid Media Landscape Guides

The infoasaid Media Landscape Guides provide comprehensive and detailed information on the media and telecommunications landscape in the country. The guides can serve as a useful preparedness tool. In the immediate aftermath of an emergency, an information needs and access assessment can be undertaken in order

to verify whether the channels of communication outlined in the guide are still functioning. Guides have been developed for 22 countries at risk of both natural disasters and conflict or both, all of which are available on the infoasaid and CDAC Network website. An infoasaid Media Landscape Guide was developed especially for use in the simulation for the fictitious country of South Seedac, and was introduced to participants by way of an email sent to all groups from OCHA.

Unfortunately some participants experienced problems retrieving their email, and it is not clear how many participants were actually aware of this tool during the simulation.

Emergency Information Service (EIS) website

EIS is a free news and information service for communities affected by disasters, media and aid organisations. It is operated by AlertNet, a humanitarian news service run by the Thomson Reuters Foundation. The website was not deliberately introduced as part of the simulation design but was introduced by the Thompson Reuters Foundation participants in the simulation. The platform served as an information clearing house for relief responders, providing coordination and information management in the early stages of the disaster; as well as "wholesaling" critical information in local languages to media and other players. The platform was widely used, and almost all agencies mentioned using it to ensure coordinated messaging.

3.3.3   Observer Reflections

Use of Technology Platforms

From the outset, it was clear that there was a spectrum of knowledge and ability among participants with regard to engaging with technology platforms: some had problems using web email accounts, while others were much more at ease with more complex tools. Those noted as being more at ease were from the MDOs and Red Cross agencies, although arguably many of the agency staff present at the simulation would not necessarily be expected to have this kind of knowledge and skills.

As one of the objectives was to provide exposure to different mechanisms that enable two-way communication, it was perhaps not surprising that there was a low level of knowledge around communication technologies, tools and platforms. What was perhaps more surprising was the observed lack of knowledge about the expertise and capacity in MDOs, given the role that these organisations have played in humanitarian response for some time.

INGO participants in particular were keen to learn new skills and wanted to engage with the different technologies present; the focus of their learning was on acquiring new skills in order to deliver agency-specific projects. There was less consideration given to how to use different platforms to facilitate collaborative action. When the INGOs actively sought out partnerships with MDOs, these partnerships were to push out programme-specific messaging. The benefit of collaborative tools, such as the mapping and the infoasaid message library, was largely – if not completely – overlooked.

It was also observed that participants seemed to be more focused on the content of their outgoing messages than the channels through which they would communicate them; on the 'what' rather than the 'how'. Because of this there was an observed reluctance on behalf of the operational agencies to engage with local actors, whether community volunteers or local telecoms providers. Another point noted was that issues related to accountability and feedback were rarely mentioned.

There was an observable fear around interacting with 'the media'. Participants noted that their field staff are often wary of interacting with MDOs, and the responsibility for doing so is often the duty of a dedicated media liaison position. This demonstrates a gap in the understanding of the role and capacity of media development organisations, in contrast to 'the media',in humanitarian response.

3.3.4 Participant Debrief

3.3.4.1 *Debrief Structure*

Agency groups – UN, INGO, Red Cross, MDO – were asked to reflect on and discuss the following:

- Range of communications mechanisms available;
- Opportunities and restrictions / downfalls;
- The future – the changing nature of humanitarian response.

3.3.4.2 *Debrief Outputs*

Which One?

"How do you know which potential communication mechanism to investigate?" With the proliferation of new technologies and platforms available, the question of which ones are worth investing agency time and capacity into was highlighted as a significant challenge to incorporating new technologies into response. Participants noted that, within agencies, the focus will often be on technologies that are currently being used in response and are therefore being talked about – which puts them behind the innovation learning curve. Moreover, they are in a far worse position because they may not even know enough to ask the "right" questions about new technologies. INGOs are likely to only start using "new" technologies once everyone else is doing so.

The Opportunity Cost of New Technology

While a number of new technology platforms being utilised in humanitarian response, such as EpiSurveyor, Frontline SMS, and Ushahidi, are available for free, participants noted that incorporating them into response at the agency level is not entirely without cost. Responders need to be trained in the use of different technologies and platforms, and it is necessary to reinforce this training on a regular basis. This time element should not be overlooked when calculating the cost of deploying a new technology.

Technology: Barrier or Enabler?

Having used EpiSurveyor during the needs assessment activity, many groups spoke about the pros and cons of using digital tablets and PDAs as an alternative to the traditional low-tech alternative of pen and paper to collect data during needs assessments in the field.

Many agencies are already employing high-tech platforms for needs assessments in the field. One agency mentioned using iPod-Touch devices for conducting needs assessments, the benefits of which include access to a GPS mapping tool; the ability to capture sound; immediate analysis of data; and the ability to take photographs.

Despite these advantages, many participants expressed the view that using tools such as EpiSurveyor or other such platforms to collect data can be a barrier to interacting with members of the affected community. There is a need to be able to make people feel comfortable and at ease. In order to do so it might be necessary to move away from the questions prescribed in a needs assessment, but EpiSurveyor does not allow the user to skip a question. This can lead to gaps in information, or misinformation, if incomplete answers are provided in one section only in order to move on to the next. Also, different emergencies will generally require that a questionnaire be adapted to the new crisis context. If it is not paper-based, this requires internal capacity to make changes to the digital format. The issue of appropriateness was also raised. Some participants felt that using such devices could be perceived as "flashy" by affected communities.

While a number of practical challenges to using digital data-collection platforms were identified, it was highlighted that it is not necessary to input information directly into a PDA and that information can be collected in the traditional paper and pen method, and inputted at a later date. Also, while it may not always be appropriate to use high-tech kit in the field, it should be recognised that there is great potential in using it as an aid to inter-agency coordination.

Context is Critical

A number of considerations were identified around the issue of utilising new technologies in response. An overarching theme was that context is critical: what works in one environment will not be acceptable in another. Red Cross colleagues noted that information gathering in a conflict environment is very different to that of humanitarian disasters. Publicising agency operations on a platform like Ushahidi may in fact create a security risk and could also jeopardise relations with important stakeholders, such as the government. The trustworthiness of crowdsourced information was also highlighted as an issue. There was confusion around how such information is gathered and, most importantly, verified.

Managing Expectations

Within the media development group, it was noted that when disaster-affected communities can communicate "in" to the aid agencies, particularly through formal channels, they expect something to be done about their concerns. In reality, it will be impossible to respond directly to every request for help: expectations must therefore be managed.

A related risk was that aid agencies will tend to focus their work where the noise is, where the community is known to be in need and is actively seeking help. In contrast, the people most in need may be effectively silenced by their lack of functioning technology, with no means of attracting attention to their concerns.

3.3.4 Key Learning

- The fact that INGOs regard MDOs warily as "the media" may be obstructing greater collaboration and mutual learning between them. Action to promote mutual understanding and relationship building may help to overcome this.
- The proliferation of potentially useful, often free, communication technologies may not be as helpful to agencies as first appears. Exploring potential options and training staff have a significant cost – and in the reality of a specific disaster context these tools may prove to be unsuitable.
- As mentioned above, technology can be a barrier to and/or an enabler of communication with affected communities.
- In considering the use of technologies for two-way communication, agencies should consider the danger of raising unrealistic expectations with affected populations – and of failing to notice the needs of "silent" populations.

Section 4: Priorities for Action

In the last session of Day Two, participants were asked to put forward their proposals for action to be taken as a result of the simulation. Several groups were formed, each discussing a particular area of concern and noting their proposals on a flip chart sheet. Finally, all participants were asked to vote on which proposals seemed to them to have the highest priority.

The participants were not asked to make proposals as to how these actions should be moved forward. As a result, the ideas are at outline level only.

Key priorities included:
- In planning their emergency responses, agencies should consider the effective integration of community communications with operations.
- Agencies should measure and manage both communications with affected communities and inter-agency collaboration as part of managing staff performance.
- Agency communications strategies should consider how best to listen to, as well as how best to talk to, disaster-affected communities, noting that "listening" and "receiving feedback" are distinct.

- Agencies should increase their familiarity with newer communications technologies, so that they understand how they might be used in emergency response and the issues which can arise from their use.
- At the same time, agencies should recognise that communications with affected communities is not all about technology – basic, low-tech systems can often be good enough.
- Agencies should recognise the potential value of working with MDOs in an emergency scenario and should establish clear guidelines for collaboration in the field, where possible removing any wariness that this constitutes "talking to the media".
- MDOs should recognise the continuing need to educate agencies about their role and capacity, and should take a pro-active stance on this.
- Both agencies and MDOs should seek out opportunities for small-scale, low-risk experiments in communications with affected communities and inter-agency collaboration.
- CDAC Network should consider having a deployable person to coordinate communications with affected communities in an emergency situation.
- CDAC Network should capture case studies – not just success stories – and share them widely with agencies.

4.1   Additional Recommendations from the Safer Edge Team

Collaboration and Coordination
There is a distinct different between collaboration and coordination, and it may be that member organisations and the area of communications with disaster-affected communities would benefit from concentrating on greater collaboration (particularly at the bilateral level), rather than trying to find an answer to the ever-elusive question of effective coordination.

In addition to either ensuring UNOCHA presence for coordination, or providing a deployable CDAC-N staff member to take on the coordination role, other mechanisms of resourcing coordination should be considered (e.g. member agencies provide the staffing resources to lead a coordination mechanism).

Communications Mechanisms
Given the lack of resources facing INGOs, and the lack of organisational buy-in for communications with affected populations, joint research through centralised funding (lead/enabled by the Network) may help quicker and more widespread adoption of new enabling technologies. This could simply evaluate existing technologies in relation to the needs of member organisations, followed by pilot testing in different contexts; or it could identify gaps and commission the development of more suitable tech (eg, a tailored online survey tool).

The CDAC Network should take a lead in establishing capacity building workshops around communications mechanisms that can be delivered at a local level to multi-agency groups, preferably in such a way as to generate a multiplier effect (eg, through ToT style trainings). Not only would this increase the uptake of different mechanisms, but would allow greater understanding between organisations, therefore opening up more opportunities for collaboration.