PROJECT ABSTRACT

This report is the product of research conducted by the Disaster Resource Network on the state of emergency information and communications technology (EICT) in international disaster response, focusing on five regions of interest. The Project was sponsored by Avaya and was conducted in two phases.

Phase 1: Preliminary desktop research was undertaken to identify key stakeholders, existing frameworks and the role of the private sector in the field of EICT. The research focused on five regions (18 countries) of interest (Table 1). Preliminary research was followed by telephone with several leaders in the field of EICT to confirm Phase 1 research findings.

Phase 2: To gain a better understanding of the issues that currently impact the effectiveness of EICT in disaster response, an online survey was developed and distributed to a range of organizational representatives with technical, operational or executive responsibilities for EICT. Survey findings formed the basis for telephone interviews conducted with 10 leaders in the field of EICT to capture more nuanced information on EICT infrastructure, with special attention to the value and effectiveness of public-private partnerships, i.e., what do the interviewees regard as obstacles, potential solutions, priorities and next steps for private sector engagement.

The study produced the following findings:

EICT Regional Readiness: The European Union, the Asia Pacific region (including Australia) and the USA emerged as having the most evolved disaster management and EICT infrastructure. With respect to each, there are mechanisms in place for the private sector's engagement in EICT development on both a regional and international scale. Findings suggest that Latin and Central America are achieving greater states of readiness, while Africa remains poorly equipped to manage large scale emergencies without significant international assistance. This being said, disparities exist in national states of readiness within the countries of interest included in Phase 1 research.

Value and Effectiveness of EICT: 100% of respondents ranked EICT as either important or extremely important to the overall functioning of disaster response operations. Likewise, 100% of respondents cited obstacles to achieving greater effectiveness. These include:

- the lack of interoperable of systems;
- inadequate or outdated equipment;
- poorly trained personnel and staff retention;
- the absence of effective command and control procedures;
- variances in national EICT capacity; and,
- poor collaboration and coordination within and across response organizations.

Ratings on the question of access to appropriate technologies varied based on the size and core mission of the respondents' organizational affiliations.

Six Key Factors: Taken together, the survey and interviews highlighted six key factors that currently impact the effectiveness of EICT disaster response:

1. equipment and technology requirements,

2. inter- and intra-agency coordination,

3. personnel,

4. standards and governance,

5. interoperability, and

6. advanced preparedness.

Underpinning many of these, survey respondents and interviewees noted concerns about funding and resource development.

Private Sector Participation: Regarding the private sector's contribution to emergency communications operations, survey respondents noted that

- offers of assistance from the private sector are relatively common,

- the private sector's involvement is intermittent and rarely sustained beyond the event,

- assistance and offers of partnership from the private sector are most effective when planned in advance, and

- business contributions are too often supply-driven rather than demand driven.

In general, survey respondents and interviewees welcomed greater private sector participation. They suggested a range of options and opportunities for industry engagement and conditions that if present, would not only increase the success of cross-sector collaborations but add significant value to the field of EICT and beyond. Their suggestions included,

- a more agile, transparent and accountable system of international response -- across organizations and throughout all phases of disasters,

- improved security, for both information and personnel,

- more targeted responses and greater cost efficiencies.

The survey respondents shared their views that private sector participation would provide benefits to both the public and private sector by,

- preserving lives and livelihoods,

- protecting the local economies and markets of vulnerable countries, thereby raising the standard of living and,

- increasing the continuity of relief, recovery and reconstruction operations.

The Disaster Resource Network invites reader response to this report and more generally, the current state of emergency information and communications technology. For information about the Disaster Resource Network or how to get involved with DRN, please contact:

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