

Typhoon Koppu Learning Review 2015 Community of Practice (CoP) on Community Engagement

Community Engagement at the heart of emergency preparedness and response



Overview

On 18 October at 1 am local time, Koppu (locally known as Lando) made landfall as a category 3 typhoon over the town of Casiguran in Aurora province in Central Luzon.

Powerful winds caused extensive damage and disruption across Northern Luzon with nine provinces affected by the widespread power outages. Torrential rains were evident across affected regions in Northern Luzon, with coastal areas in the western part experiencing the highest accumulations¹.

A state of calamity was declared in the provinces of Aurora, Cagayan, Isabela, Nueva Ecija, Nueva Vizcaya, Pangasinan, Quirino, three cities namely Dagupan, Ilagan and Tuguegarao, and nine towns specifically Arayat, Baler, Cabatuan, Calumpit, Camiling, General Nakar, Infanta, Ramos and Sugpon due to widespread flooding. Overall, 54 people were killed, 82 others were injured, and 4 more were reported missing across affected areas in Northern Luzon. Total damage reached at least 11 billion pesos (US\$235.8 million) with the agriculture sector² incurring majority of the damages, and approximately 1.24 million people were directly affected by the storm and half a million people have been forced from their homes as torrential rains submerged villages along the coast³.

Typhoon Koppu tested the inclusive but highly diverse minimum capacities and resources of the Community of Practice (CoP) on Community Engagement. The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) CoP complemented the in-country capacities of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) by providing support on information exchange, improving available feedback mechanism and enhancing the level of participation of the community and accountability to them.

One week after the typhoon, the learning review was conducted to reflect on the minimum preparedness and response actions of the CoP on Community Engagement. The main objective was to capture and document identified good initiatives or best practices as well as identified challenges where CoP members, partners and other networks can integrate into humanitarian programming and further enhance its disaster preparedness and response protocol. Specifically, the learning review facilitated and documented strategic and field level experiences of the CoP members or partners in preparing and responding to typhoon Koppu.

Methodology

A half-day workshop session was designed to convene CoP members and agencies that were directly involved in typhoon Koppu's overall preparedness and response.

The CoP members' learning review was divided into two big breakout sessions and the following key points for preparedness and response were discussed:

- **What went well?** (facilitating factors, good initiatives, best practices, innovations, unique experiences)
- **What didn't work?** (challenges, gaps, issues, hindering factors)
- **What steps or actions must be considered to improve the system in responding to future emergencies or disasters?** (capacities, resources, partnerships, relationships and operational protocols)

¹ Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA)

² Department of Agriculture (DA)

³ National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC)

The CoP has four sub-groups as per revised Terms of Reference (ToR) and these are the following:

- 1.) Online Platform and SMS
- 2.) Assessment, Accountability, Monitoring and Evaluation
- 3.) Training, Innovation and Partnership
- 4.) Multimedia

For the learning review sessions, the CoP was divided into two big groups:

- Group 1 and 4
- Group 2 and 3

The facilitators were the Core Group members such as OCHA, IOM, World Vision and United Methodist Communications (UMCom).⁴

Preparedness

With regard to preparedness, the discussions were focused on the prepositioning of in-country capacities and resources, coordination with government partners and/or CoP members both at the national and field level, use of information and communication technologies (especially on life-saving information sent to communities 72 hours before landfall and some feedback received from the affected population).

What went well?

The big CoP meeting conducted on 15 October 2015, three days before the landfall, was considered by most members helpful in terms of pre-positioning various communications technology⁵ and mapping once again of the minimum resources and capacities of each member. The mapping includes the review and discussion on members' roles and functions and the CoP's possible interoperability at the height of the response especially working with the national government agencies and local government units (LGUs).⁶

The presentation on the Philippine El Nino's snapshot was considered useful by most CoP members in anticipation of a more erratic behavior of typhoons that may hit the country from last quarter of 2015 up to the first three quarters of 2016.⁷

Setting up the skype group two days before the landfall facilitated and hastened up the information sharing and various level of collaboration was organized and established including the schedule of deployment and identification of priority areas.

Another factor that went well, especially to members⁸ that were deployed two days after the landfall, was having a prepared assessment and community feedback tools like the Rapid

⁴ All members of the global Communicating with the Disaster Affected Communities Network or CDAC-N

⁵ CoP, for details, please view this link: <http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/i/20150812171852-5gcdo>

⁶ CoP, for details, please view this link: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/ocha-phl_copcemapping_01sept2015.pdf

⁷ OCHA, for details, please view this link:

https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/ocha_phl_el_nino_snapshot_06oct2015.pdf

⁸ CARE, Save the Children, IFRC, PRC, World Vision, CODE-NGO, FRR-FEBC, NASSA/Caritas, SkyEye, IOM and ACF

Information Communication Accountability Assessment (RICAA), Community Feedback Form and standby teams for assessment and possible set up of the field level working group.⁹

Days before the landfall, Weather Philippines and Panahon TV consistently provided regular weather updates and early warning advisories to CoP members, LGUs and at-risk communities with access to internet and mobile phones. Open Garden has activated the use of FireChat to connect people and mobile devices even when no internet is available. The United Methodist Communications (UMCom) offered the use of ham radio units (ICC-V88 VHF transceiver) to some members on the field.

IOM also prepared to launch the Community Response Map (CRM) as part of pre-positioning two-way communication feedback platform for humanitarian responders and the affected communities. UNFPA had pre-positioned 10, 000 solar radios for affected women readily available in case the government requests for them. Lastly, the First Response Radio-Far East Broadcasting Company (FRR-FEBC) also activated its radio team as part of deploying the emergency radio in a suitcase.¹⁰

In terms of collecting and crowdsourcing information, existing platform and partnerships facilitated as well in crafting key messages and life-saving information (focusing on early warning and safe evacuation procedure).¹¹ Also prior to the landfall, some members of the CoP have been receiving information that affected communities in Aurora, Nueva Ecija and Pangasinan have access to preparedness information coming from the media, LGU and other organizations that have presence in the area through SMS, social media (Facebook and Twitter) and door to door announcement.¹²

Some CoP members were stationed at the NDRRMC and it was useful in terms of information sharing and mapping of resources available. Rappler for instance has also set up 24-hour satellite operations center at the OCD command center.

What didn't work?

Despite the availability of various communication channels, most CoP members observed that it was not widely accessible to the at-risk communities. Only few have access to internet and while radio and TV were the preferred communication channels, power interruption days before the landfall made it difficult to most affected populations to access any updates about the typhoon including other public service announcements from the government.

While emergency radio facility was pre-positioned, only 3 out of 10 regional stations were trained to use emergency radios as well as skilled in the radio humanitarian programming and field level coordination. This was a big challenge in maximizing the deployment of the emergency radio facilities in other affected areas.¹³

⁹ Since Zamboanga siege (September 2013), Bohol earthquake (October 2013) and typhoon Haiyan (2013), OCHA has taken the lead in establishing the coordinated CwC/AAP field working group (now simply called as Community Engagement).

¹⁰ FRR-FEBC also set up the emergency radio facility during Haiyan (2013) and Hagupit (2014) response.

¹¹ World Vision and Rappler

¹² Save the Children, World Vision, CODE-NGO, SMART, PRC, NASSA/Caritas

¹³ FRR-FEBC

UMCom received a lot of requests for ham radios from CoP members and LGUs. But limited information where to strategically and operationally deploy it was a big challenge considering the extent of areas affected by Koppu.

NASSA/Caritas field support units reported that confusion on storm signals and considerable delays in the immediate activation of Barangay Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (BDRRMC) and proper utilization of local DRRMC funds affected various decision making at the ground level days before the landfall.

Response

With regard to response, the focus was on the provision of minimum response actions on communication, assessment, community consultation, other forms of partnerships or coordination in the field, response or initiatives to date (ongoing activities) and key findings and issues on information, communication, accountability and common service partnerships.

What went well?

The HCT's CoP complemented the in-country capacities of the NDRRMC and LGUs by providing communications support and conducting series of community consultations and assessments.

Upon the request of the NDRRMC, Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) drone were deployed as part of aerial assessments in Pampanga, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija and Aurora two days after the landfall.¹⁴ Results were shared to the regional DRRMCs and the LGUs. It was noted that both regional and provincial offices were supportive on the conduct of drone assessment and it was proactive in terms of coordinating humanitarian response with INGOs in the field.

Rappler's Agos mobilized its digital humanitarian volunteers and partner networks to help the OCD and humanitarian responders to gather and verify crowdsourced information. It directly shared to NDRRMC and the CoP consolidated information and reports on the search, rescue and relief aid needed by the affected communities via social media.¹⁵

Three days after, FRR-FEBC set up the emergency radio facility (98.7 FM) in Casiguran, Aurora supporting the LGU, humanitarian agencies, affected local media and communities in the provision of two-way communication radio programming. It also distributed hundreds of solar radios to complement the humanitarian radio service. FRR also received 7, 000 SMS reports and it was verified and properly addressed in coordination with the LGU. To complement this to other affected areas, NASSA/Caritas was able to maximize its vast diocese networks including the use Radyo Veritas.

Ad-hoc partnership between weather TV network and humanitarian radio station was forged and it was appreciated by the affected communities in Casiguran in terms of its provision of daily weather updates and other advisories.¹⁶

¹⁴ Skyeye and IOM, please view this link and go to videos section: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/philippines/accountability-affected-populationscommunications-communities-community>

¹⁵ Rappler, for details please view this link: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/by8de8ezaccay2h/%23LandoPH%20Rescue-Relief%20Requests%20from%20Social%20Media%20-%20Sheet.pdf?dl=0>

¹⁶ Panahon TV and FRR-FEBC

SMART telecom set up 44 free calls, SMS and charging stations services in the affected areas of Aurora, Cagayan, Isabela and Nueva Ecija. It also restored telecom towers that were destroyed days after the typhoon.

Seven CoP members conducted series of RICAA in Pangasinan, Nueva Ecija, CAR and Aurora.¹⁷ Results were shared to the NDRRMC, HCT and other humanitarian working groups. The assessment teams worked consistently in coordination with other local humanitarian organizations and the LGUs.

Government agency like DA conducted its own damage assessment and it was useful in terms of crafting key messages and other information on the overall damage to agriculture and other food livelihoods to the affected communities.¹⁸

What didn't work?

Aside from wide and geographically scattered areas affected by typhoon (from wind destruction, heavy rains, landslides and flooding), no field level working groups were established in the most strategic areas like in Casiguran in Aurora and Cabanatuan in Nueva Ecija. Though it was not considered a priority compared to Haiyan and Hagupit¹⁹, much of the response actions or initiatives relied on the minimum common service partnerships of the CoP members to deploy and operate on various areas. The results varied but most of it was not able to maximize the coordinated mechanism of all agencies at the field level.

While there are 40 members of the CoP, the numbers of agencies that responded and went directly to the field were limited, at least seven, including those that conducted the RICAA and initial community feedback sessions. The limitations can be attributed to member UN agencies that were standby awaiting the government's official request for aid and support. CoP members coming from INGOs, private sector, media development, CSOs and faith-based groups were at the forefront of responding and working with the affected LGUs and communities days before and after the typhoon.

Despite communication technologies available, people expressed face to face conversation on preparedness and response messages and feedback mechanism. The numbers of CoP members on the ground were limited and most of these agencies also relied on the minimal support provided by local networks available including LGUs, which were all affected as well.

In the same way, while network update was regularly sent to the National Telecommunications (NTC) and the NDRRMC, SMART experienced some challenges in giving timely updates to its subscribers in the affected areas and to the humanitarian networks. The latter was crucial especially to improving the humanitarian response programming and supporting identification of the evolving needs of the affected communities.

The disconnect in terms of coordination from national to field level areas was not a big challenge. However considering various mandates of each agency member, not all were able to integrate RICAA in the overall assessment or it took two more days since deployment to ask

¹⁷ Care, ACF, Save the Children, World Vision, CODE-NGO, IFRC/PRC and NASSA/Caritas

¹⁸ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

¹⁹ OCHA, for more details please view this link:

[https://www.dropbox.com/s/97vsc68s3ol493w/CoP%20on%20Community%20Engagement Summary%20of%20Response%20and%20Preparedness Typhoon%20Hagupit.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/97vsc68s3ol493w/CoP%20on%20Community%20Engagement%20Summary%20of%20Response%20and%20Preparedness%20Typhoon%20Hagupit.pdf?dl=0)

questions related to information needs, preferred communication channels and available feedback system in various evacuation centers.

Logistic was a considered a major challenge to most members that were deployed. Issue on accessibility and challenges due to floods, landslides and road blocks caused major delays in the information exchange and data transfer of the UAV results, RICAA initial documents and other situation reports available.

Lack of coordination between national government agencies and the regional offices was observed including the conflicting interpretation of data and delays in the submission of reports. Some LGUs were not receptive of INGOs and CSOs conducting other assessments or even joining them in the conduct of assessments.

Despite extensive use of social media crowdsourcing, few feedbacks or even any action points were considered for inclusion in the immediate reports provided to government and humanitarian community²⁰. In the same way, while RICAA results were shared to NDRRMC and HCT, there were few actions addressing recurring issues were observed.

Recommendations

Just like the minimum preparedness and response actions during Hagupit in 2014, typhoon Koppu opened a lot of opportunities for CoP to improve its strategic and operational platforms. The focus would be on its core functions and deliverables (as highlighted in its ToR) such as on effective coordination (between national and field level), technical support (in-country innovations and partnerships), and advocacy (mainstreaming and institutionalization of good initiatives)

Coordination

- Categorize triggers for CoP to convene and deploy at least 72 hours before the landfall including possible meeting with concerned government agencies to discuss joint undertakings and sharing of information and other resources.
- Identify CoP members that are still on the ground or planning to have long term presence for that could be the basis to establish a field level working group to monitor and evaluate communications and accountability to the affected populations.²¹
- Consider extending the CoP memberships to government agencies like OCD, Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG). The engagement could be issue specific –based or as needed and required.
- Formalize strategic and operational protocol (as per ToR and previous experiences) to improve pre-positioning of communications technology, coordinated conduct of assessments and community consultations, and establishing of feedback mechanisms.

²⁰ Rappler

²¹ Just like the case of Zamboanga field level working group and Haiyan merged CwC/AAP CoP

Technical support

- Improve the accessibility of various communications technologies and platforms and ensure it has wider reach to the affected communities. Consistently monitor preferred communications channels and find ways to contextualize messages and information for better access.
- Conduct comprehensive Community Engagement 101 training²² to all CoP members as part of overall preparedness initiative.
- Use Community Resource Map (CRM) as an online platform to record and monitor feedback from the affected communities and humanitarian responders in preparedness and response.²³
- Train CoP members to use of Agos map²⁴ and maximize its platforms for effective crowdsourcing of information from various stakeholders.
- Tap new technologies such as the use of drone for assessment and FireChat to be more accessible to affected communities.²⁵
- Enhance the pool of “accountability responders” (those skilled and experts in the conduct of community consultations and establishing of various feedback mechanisms and referral pathways) to maximize humanitarian accountability in the overall response.²⁶
- Set up a dedicated CoP ham radio and humanitarian radio programming frequency²⁷. UMCom will establish three repeaters in Baguio, Tagaytay, Davao and Kidapawan.
- Improve the contents and accessibility of the CoP on Community Engagement website²⁸.

Advocacy

- Create network for shared learning with the affected communities and ensure that it will be properly documented.
- Ensure messages that the CoP communicates are supporting and augmenting government’s available resources and capacities.
- Continue to work in the context of balance approach such as in the case where UN agencies are working directly with the government while INGOs and CSOs are providing the necessary direct lifesaving interventions.²⁹

²² Combined Communications, Accountability, Community Participation and Common Service Partnerships)

²³ IOM

²⁴ Rappler

²⁵ Skyeye and Open Garden

²⁶ World Vision and OCHA

²⁷ UMCom and FRR-FEBC

²⁸ Philippine Humanitarian Response Info website

²⁹ With reference from Humanitarian Principles and Core Humanitarian Standards on Quality and Accountability

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