



Each GECS MOVE set has an integrated communications system, comprised of the following: Hub, Dispatch, and an off-road motorcycle with communication equipment to support the crew.



GECS-MOVE

Global Innovation in Telecoms Disaster Response

The Philippines is prone to natural calamities as it is situated in the west of the Pacific Ring of Fire. It remains on top of the list of countries suffering most from extreme weather events and sustaining weather-related losses — in 2018 and over a 20-year period from 1998 to 2018, according to the Global Climate Risk Index 2020.

When major disasters like typhoons or earthquakes strike, communications systems immediately go down. This is a blindfold for emergency responders who need to know where and how to direct urgent assistance.

Through the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) Government Emergency Communications System - *Mobile Operations Vehicle for Emergencies or GECS-MOVE project*, six high-tech, mobile, emergency telecommunications units have been designed and prepositioned in major disaster-prone areas of the Philippines, ready to be rapidly deployed closer to the disaster zone at first notice.

These uniquely designed unit, the first to be created by WFP globally— can quickly communicate critical information to frontline rescuers such as disaster coordinators and health/welfare responders. In December 2018, WFP signed a ground-breaking five-year partnership agreement with the Philippine

Government through DICT to launch the GECS-MOVE project.

Completed in May 2021, the project's first phase was funded primarily by the Philippine Government (USD \$4 million; Php 200M) with additional financial support from USAID and WFP.

In line with DICT's mandate to assist in information dissemination through ICT to reduce the impact of disaster-related shocks, this unique partnership has drawn on the expertise of WFP's global Emergency Telecommunications team.

As the world's largest humanitarian organization and the global lead of the United Nations Emergency Telecommunications Cluster, WFP responds to the most complex and largest disasters globally, where telecommunication interruptions present one of the most immediate first challenges.

WFP's specialized division, FITTEST (Fast Information Technology and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team) have been deeply involved in the design and operationalization of this project. FITTEST is a group of humanitarian responders based in Dubai who deploy when emergencies strike to establish and restore information and communications technology services.

FITTEST is no stranger to the Philippines, having deployed 53 international WFP staff and partners during the Typhoon Haiyan Response.

Each GECS-MOVE unit is composed of the following:

- 1) Hub – a self-contained mobile operations and coordination center housed in a customized heavy-duty truck equipped with an integrated communications system where a crew of ETC experts can live and sleep
- 2) Dispatch - a self-sustained connectivity hub installed in a heavy-duty off-road vehicle which helps extend the reach of the Hub into disaster zone
- 3) Off-road motorcycle equipped with communications equipment. This supports the crew in reaching deeper into remote and inaccessible terrain, (e.g. mountain tops) with VHF equipment
- 4) Two heavy-duty drones to further extend connectivity

When commercial telecommunications are down - as in most major disasters - coordination among responders in the local, provincial, and even national government response clusters will be supported through these temporary but reliable structures.

The mobility of the units means that ICT resources become agile, able to be deployed or moved to localities where they are needed the most, depending on the disaster at hand. These enhance the capacity of the Government to act efficiently and effectively during life-saving interventions.

Ahead of the 2021 typhoon season, the 6 GECS-MOVE units have been prepositioned in the following locations:

- ◆ Luzon Cluster 2 — Batangas City (deployed May 2021)
- ◆ Visayas Cluster 2 — Tacloban City (deployed May 2021)

- ◆ Mindanao Cluster 2.—Butuan City (May 2021)
- ◆ Luzon Cluster 2— Mabalacat City (June 2021)
- ◆ Davao Region, Davao del Sur (December 2019)
- ◆ National Capital Region (NCR) — Quezon City

More than 30 highly specialized technical and capacity training courses have been conducted from June 2019 to March 2021 to teach DICT personnel and disaster responders on the utilization of the GECS-MOVE units.

Part of the training and information dissemination campaign included a visit to WFP's FITTEST office in Dubai and a national information caravan in several regions in the Philippines to train local government units and first responders how to operate the GECS-MOVE units.

NEXT STEPS

The GECS-MOVE project is integral to WFP's work in the Philippines, and its commitment to enhance national and local government's capabilities to reduce vulnerabilities and shocks by 2020 - a core objective in WFP's Country Strategic Plan (2018-2023).

DICT and WFP have committed to start a second phase of the GECS-MOVE project (USD \$3.2 m plus USD \$1 m from WFP) which includes the building of four additional sets with enhanced specifications and design and a focus on soft skills training, including for new staff, to support DICT's recent mandate to lead the national ETC.

DONORS

- ◆ Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT)
- ◆ United States Agency for International Development (USAID)



The GECS MOVE Hub serves as the heart of the integrated communications system and functions as a mobile operations and coordination center housed in a customized heavy-duty truck.