The Philippines - Typhoon Rai (Odette)

ETC Situation Report #5

Reporting period: 21/01 to 02/02/2022

Since Super Typhoon Rai (Odette) struck the central Philippine islands on 16 December 2021, the Global ETC has been coordinating with its partners globally and on the ground to support government response efforts and the needs of humanitarian responders through the national ETC led by the Philippines Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT).

Highlights

- The Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) has demobilised three of the four Mobile Operations Vehicle for Emergencies (MOVE) units that have been providing connectivity across the affected area since the beginning of the response. WFP, as the lead UN agency for the ETC, is continuing to support DICT as the national ETC cluster lead to provide connectivity to government and humanitarian responders in 16 locations across the seven main operational areas.
- The ETC is working to establish connectivity at the location that has been identified for a humanitarian hub in Surigao City.
- The WFP IT emergency coordinator and Ericsson Response ICT specialist conducted a field assessment of connectivity in Southern Leyte in support of efforts to identify a location for a second humanitarian hub.

The ETC Coordinator surveys damage to telecommunications lines in northern Mindanao

Photo: WFP/Prakash Muniandy

Activities

General situation

Progress on the recovery of public telecommunications infrastructure continues to be slow as network operators tackle more difficult repairs of downed towers and backhaul infrastructure to restore connectivity in the remaining affected areas.

An in-person assessment conducted by the WFP IT emergency coordinator and Ericsson Response ICT specialist in Southern Leyte found that there is stable voice and data mobile connectivity along the western coast of Leyte, except in Maasin City and its surroundings where significant congestion of mobile data services was observed. The town of Sogod and its surroundings also was found to have

stable mobile data coverage, while the rest of the peninsula of Southern Leyte is mostly without data connectivity.

The Disaster Connectivity Map (DCM) has been gathering data from the Philippines since 21 December and has been updated regularly to show the status of access to connectivity in the affected area compared to baseline measurements taken before the typhoon. The map is an initiative of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and the ETC with support from the Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA).

The Humanitarian Country Team has decided to expand the areas covered in the Humanitarian Needs and Priorities to cover the Central Visayas region (Region VII), and in particular Bohol Island and Cebu Island. The ETC has submitted its revised plans to provide connectivity to humanitarians in a total of seven locations, namely Southern Leyte, Surigao City, Dinagat Island, Siargao Island, Socorro Island, Bohol Island, and Negros Occidental.

Effective 10 February 2022, fully vaccinated national of non-visa required countries will be allowed to enter the Philippines and obtain a visa-on-arrival. Some COVID-19 testing and quarantine requirements for international travellers have also been relaxed effective 1 February.

Delivery of ETC services

DICT has demobilised three of their Mobile Operations Vehicles for Emergencies (MOVE) units that were stationed in Surigao City, Butuan City, and Carmen City on Bohol Island. Connectivity continues to be provided in those locations, while the fourth MOVE unit remains in Alegria on Cebu Island. DICT is also continuing to provide connectivity by VSAT in 12 locations across Dinagat Island, Siargao Island, and Socorro Island.

The ETC is working with local fibre providers to explore the options for establishing connectivity at the location that has been identified for a humanitarian hub in Surigao City. While the location for the planned humanitarian hub in Southern Leyte has not yet been determined, Sogod City is now being considered as alternative to Maasin City as it is closer to the area of operations and has more stable data connectivity. The WFP IT emergency coordinator and FITTEST ICT specialists also deployed to Bohol Island to identify and assess potential locations for a humanitarian hub there.

The coordinator from the Global ETC team and a WFP FITTEST ICT specialist visited six barangays in northern Mindanao to conduct an assessment for potential services for communities. Communications needs amongst the affected population were already apparent from previous efforts to extend connectivity to the community at various DICT service points. The ETC is working to develop a dedicated solution to provide for the communications needs of the affected population.

DICT has also requested equipment and assistance from other ETC partners. ITU is working to ship 25 satellite phones to the Philippines, while NetHope is providing DICT with HF HAM radio kits.

NetHope is also establishing networks in five locations on Cebu Island and Bohol Island in response to requests from its members and is distributing satellite phones to Local Government Units (LGUs).

MSB is planning for a potential deployment of personnel to the Philippines in response to a request from OCHA for staffing support.

The ETC is engaging with World Vision International to secure additional staffing support from their ICT personnel in-country.

Funding

The ETC has received US $200,000 from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance and US $100,000 from the government of Brazil. The ETC has also been allocated US $300,000 from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

With these funds, the ETC has secured 60 percent of the US $1 million required for the response. The project and funding requirements, where are inclusive of expected in-kind contributions from WFP stand-by partners (SBP), are reflected in the updated Humanitarian Needs and Priorities launched on 2 February.

Challenges

The increasing numbers of COVID-19 infections amongst government and humanitarian responders, including the ETC team has reduced capacity.

The importation of equipment has proven to be a significant challenge in this response. Normal customs clearance procedures, which can take several months, remain in place for the importation of all telecommunications equipment. Although some of the required equipment is available on the local market, stocks of some types of equipment are beginning to become depleted.

Travel within the Philippines to the area of operations requires the submission of documentation related to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

While ferry services have been restored in the affected islands, not all ports are fully operational and long wait-times have been reported. Accommodation on the islands and throughout the area of operations is very limited.

Meetings

The next Global ETC Partners teleconference will take place on **7 February 2022**.

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All information related to ETC operations can be found on the website:

www.etcluster.org/emergency/super-typhoon-rai-odette-philippines

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