Workshop Pre-Read: Affected Populations

ETC2020 Strategy Process, March 2015

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## Value Proposition

*For disaster affected populations needing to communicate with each other, with humanitarians, or with government or commercial services, we ensure/enable a dedicated and principled communications solution, by brokering accredited connectivity and services through our extended partnership network. For the direct humanitarian benefit of crisis affected populations, we facilitate principled restoration or extension of commercial communications service capabilities by brokering accredited and prioritized policy, regulatory, and partnership attention to communication as aid.*

## Discussion Highlights

The ETC is looking to expand it remit beyond connectivity for UN agencies, NGOs and other civil society organization, to include services which are directly delivered to populations who are affected by disasters. Moving beyond its traditional role presents a number of challenges for the ETC, but with the understanding that *communications is aid* in a disaster, it is critical that this shift occurs in order to provide a core set of services that allow communities to quickly regain their communications links to wider society. This shift can be described as moving from “inside the wire” where control (over technologies, placement, services and actors) was high and limited in scope, to a move to being “outside the wire” where new technologies, new methodologies and new audiences would need to be embraced.

To date the worksteam has focused on five key questions:

* Is the vision statement above an accurate reflection of the role the ETC wants to and can play in this area?
* What does services to affected populations mean, who are the targets, what services will be deliver, where and delivery will be undertaken by whom?
* What is the role of the ETC in delivering services to affected populations (the lead actor, a support, a coordinator, a collaborator)?
* What barriers (such as political, economic, social or geographic) do you see for the ETC when it expands its remit into this area?
* Who are the other actors in that provide services to affected communications that the ETC must co-ordinate its efforts with?

Based on the discussions there is a broad alignment that the visioning statement is correct, but the role of the ETC needs to be more closely defined. The ETC needs to ascertain if it is the provider of these services, or is the coordinating agency that brings together existing providers (government, industry, private sector, civil society and NGOs). This is somewhat challenging to the role of the ETC if it is to provide services that could put us in direct conflict with these existing disaster focused actors. The politics of implementing this change will need to be carefully managed with the other humanitarian actors. Also, there is a need to have agreements in place well in advance of a disaster with governments, some of who still do not allow the setup of satellite based communication services as a method of quick restoration of impacted communications links following a disaster.

To fully explore the role of the ETC, we need a definition of the range of services which will be delivered to affected populations. Discussions (and broad agreement) have focused on the following services:

* Voice (mobile)
* Data
* Energy

However, the need to potentially provide or supplement other services which could include the restoration of traditional communications mechanisms (such as radio, television, or hard line phone systems) has also been hinted at in discussions. There is also potentially a need for applications that enable communications for affected communities in the aftermath of a disaster (to track where help is needed, what help is needed, and to gather data on the overall impact of the disaster on the communities). This bring the challenge of scale in responding to disasters with service delivery to affected populations, since the ETC would be moving from assisting dozens of actors in a crisis, to potentially working with millions of people who have been impacted. This creates a challenge to deliver services at scale, especially when it comes to the delivery of bandwidth dependent services which could be unaffordable when provided to a large target audience. Perhaps a key consideration would be to look more at broadcast services, and particularly restoration of AM/FM radio and distribution of wind-up radio devices in order to provide for an information dissemination channel that could be quickly setup and easily maintained.

The challenge of capacity building and providing resilience against disasters is also a key consideration but this would also entail an expansion of the role of the ETC from disaster response, to disaster risk reduction and preparedness. The concept of providing the pipeline for digital aid is also a key consideration as many of the humanitarian actors move away from distributions involving cash to e-vouchers.

In true collaborative style and utilizing the best development practices of community involvement, the group has discussed the need to involve communities in the discussion of what services would be needed to be restored and allow the communities to input where the priorities should sit with the ETC. Communications should not be solely “broadcast” but two way allowing for the community to have a voice, and a mechanism to communicate with each other and key humanitarian actors.

The overall challenge in this is in having the ETC expand rapidly beyond its existing core mandate, and in doing so spreading ourselves too thin and taking on too much. At the crux of this concern is the funding model that would need to be enable in order to facilitate the scaling up of an expanded ETC response.

## Key Areas

Proposed areas of focus include:

* Coordination, facilitation and advocacy with local carriers/MNOs to ensure infrastructure stability and provision in energy and power to make that infrastrure useful
* Affordable access for affected populations (devices + service/technology)
* Technology advisor - providing technical expertise, training and assistance to implementing agencies
* Forging partnerships (with organisations keen on connectivity and communications for the masses)

## Issues

* Energy – should the ETC focus on provisioning energy to affected populations to charge their devices?
* Coordinating content - should the ETC wants to get into coordinating messaging/content to affected populations (work stream participants felt this should be left to humanitarian agencies, other body)