CDAC NETWORK

GROUND TRUTH SOLUTIONS

CASE STUDIES

The Journey To Build
Fiji's National Communication Platform

OCTOBER 2020

C D A C
N E T W O R K
CASE STUDIES

Fiji

Fiji's people and their country:

» 900,000 people, with most living on the major islands of Viti Levu and Nanua Levu

» Four official languages Fijian, English, Fiji Hindi, and Rotuman

» 100+ populated volcanic islands with a tropical climate

» Spans 2000 km in the South Pacific

» Very high natural disaster risk including tropical cyclones, volcanic eruptions, and earth quakes

Ensuring Communities Have The Life-Saving Information They Need Before, During And After Disasters

The journey to build Fiji's national communication platform

WHEN COMMUNITIES RECEIVE CLEAR, CONSISTENT INFORMATION that can be used to take action, people have the ability to make important potentially life-saving choices before, during, and after a crisis. If they are also given a voice to share their insights, information, and feedback it is possible for organisations that serve communities in crisis to adjust their strategies and more effectively use their resources. Over the last two years, Fiji has worked to build a Communication and Community Engagement (CCE) platform that embeds advanced two-way communication capabilities in the national disaster response system.

While it is common to think of "platforms" as a technology service, the intent here is much broader. While technology is an important component, today's best-in-class national CCE "platforms" include a broad network of organisations that collaborate on communications efforts, create resources such as guides and training that support efforts, and provide governance structures that support an integrated communication framework.

This is critical work. As a Pacific island nation, Fiji's nearly 900,000 people are exposed to the ongoing threat of tropical cyclones and earthquakes. At the beginning of 2020, Fiji faced two tropical cyclones in a period of three weeks and then in April experienced land fall from the category five Tropical Cyclone Harold. These weather crises coincided with the public health challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Full cycle of engagement

The government of Fiji has established a broad emergency response system that engages multiple public agencies, private sector businesses, civil society, and international aid organisations. This nationally-led capability enables the country to coordinate and deliver response efforts over its 100+ populated islands. This broad network provides a powerful foundation for response actions, but also comes with the risk that communications issued by multiple institutions will be contradictory, incomplete or have inconsistent availability. Furthermore, these crisis response communications are often one-way, so that communities receiving information have limited ability to provide insights and feedback that could help shape diverse organisations' crisis response.

Fiji is addressing these challenges by pursuing an advanced communication framework that seeks to build a complete loop of communication. In this full cycle model of engagement, communities speak, and organisations actively listen.

This complete loop of communications and engagement makes a powerful contribution to disaster response for communities, the government, and supporting organisations. When fully realised, this enables active collaboration between individuals facing crisis and the many organisations working to support them. With clear, consistent messaging, content that is trusted, relevant, and actionable, community members can make informed choices and work in concert with crisis responders.

Government, international, and civil society actors leverage the timely insights they receive from communities to shape and execute their response strategies. The goal is to assure that all affected groups are provided with the services they really need can be better addressed if there are well established channels for regular community engagement. Timely insights can also help address operational challenges like duplicated services or efforts that are misaligned with current needs.

Over the last two years, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has supported a programme to build sustainable next generation CCE capabilities in collaboration with Fiji's National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), the Ministry of Communications, Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) as well as with UNICEF and other stakeholders. The CDAC Network and Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) have worked with this multi-organisation group to provide technical support and support in systems building. At the time of this case study, the programme is at its midpoint, with two more years of development planned.

Fragmented One-Way Communications

The Three Capabilities Underlying a CCE Platform

CDAC / Ground Truth Solutions 2020
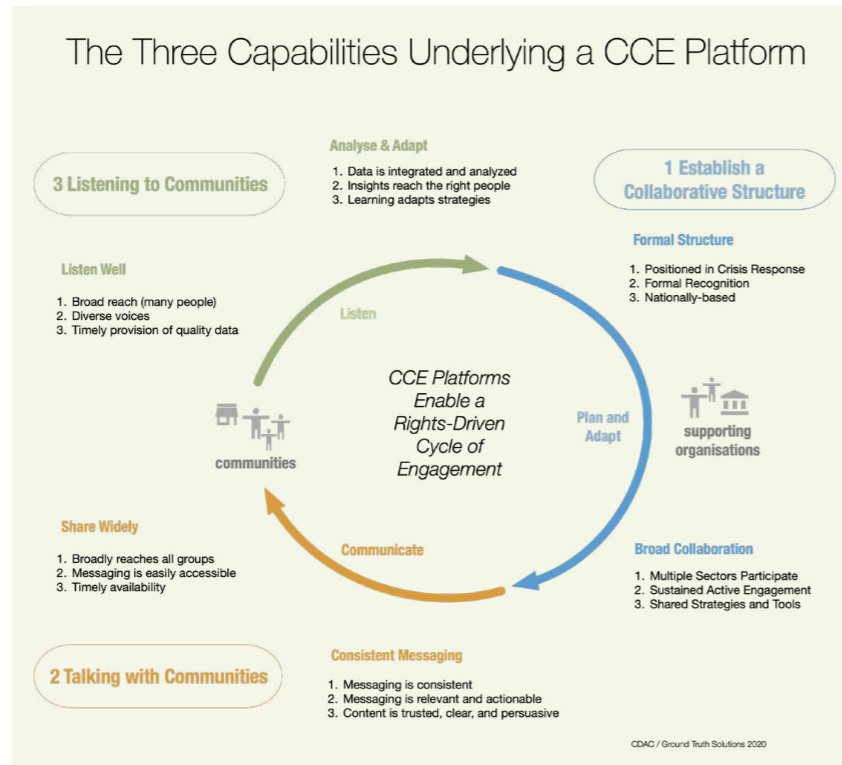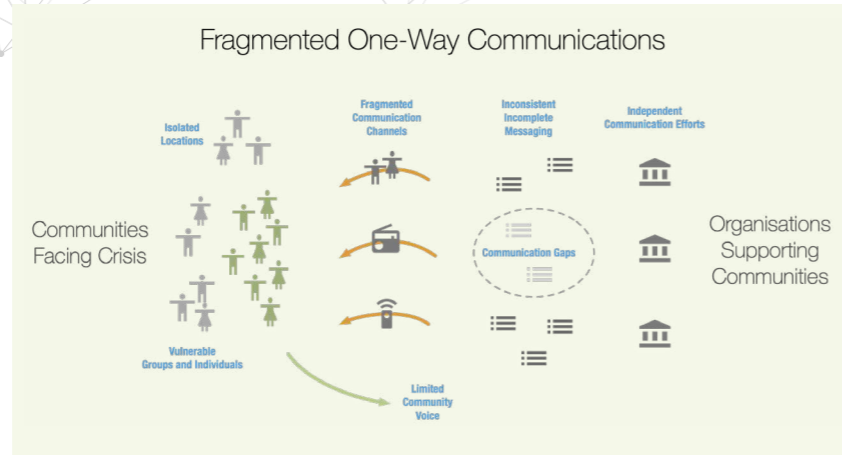
Building within existing organisations

This case study describes the unique challenges and opportunities that occur when building a robust platform within an existing complex network of crisis response organisations and the communities they serve. Any work that is done must be woven into what is already there, an ongoing creative effort that involves many collaborators. This level of integration and change is made even more challenging by the need to accommodate ongoing response activities and existing organisational priorities.
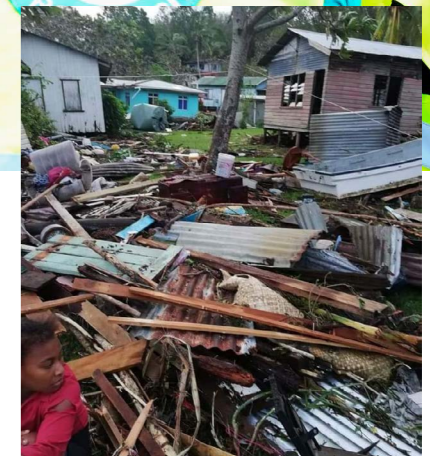
As a simple metaphor, consider how easy it is to build a house in an open field. All the work can be planned and performed without worrying about anything except finishing the project. By contrast, it is far more difficult to expand a building that already exists in middle of a busy city block. New ideas must fit into existing structures, surrounding constraints must be considered, and all the work must be done taking into account the traffic and activity on the street.

Of course, there are rewards for undertaking a complex challenge like this. The resulting platform doesn't exist in isolation, but rather can draw on the strength of what has already been put into place and become a deeply integrated part of the established crisis response system.

There are three major challenges that are associated with creating the foundation for such a broadly collaborative communication programme.
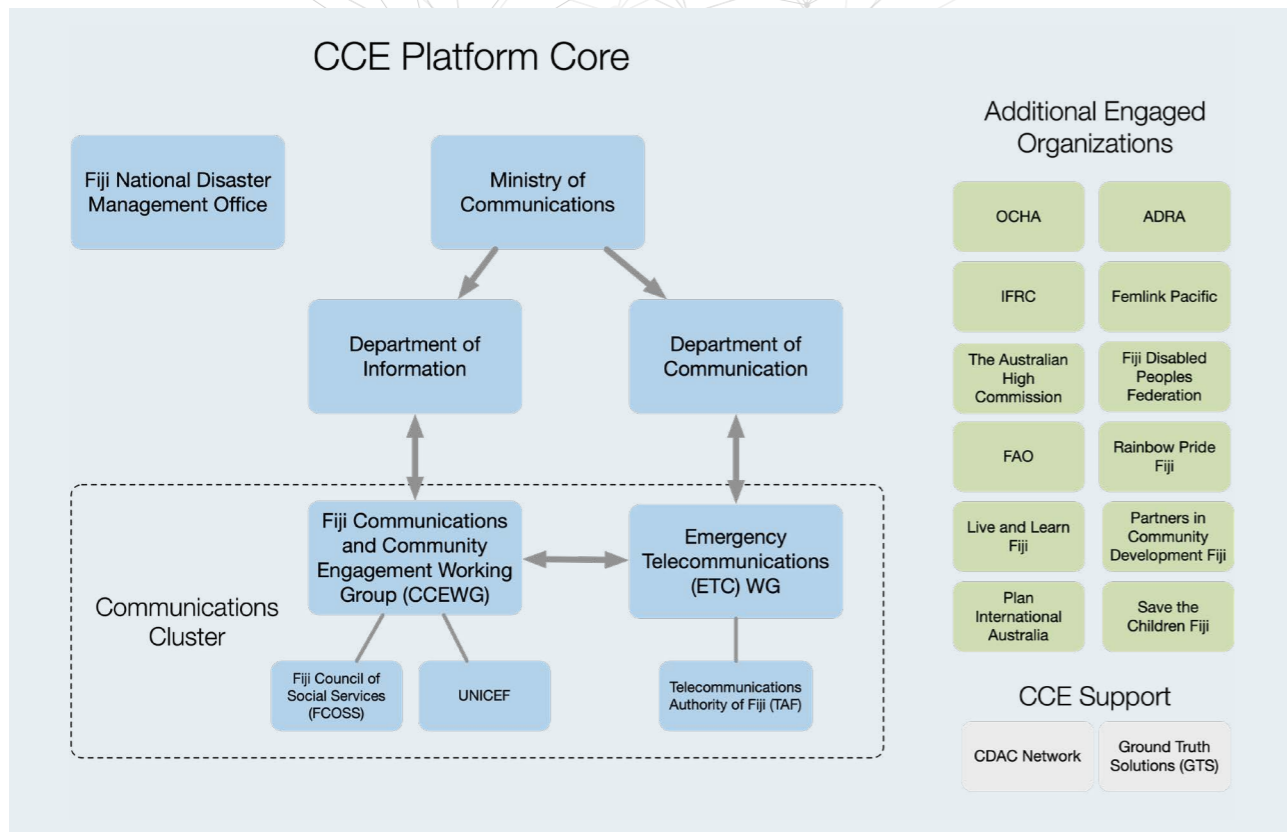
» 1) Leveraging Existing Institutions: The platform must be embedded within the existing formal institutions that support crisis response and preparedness.

» 2) Inviting in Wide Engagement: It should seek to be broadly inclusive, stretching outside government to include many other potential collaborators.

» 3) Broadly Enabling Good Practices: Making it possible for many organisations and individuals to apply shared practices and effective communication strategies.

This initiative has been designed to simultaneously address all three of these challenges, evolving the different parts of the platform together.

"Humanitarian response is no longer a knee-jerk response whenever a disaster happens. Building of resilience is key. It is impossible to approach this process without involving the community and having people at the center of the journey."

AMBASSADOR NAZHAT SHAMEEM KHAN, FIJI'S PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UN IN GENEVA - 2020 HUMANITARIAN NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS WEEK IN GENEVA

CCE Platform Core

Communications Cluster:
- Fiji National Disaster Management Office
- Ministry of Communications
  - Department of Information
  - Department of Communication
- Fiji Communications and Community Engagement Working Group (CCEWG)
  - Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS)
  - UNICEF
- Emergency Telecommunications (ETC) WG
  - Telecommunications Authority of Fiji (TAF)

Additional Engaged Organizations:
OCHA, ADRA, IFRC, Femlink Pacific, The Australian High Commission, Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation, FAO, Rainbow Pride Fiji, Live and Learn Fiji, Partners in Community Development Fiji, Plan International Australia, Save the Children Fiji

CCE Support:
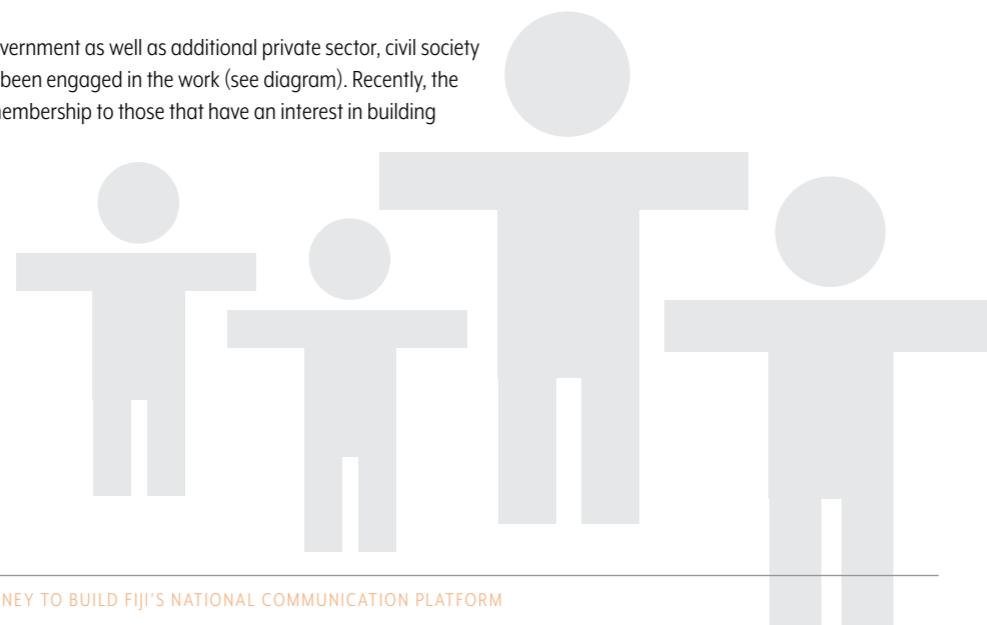CDAC Network, Ground Truth Solutions (GTS)

Creating a nationally-based foundation

At the heart of the platform is the Fiji Communication and Community Engagement Working Group (CCEWG). It leverages Fiji's well-established national crisis response institutions by being placed within the national government's Communications Cluster, which is in turn led by the Ministry of Communications and the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO).

The CCEWG focuses on communication and engagement efforts. It sits alongside a second group, the Emergency Telecommunications (ETC) working group, which supports the telecommunications infrastructure. While they both ultimately report to the same Ministry, they are not bound by the limits of top down control. There is intentional effort to promote horizontal cooperation between the working groups.

This foundation, solidly based in Fiji's national government, is well positioned to integrate the capabilities of additional organisations. As a result, the Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) and UNICEF are Co-leads of the CCEWG, and the Telecommunications Authority of Fiji (TAF) is a co-leader of the ETCWG.

Over the first two years, many levels of government as well as additional private sector, civil society and international aid organisations have been engaged in the work (see diagram). Recently, the NDMO has formally opened up CCEWG membership to those that have an interest in building communication capacity.

Leveraging the power of a broad collaboration

This broad collaboration makes it possible to integrate communication efforts during a crisis. It is a powerful base, but its rich complexity can be challenging to navigate for its many participants.

The effort to build a broad and accessible platform began with the core participants. The NDMO and Ministry of Communication have convened multiple meetings of the working group building familiar working relationships that can translate into hands-on action during a crisis response. These meetings, which have engaged 20 different organisations, have been used to shape a common governance approach, provide a shared view of Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Communication Cluster, create joint action plans for the working group, and explore possible opportunities for collaboration.

In 2020, the CCE Working Group meetings have focused on the on-the-ground challenges of Covid19 and Tropical Cyclone Harrold responses. In addition to helping structure the current communication activities, the platform also provides an opportunity to leverage practical learning from this work in future strategies.

Of course, one of the platform's strengths is that it can extend even further, reaching beyond the core members of the working group. Being able to identify and understand the full range of government, private sector, civil society and international organisations makes it possible to develop strategies that leverage the full range of Fiji's communication capabilities.

To promote visibility into this broader network, a 4Ws mapping tool (Who is doing What, Where and When) has been developed with the goal of making opportunities for collaboration more accessible. A wide variety of potential contributors, such as media networks, community networks, subsidised TV and radio broadcasting resources, and printing services have been included (see sample layout).

A shared resource like this is a powerful tool, but it can also come with challenges. For example, when working with many independent collaborators, there will inevitably be differences in underlying terms and definitions, such as the definition of geographic boundaries and CCE categories. Having a forum to resolve these differences is one of the hidden sources of value that a shared platform provides.

CDAC led the initial 4Ws tool development, but the work is now being more broadly supported through a data collection pilot that leverages KOBO toolbox forms. Other clusters who work with collaborations have seen value in this type of resource. As a result, similar 4Ws mapping efforts are being led by FAO working with the Fiji Food Security Cluster and UN Women collaborating with the Fiji Protection Cluster.

"Fiji and other Pacific Island countries have experienced a greater number of disasters and a higher intensity of the consequences of those disasters."

AMBASSADOR NAZHAT SHAMEEM KHAN, FIJI'S PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UN IN GENEVA - 2020 HUMANITARIAN NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS WEEK IN GENEVA

Developing coordinated communication strategies

Ultimately the value of a CCE platform is in how it is applied to the many crisis response challenges where communications matter. Each crisis situation has periods of readiness, response, and recovery where different communication strategies and content will be needed. Adding to the complexity are the challenges that come with different types of threats (earlier in 2020, Fiji was responding to both Tropical Cyclones and COVID-19) and varied community needs.

Clearly no single communication strategy can address all of these different conditions. To foster a resilient creative ability, the CCE working group has worked to produce flexible tools that can support many different participants. For example, the 4Ws mapping is being augmented by a new Fiji Media Telecommunications Linguistics Landscape Guide that is designed to provide a broad range of information needs to design effective communication strategies. As with the 4Ws map, this is intended to be a living document that is continually revised and extended.

Broadly inclusive training programmes have also been developed to support this work. Programmes exploring CCE Design and Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) have been attended by representatives from government, private sector, civil society, and international partners and have been performed in the capital. Efforts to extend training to the country's Divisional level have also been piloted.

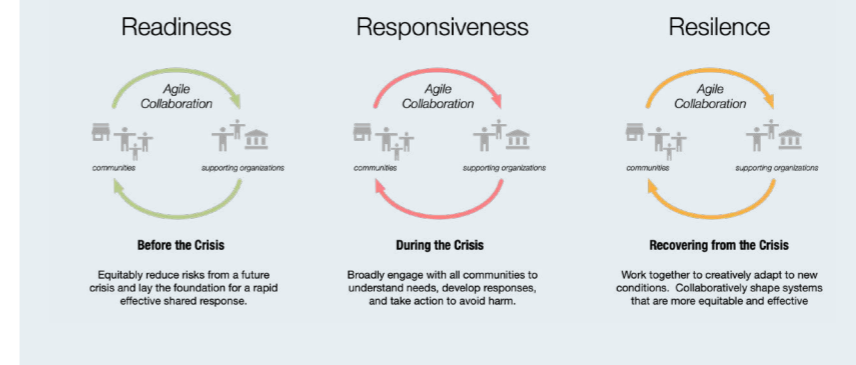**Fiji Media Telecommunications Linguistics Landscape Guide**

- Inventory of major media outlets
- Additional trusted and popular information sources
- Guidance on information needs assessment
- Data on factors such as mobile phone ownership and social media use

Accountability to Affected People Training

Creating Agile Collaborations that Transform Crisis Response Capabilities

Readiness	Responsiveness	Resilence
Agile Collaboration	Agile Collaboration	Agile Collaboration
communities supporting organizations	communities supporting organizations	communities supporting organizations
Before the Crisis	**During the Crisis**	**Recovering from the Crisis**
Equitably reduce risks from a future crisis and lay the foundation for a rapid effective shared response.	Broadly engage with all communities to understand needs, develop responses, and take action to avoid harm.	Work together to creatively adapt to new conditions. Collaboratively shape systems that are more equitable and effective

"It is only through discussions with affected individuals, groups, and sometimes whole communities that "real needs" are voiced and ensure that interventions are relevant."

VOICES FROM GROUND ZERO; A FRIEND EXPERIENCE POST TC WINSTON IN RA PROVINCE, FIJI

Closing the engagement loop

Integrated communication strategies that talk to communities are only half of a complete Cycle of Engagement. To close the loop, an effective listening capability must also be in place. There are many ways that a CCE platform can contribute to building this capacity.

For example, existing Initial Damage Assessment (IDA) practices are being reviewed and revised to include questions about community information and communication needs alongside other response needs. This reflects the growing consensus that information is a concrete form of aid. Tailoring information content, format, and delivery channels to the differing needs of individuals and groups within a community has the potential to save lives and improve wellbeing in a crisis.

Surveys have been developed leveraging a foundation of existing tools to support engagement during the Readiness, Response and Recovery stages of a crisis. This enables communication strategies that are tailored to the unique challenges at each stage of a crisis. Readiness efforts may largely focus on providing information and understanding communities, while during a Response, communication and engagement strategies shift to addressing immediate needs. As the Recovery progresses, attention can move to supporting the provision of appropriate services and their implementation.

Working with the NDMO, training has been developed to extend the use of community engagement practices to provincial levels, with instruction on the design of surveys, collection of data, and the analysis and use of information. Surveys were also created for the COVID-19 crisis, exploring the impact of restrictions and the awareness communities had around the disease.

In this work, it has been important to recognise that many different groups exist within a single community. Young people, women, people with a disability, elderly, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and members of the LGBGTI community may each have unique insights and challenges. As a result, strategies need to be designed to engage this diversity and avoid the tendency to lean too heavily on traditional positions of power and authority.

Looking forward – building on the foundation

Fiji's CCE platform has not been built in a static environment. Rather it has been designed and constructed as the nation faced multiple disasters ranging from weather to disease. These tumultuous conditions are challenging for the government, supporting organisations, and communities, but they also make it possible to test and adapt the platform to real-world situations. This has created an opportunity to mobilise support and focus work around communications and with disaster response more broadly.

Continued progress will require sustained effort that demands both time and resources. Having established a national foundation for the platform there is now an opportunity to extend the reach to divisional levels of government and invite in an even wider range of collaborating organisations. There are also opportunities to build links between community engagement strategies in disaster response and similar efforts undertaken by development sector initiatives.

This is work that will benefit from dedicated resources that can offer face to face interaction and sustained effort. To that end, new roles are being established to provide on-the-ground support for CCE platform development and operation, and foster a model of continuous learning and adaptation.

Looking even more broadly, the platform work done in Fiji offers a potential template for similar efforts in other countries, as well as providing a basis for a broader regional communications and engagement effort.

"Another important issue to note especially in a post-disaster period is that needs change with time and the responses that have been carried out."

VOICES FROM GROUND ZERO; A FRIEND EXPERIENCE POST TC WINSTON IN RA PROVINCE, FIJI

This case study was prepared and written by independent consultant Dan McClure, in collaboration with the Fiji team.

All images: Fiji Red Cross.

PLEASE NOTE: This document is a work in progress.
All comments welcome: please send them to info@cdacnetwork.org

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