



CASE STUDIES

Practical experiences building a government-led CCE platform in Vanuatu

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CASE STUDIES



Vanuatu



Vanuatu's people and their country:

- » 300,000 people, two thirds engaged in agriculture
- » National language is Bislama with many indigenous languages
- » Parliamentary republic and member of the UN
- » Spans 1300 km in the South Pacific
- » Very high natural disaster risk including tropical cyclones, volcanic eruptions, and earth quakes

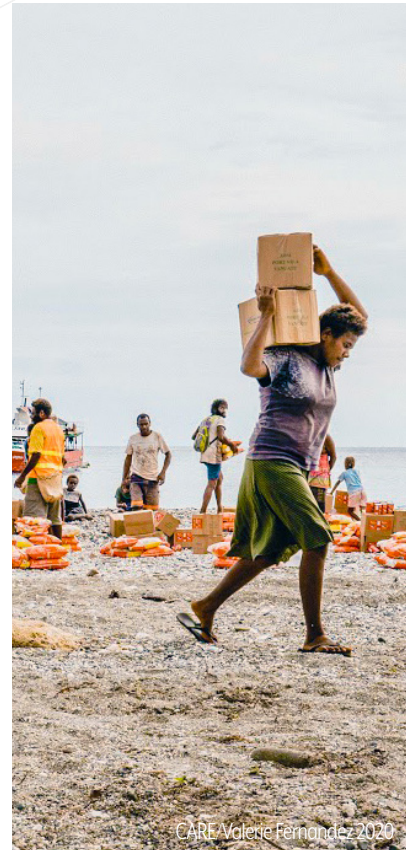
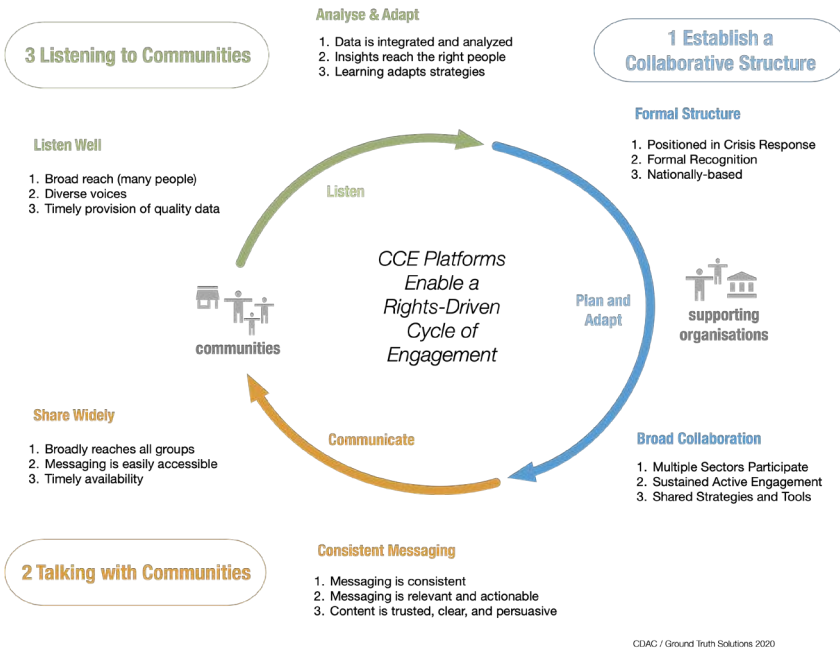
Practical experiences building a government-led CCE platform in Vanuatu

IT IS NOW WIDELY RECOGNISED that timely, trusted, and actionable information shared in a crisis response is a tangible form of aid, with the potential to significantly save and improve people's lives in difficult circumstances. In the past, a traditional aid response might have checked this box by diligently providing regular updates to local communities. Today, innovative national programmes for communication and community engagement (CCE) set far more ambitious goals, seeking to fundamentally transform the nature of the collaboration between communities and those working to serve them in a crisis.

Building effective CCE capabilities is particularly important in Vanuatu, a Pacific nation spanning 83 islands, which is vulnerable to natural disasters ranging from tropical cyclones and volcanic eruptions, to disease and agricultural threats. 2020 was a particularly challenging year for its 300,000 citizens, with the landfall of Category 5 Tropical Cyclones Harold and Yasa and the concurrent rise of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since 2018, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has sponsored a programme to build sustainable next-generation CCE capability within Vanuatu. This nationally grounded initiative has been led by Vanuatu's National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) with coordination support from the CDAC Network and Ground Truth Solutions (GTS). CARE provides additional CCE Technical Advisory and Secretariat support.

The Three Capabilities Underlying a CCE Platform



This initiative is a systems-level innovation that pursues two ambitious objectives. The first is to establish the foundation for resilient two-way collaboration between people facing crisis and the many organisations that seek to support them. The second is to build this capability as a “platform” that broadly integrates communication capabilities across the diverse ecosystem of organisations responding to a crisis (government, private sector, international actors, and civil society).

This case study presents an updated snapshot of the programme’s systems-building efforts after four years of support.

Creating a rich cycle of engagement

Next-generation CCE strategies seek to enable a rich cycle of engagement. They put in place the tools and practices needed to intentionally gather, consolidate and analyse the observations, insights, and concerns of those actually facing a crisis. This timely information isn’t simply intended as a report card for evaluating services (although that is a valuable outcome). Its impact is deeper, enabling government, private sector, civil society, and international actors to flexibly adapt their strategies based on real time knowledge of a community’s experience and desires.

Ideally, providing input into this arc of “Listening” capabilities is widely accessible, even to those in the community that may normally have limited access to official communication channels. This treats communication and the ability to have one’s voice heard within a crisis as a basic right within an aid response.

The ability to listen well is only half of the complete loop of engagement. Organisations also need to deliver valuable information to communities through the channels that people actually use. This trusted and relevant content in turn enables individuals and communities to adapt their own plans and actions.

To capture the full value of a systems-level innovation such as this, all these capabilities need to be put in place and work together as a whole. This is not a trivial requirement since each of the elements involves different skills, tools and stakeholders, and has different measures of success (see diagram).



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Embracing a big ecosystem

Creating these capabilities would be a substantial task even if all the work involved a single organisation. That, of course, drastically oversimplifies the reality of a real-world aid response, where a broad array of different institutions make up the crisis response ecosystem.

Multiple government agencies, private sector organisations, as well as both local and international NGOs need to collaborate on efforts to produce information that is clear and actionable. It is not enough for each agency or organisation to generate its own information, or even share their work at arm's length with others. While well-intentioned, fragmented efforts to communicate with communities have the potential to produce a flood of confusing messages and leave crucial gaps on important subjects.

Moreover, when multiple organisations gather information and insights from communities, community members can face an overload of interviews and surveys, answering the same questions multiple times. Even more troubling, a fragmented approach to listening creates the risk that key insights from one survey may not be available to others who are collaborating on the response.

Building a platform with lots of moving parts

This was the scope of the challenge undertaken in Vanuatu. With so many moving parts, it is important to see this work as an interconnected system, rather than a series of independent tasks. The resulting “platform” is designed to bring together the varied elements needed to generate timely content, communicate through multiple channels, collect insights from diverse sources, conduct real time analysis, and broadly share insights.

Leveraging a systems-thinking approach, multiple parts of the platform were developed in parallel, allowing advances in one capability to support work done with other elements. Interconnected efforts in organisation building, coordination, skills training, and capability building were broadly pursued and then tested through real-world use.



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Collaboration is at the core of the platform Vanuatu led CCE Sub-Cluster

Establishing a sustainable platform

It might be expected that technology would be at the core of a communication platform. While technology does play a part, the foundation of Vanuatu's communication work is rooted in people and organisations.

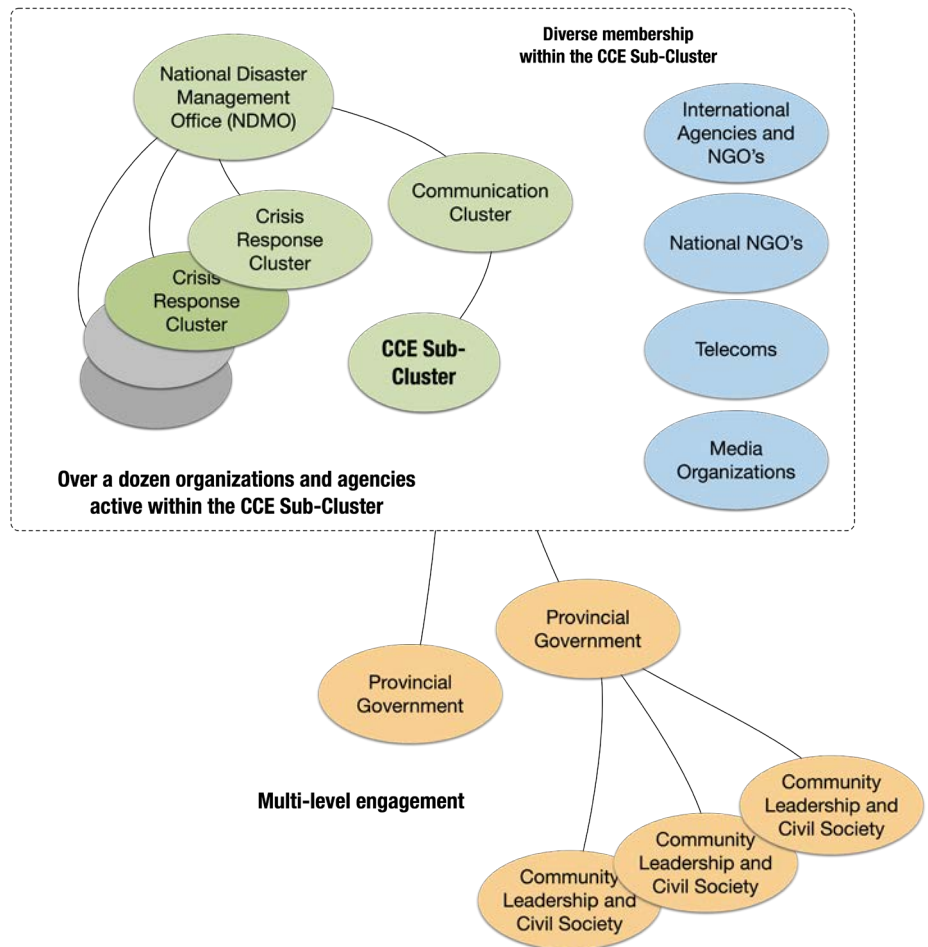
The heart of platform-building activities focused on creating a recognised home for sustainable communications capabilities centered in Vanuatu's existing disaster response system. It has been crucial to the programme's vision that Vanuatu-led organisations and people be at the center of this collaboration, with supporting roles from international actors.

The new CCE Sub-Cluster was set up within the government's National Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (NETC), placing communications activities directly within the NDMO. Furthermore, in Vanuatu's wide-ranging geography, provincial and community leadership play a key role in two-way community engagement.

The platform was not limited to government agencies. Rather the CCE Sub-Cluster was designed to broadly engage the wide variety of contributors to a crisis response. It provides an ongoing forum for collaboration among government ministries and crisis response clusters, as well as international NGOs, local NGOs and key private sector actors such as telecom providers and media channels.

The project achieved significant progress both in operationalising communications with disaster-affected communities and strengthening localisation in Vanuatu. Building on a strong, strategic partnership formed with the NDMO, the project successfully increased the prioritisation of CCE in disaster preparation and response at the national and sub-national level. This was achieved through a multi-layered approach, including establishment of a highly engaged CCE Sub-Cluster, capacity building for key stakeholders, development of a systematic collective feedback mechanism, integration of CCE components within formal disaster plans and SOPs at national and sub-national levels and creating an approved community messaging library to support communication with disaster affected communities.

Establishing a strong working relationship with the NDMO and gaining their trust was a key strategic goal of the project. This was successfully achieved by listening to the NDMO and focusing project activities and support around top NDMO priorities that aligned with project goals – particularly strengthening community feedback channels, which the NDMO identified as a key need after TC Harold. Embedding two project staff within the NDMO to provide wide-ranging support, advocate for CCE activities and inclusions, and build capacity to implement CCE enabled the project to practically demonstrate the impact and value of CCE and achieve a greater appreciation of and subsequent commitment to CCE within the NDMO.



The ongoing secondment of the National CCE Coordinator role within the NDMO provided the foundation for all other work to progress CCE within the NDMO over the four years of the project. This role provided constant advocacy and support for CCE across the full spectrum of NDMO activities, directly contributing to the NDMO Director listing improving communication with communities as his top priority and providing critical support in building CCE capacity within the NDMO and the overall national disaster system.

Forming the CCE Sub-Cluster comprised of Vanuatu-based communication practitioners, building their skills in communication with disaster-affected communities, and maintaining their engagement in the group over the long term was a key achievement. A diverse range of organisations, spanning NGOs, INGOs, media, telecommunications and government, were targeted for inclusion in the group to enable integration of CCE in key sectors. The overwhelming majority of members and member organisations are ni-Vanuatu, providing a highly localised representation to support long-term sustainability. Further, the integration of this group within the Vanuatu Cluster System establishes its credibility, provides opportunities to support strengthening of CCE within other clusters, and positions it for ongoing impact at the national level.

CCE Sub-Cluster members actively led CCE activities throughout the life of the project, including collaborating on the production of community feedback processes and CCE resources for communities, facilitating CCE training at the provincial level, providing CCE surge support to the NDMO during the TC Harold response, representing Vanuatu at a regional CCE learning event in Fiji and actively participating in national training events. This high level of engagement is a promising indicator of the stronger national capacity that has been created by the project and the sustainability of its core achievements.

The CCE Sub-Cluster members were regularly engaged through meetings and e-newsletters designed specifically to target organisational leaders and celebrate progress and members' specific contributions, such as their involvement in various projects, to motivate ongoing involvement.

Creating shared tools and practice

Engaging diverse stakeholders provides an opportunity to integrate fragmented activities, share tools, and identify where gaps may lie in current practices. For example, standard approaches for data collection templates, assessment questions, data analysis templates, and partnership agreements are being collaboratively created and reviewed through the CCE Sub cluster.

A shared approach to sharing communications with communities is being built around pre-prepared messages, channels map, and media landscape guide. It would be easy for such diverse resources to become lost, so the many elements of practice have been incorporated in a CCE Handbook. This is intended to be a living document, which can continue to evolve with the overall CCE effort.

The project also supported the creation of a suite of videos, posters and other resources covering disaster preparation and COVID-19 that are ready for use in communities. This is a significant achievement, particularly given that the availability of high-quality, contextually relevant, Bislama language messaging materials is limited. Organisational Vanuatu-specific resources are not commonly accessible for use by other disaster responders, leading to duplication of work and inconsistent messaging. As such, the establishment of the CCE Sub-Cluster's online resources hub is also a key achievement. Materials targeting disaster responders themselves, such as training presentations and explainer videos, have also been shared through the resources hub.



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Key CCE resources included:

- » The [CCE Sub-Cluster online resource hub](#), which provides all disaster responders with ongoing, open access to CCE resources including a [CCE handbook](#), [feedback guidelines](#), tools and NDMO-approved disaster messaging for communities.
- » A series of [disaster preparedness videos](#) for communicating approved messaging to communities, focusing on the role of NDMO, the importance of inclusion, and preparation advice for specific disasters: cyclone, flood, earthquake and volcano.
- » A series of [video explainers for responders](#) to use in CCE training, outlining the importance of communication as aid and community feedback processes.
- » A series of [outbreak alert system videos](#), created at the request of the Ministry of Health to support community communications throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, beginning in March 2020.
- » Two [video case studies](#) for responders exploring why and how systematic feedback should be integral to a disaster response and the role of CCE Sub-Cluster within the TC Harold response.
- » The [Vanuatu CCE Sub-Cluster Facebook page](#), providing a valuable platform for sharing resources and engaging with a broad range of disaster responders, reaching more than 600 targeted followers.
- » The [NDMO Facebook page](#) actively shares key disaster-related communication, engages with community members and collects community feedback.
- » [Standard feedback questions](#) were a critical foundational element of the systematic collective feedback mechanism.

Training in the art of engagement

The simple existence of tools and procedures is not enough to actually enable hands-on use and adoption. A wide range of skills and knowledge must be mastered by individuals and organisations to effectively share information and listen to communities well. This was a key need identified in early assessments, and motivated a broad effort to build these skills at the community, area council, and provincial level, as well as among national organisations.

The project provided CCE training, including on the new systematic feedback system, to key stakeholders at the national, provincial and area levels (specifically within Tafea, Penama and Sanma), including NDMO staff, CCE Sub-Cluster members, provincial disaster committee members and area council representatives, among other disaster response partners. This developed a strong base of local people with the core skills and knowledge needed to successfully strengthen communication with disaster affected communities. While work remains to be done in this area to reach other provinces and embed learning with regular refresher training, this achievement provides an important foundation of CCE awareness and capacity, strengthening local capacity in CCE nationally and sub-nationally.

Workshops and classes were conducted in partnership with other training initiatives serving provincial offices and local communities. Collaborations with training efforts by CARE International, Save the Children, World Vision, the Vanuatu Red Cross, and the Vanuatu Christian Council allowed initial CDCCC community training programmes to reach over 20 communities for example, as well as providing provincial-level training.



Listening applied to CCE design

Communities include diverse individuals with varied preferences for where they receive information, who they trust, and the type of information presented. Knowing these communication needs can save lives, making it possible to effectively engage diverse community members when designing and prioritising CCE strategies.

The CCE programme actively applied its own “listening” tools to the challenge of better designing communication strategies for varied communities. Two surveys of communication preferences were conducted using the Kobo survey tool with support from Ground Truth Solutions. In addition to the practical insights that resulted from the investigations, the initiatives also offered an opportunity to illustrate data analysis techniques in a non-crisis environment.

Furthermore, harnessing NDMO prioritisation of response to community feedback in the wake of concerns raised during TC Harold, the project successfully led the collaborative development of a national systematic collective feedback mechanism. This system builds on the existing and accepted national communications systems and is complete with step-by-step feedback collection, documentation and response processes for seven context-appropriate channels (community meetings, surveys, Facebook, call centre, Emergency Operations Centre front desk, suggestion boxes and partners), guidelines, forms, logs and other tools, and a community feedback summary template to facilitate information sharing. Rolled out at the national level and in three provinces, this system is a major achievement in operationalising CCE.

The CCE handbook, feedback processes, feedback guidelines and supporting tools were collaboratively developed. Standard feedback questions were developed in two formats – short and extended – and shared with national and provincial NDMO staff and CCE Sub-Cluster members, as a critical foundational element. The standard questions and feedback processes were then incorporated into two Oxfam CDCCC studies and community feedback summaries were subsequently developed, demonstrating early partner contributions to the national collective feedback mechanism. Feedback processes were also piloted during the NDMO’s TC Harold response and focused on collecting feedback from marginalised community members on Santo and sharing the findings with the NDMO to inform decision-making.

Rapid Pro was tested as a feedback collection tool, using mobile phone SMS and Facebook to capture community views on the coconut rhinoceros beetle outbreak crisis – a topic requested by the NDMO. The findings were shared with NDMO and Biosecurity and revealed that the outbreak had spread to an additional island that Biosecurity was not previously aware of, highlighting the value of community feedback to both government agencies.

At the request of the NDMO in early 2022, a post-disaster community feedback report was created based on public feedback after TC Dovi, captured through the NDMO’s Facebook page and a Radio National talkback programme on the alert system. This report identified key areas to improve communication with disaster-affected communities, building on the NDMO’s openness to strengthening performance in this area.

Testing and evolving the platform in practice

The CCE Platform is designed to evolve in response to actual experience. As new pieces are put in place, they can be tested against real life situations, providing new insights and guiding improvements in approach. For example, during TC Harold, there was a significantly expanded use of Facebook as a social media channel for sharing information. In addition, a new Ministry of Health hotline was put in place for COVID-19, leveraging the extensive availability of mobile phones within communities.

As part of the COVID-19 response, tailored feedback tools were developed and the level of collaboration within the sub-cluster substantially increased, indicating that the platform is a working resource and not just a concept on paper.

Notably, the platform has been able to provide surge support during disasters. The CCE Sub-Cluster provided extensive support to the NDMO throughout the TC Harold and the Tanna Mt Yasur volcano responses as well as during other disasters. Led by the National CCE Coordinator, this included support with media liaison, social media management, key messaging development and translation. The CCE Sub-Cluster also worked closely with the Ministry of Health on its response to the COVID-19 outbreak in 2022, providing technical support and assisting with production, printing and coordination of resources.

CCE components have also been added into core NDMO disaster preparedness documentation, including the National Emergency Operations Centre standard operating procedures, the Ministry of Climate Change Adaptation's communications guidelines, and Provincial Disaster Response Plans. These inclusions reflect the increasing prioritisation of communication with disaster-affected communities and provide a stronger mandate and greater accountability for the inclusion of CCE within emergency responses in the longer term.





OCHA/Yaelle Link

Continuous learning

Learning has been documented and shared over the course of the project. A number of presentations, discussions and key research papers were hosted or produced, including the following:

- › [Scoping mission report for Vanuatu](#) – The 2018 scoping mission report outlined existing capacities, needs, challenges and opportunities for CCE at the collective level in Vanuatu.
- › [Operationalising localisation and the Participation Revolution: communications preparedness and accountability for disaster response in Fiji and Vanuatu](#) – Provides a summary of findings from the in-person Fiji-Vanuatu learning event, held in Suva, Fiji in March 2020. Nine members of the Vanuatu CCE platform joined Fiji CCE stakeholders to reflect on the strategies, best practices and common challenges of the two-country project and take forward approaches and potential solutions to enable more consistent and systematic two-way CCE.
- › [Framework for assessing success of national CCE platforms](#) – Lays out the multiple elements needed to successfully build and assess the performance of a national CCE platform.
- › [Practical experiences building a government-led CCE platform in Vanuatu](#) – This case study shares experiences from establishing the multi-stakeholder CCE platform in Vanuatu and provides an overview of project highlights from 2018 to 2020.
- › [Vanuatu: responding to disaster](#) – TC Harold was the first time the CCE Sub-Cluster was activated in an emergency and its preparedness work put to the test. This photo essay depicts what happened.
- › [Collaborative communication and community engagement approaches in Fiji and Vanuatu: supporting effective two-way communication with disaster affected communities](#) – This poster accompanied an oral presentation given at the 2021 Australian Disaster Resilience Conference exploring the highlights, good practices and lessons learned from establishing multi-stakeholder, collaborative and locally led approaches to communicating with disaster-affected communities in Fiji and Vanuatu.
- › [The impact of COVID-19 on communication, community engagement and accountability: perspectives from stakeholders, communicators and audiences](#) – Exploring how the communication landscape and information ecosystems in disaster-affected countries have changed since COVID-19. Specific focus is given to how digitalisation, localisation, communication and engagement have evolved since March 2020, including in Fiji.
- › [Intentional inclusion of people with diverse SOGIESC \(LGBTIQ+ people\) in communication, community engagement and accountability: a guide on key entry points for humanitarian organisations and practitioners](#) – This guide offers background and entry points for inclusion of people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) in CCE activities.
- › [Pre-positioning locally led communication and community engagement networks: learning from Fiji and Vanuatu](#) – The CCE platforms in Fiji and Vanuatu aimed to be locally led, intentionally inclusive of diverse communities and embedded in local institutions. This paper captures key learnings from the project, as well as insights for scaling this type of CCE work and making it sustainable.

Further to the above publications, project learning was also shared at Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks (HNPW) 2020, Australian Disaster Resilience Conference 2021, World Conference on Humanitarian Studies 2021, HNPW High-level AAP Leadership Event 2022, and the annual CDAC Public Fora.

Continuing opportunities for growth

A key learning of this work has been that building a sustainable, multi-stakeholder platform takes time. This kind of complex systems innovation requires persistent work to put in place diverse moving parts, and sustained effort to evolve the approach. This has emerged as a strongly Vanuatu-based initiative, with the national government and local institutions providing the foundation of the CCE platform.

While the COVID-19 crisis and TC Harold delayed some in-person platform building activities, the current hands-on application of the platform has provided valuable practical insights and lessons.

Going forward, there are opportunities to continue to build CCE capacity within the national humanitarian infrastructure, to embed CCE components that have already been integrated into disaster plans and processes into longer-term ways of working, and to complete the roll-out of CCE capacity and system implementation at sub-national levels.

The CCE capacity of NDMO can be further strengthened by supporting the continued embedding of the National CCE Coordinator role at the NDMO, and supporting the CCE Sub-Cluster's activity plan to build the skills of key NDMO team members through a series of communication skills training sessions.

A series of disaster response simulation exercises at national level and in provinces where provincial CCE Working Groups have been established would also be valuable. Supporting the incorporation of CCE actions and tools such as the standard questions into partner organisations' practices and assessments would also further enable a more systematic approach to two-way communication and engagement.

Completing the formation of provincial CCE structures in all six provinces would further support sub-national stakeholders; this would involve facilitating CCE workshops in the four provinces where training has not yet been held (Malampa, Torba, Shefa and Sanma), to establish CCE working groups, provide basic CCE training, and provide communications materials and tools.

While there are opportunities for further growth, this initiative stands out as an important example of how the pre-positioning of national and sub-national mechanisms in disaster risk countries can enable more predictable and intentional two-way communication and engagement with people affected by disasters.



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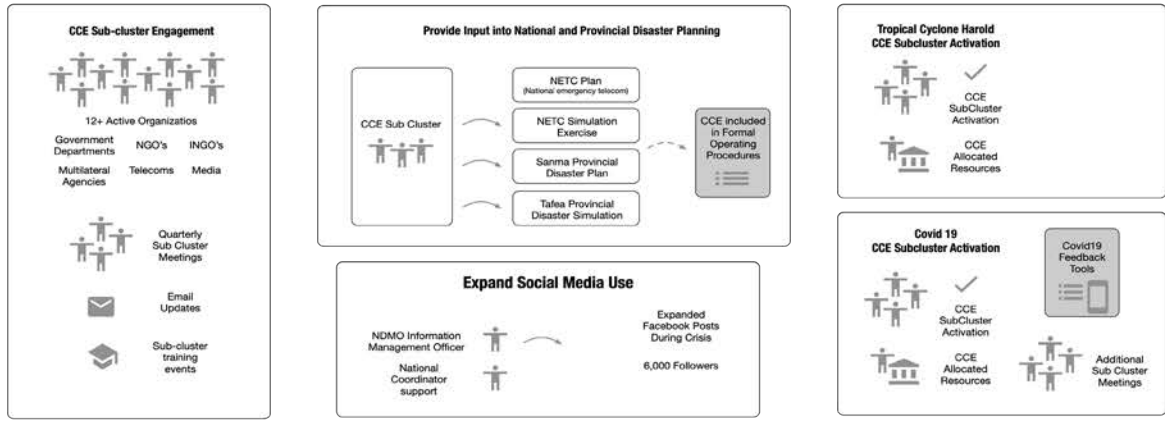


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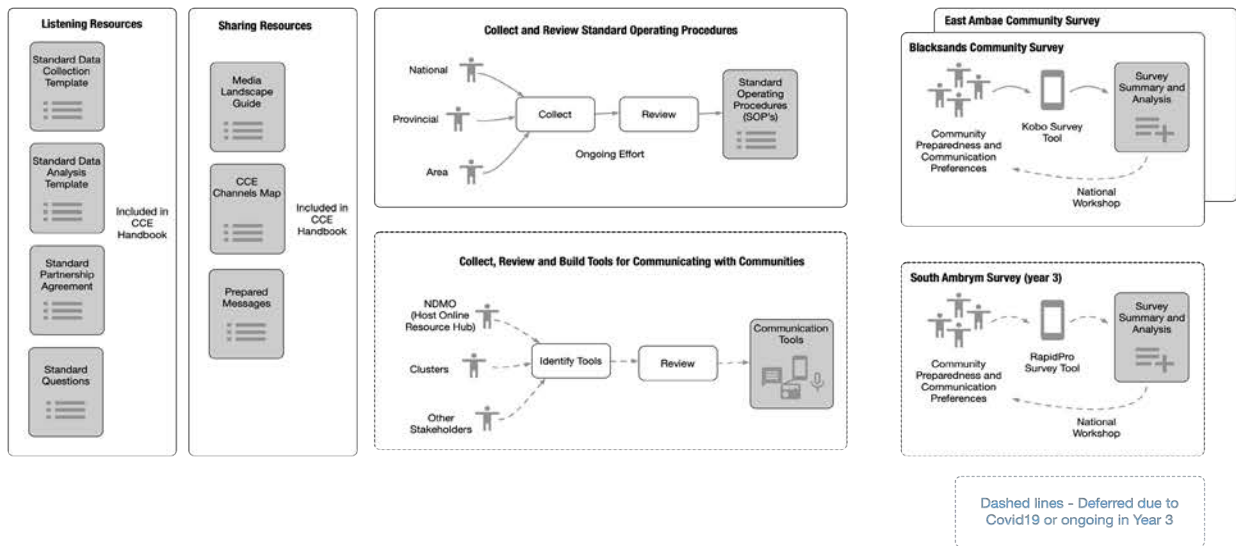
This case study was prepared and written by independent consultant Dan McClure in 2020, in collaboration with the Vanuatu team. It was updated in December 2022 by Jacinta Isaacs, CDAC Network's Regional Programme & Insights Lead, Asia Pacific.

Vanuatu CCE Platform Development (Year 2 Snapshot Looking Forward to Year 3)

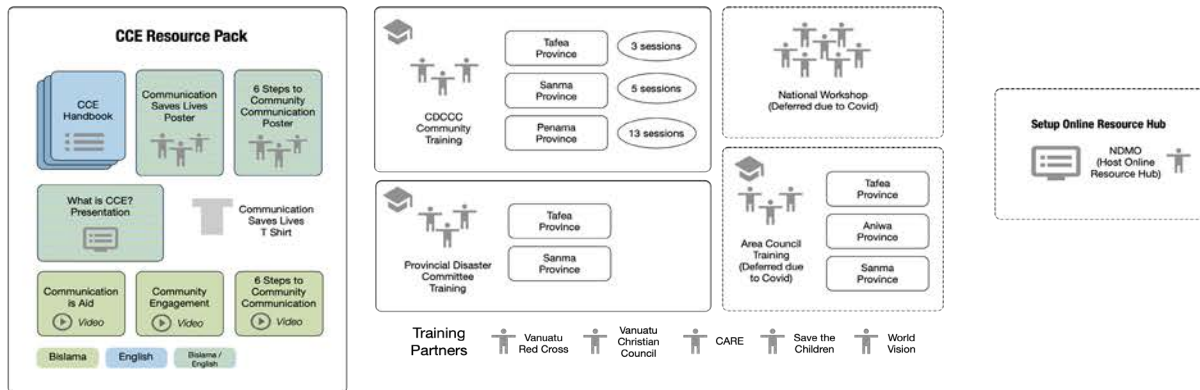
Platform Setup and Application



Tool and Practice Development



Training and Skill Building







PLEASE NOTE: This document is a work in progress.

All comments welcome: please send them to info@cdacnetwork.org



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