Pacific – Preparedness

ETC User Satisfaction Survey report 2020

Survey period 25/01/21 to 05/02/21

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) in the Pacific has been activated since 2016 under the structure of the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) to support telecommunications preparedness activities across the 12 Pacific Island Countries (PICs).

In 2020, the ETC in the Pacific joined the Joint Pacific COVID-19 Joint Incident Management Team (JIMT) led by the World Health Organization (WHO) Pacific sub-office and has been key in identifying country and sector communications needs in up to 21 PICs as part of this team.

The ETC conducted a user satisfaction survey from January-February 2021 to gather feedback from those who engaged with ETC preparedness activities and services in 2020, to evaluate satisfaction levels and identify areas in which the ETC can improve.

Overview and Methodology

The survey comprised 10 questions and was launched on 25 January 2021. The invitation to participate was shared widely among key national and regional stakeholders across Australia, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands (RMI), Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

The survey closed on 5 February 2021 after an extension of one week to facilitate additional participants. 17 stakeholders responded to the survey.

Respondents represented staff from United Nations (UN) agencies (58.8%), government (17.7%), international NGOs (11.8%), local NGOs (5.9%) and National Disaster Management Offices (NDMOs) (5.9%). Respondents included programme officers, directors, cluster coordinators, ICT specialists, logistics officers, operation managers, information management officers, humanitarian coordinators, humanitarian affairs officers and those involved in national disaster risk management. Over half the respondents were based in Fiji.

Key Findings

Existing ETC preparedness services and activities

The ETC user satisfaction survey resulted in an overall user satisfaction rate of **60%** for ETC preparedness services and activities provided in the Pacific. In 2020, respondents collaborated with the ETC mainly in the areas of advocacy, coordination, guidance and advisory support as well as assisting the government's COVID-19 response efforts.

The survey highlighted:

- **77.8%** satisfaction rate for **coordination** services — e.g. with government-led groups, local ICT working groups, and partnerships with humanitarian agencies, industry and government.

- **50%** satisfaction rate for **COVID-19 support** — including assisting set up of dedicated helplines, advisory for Health Emergency Operations Centres (HEOCs) and drafting a COVID-19 operational telecoms strategy.

- **42.9%** satisfaction rate for **training and simulations** — to ensure responders are trained on the latest tools and how to use them. E.g. staff take part in simulations that mirror the conditions of potential emergency scenarios.

- **42.9%** satisfaction rate for **technical assessments** — e.g. checking that systems and processes are in place.

- **50%** for **reinforcing infrastructure** — including upgrading regional and national infrastructure, prepositioning equipment, promoting technical standards and developing strategic agreements.

- **87.5%** for **guidance and advisory** — e.g. developing and sharing strategic guidance materials such as the joint ETC-ITU emergency telecommunications table-top simulation guide and the ETC-ITU emergency telecommunications preparedness checklist for disaster management.

- **66.7%** for **advocacy, awareness and collaboration** — e.g. promoting disaster risk reduction among key ETC stakeholders and forums globally and regionally.

Satisfaction rating of each ETC service/activity
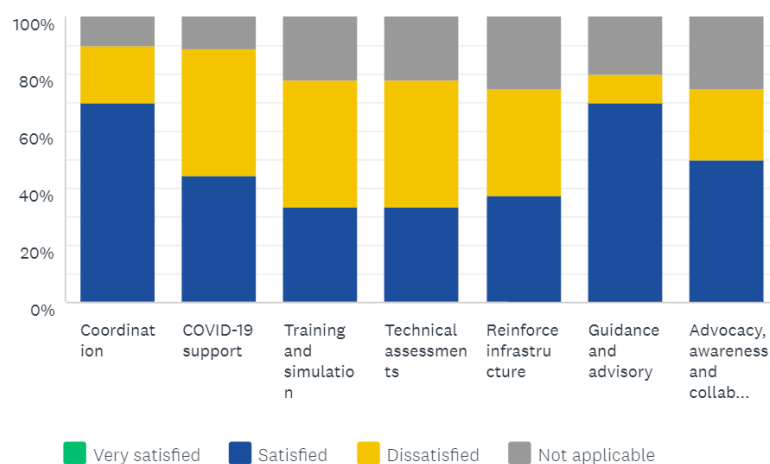
Improving ETC preparedness services and activities

The survey asked responders for suggestions on how ETC preparedness services and activities may be improved (respondents were given an open-ended option):

- **Coordination:** Multiple respondents noted that they would benefit from regular (at least quarterly) bilateral ETC meetings to catch-up, exchange information and re-establish networks among government and the humanitarian communities.

- **Guidance and advisory**: One respondent outlined a need for ETC guidance and advisory on setting up Emergency Operation Centres (EOCs), particularly on the type of communication tools to use. Some participants are not always sure who to contact for ETC guidance and advisory for activities such as this.

- **Advocacy and awareness:** Participants suggested improved advocacy efforts to ensure preparedness services and activities provided by the ETC are more widely known and understood in the region and by country. Awareness training for national ETC staff was put forward as a solution to increase access to ETC preparedness services and activities.

- **Collaboration:** Participants highlighted the need for continued and increased collaboration with national stakeholders to ensure readiness in future emergency telecommunications emergencies.

Expanding ETC preparedness services and activities

The survey asked responders what additional ETC activities they require to better support preparedness measures and where (respondents were given an open-ended option):

- **Develop bilateral agreements**: Respondents proposed the development of standing agreements with relevant government departments and national providers to increase countries' emergency telecommunications preparedness and response capabilities. This includes regulating the provision of free or fixed-price messaging services from national providers following a disaster and setting up disaster hotlines. Such agreements would avoid unnecessary duplication efforts by the response community and would bypass the need to renegotiate the provision of such services during each emergency response.

- **Consolidate ties with NDMOs**: The creation of a group for Pacific NDMOs on ETC topics was suggested to strengthen the working relationship between government disaster management offices and the ETC.

- **Training and simulation**: Multiple participants would appreciate the expansion of the ETC's training and simulation programme to inform preparedness and response planning across the PICs.

- **Building local capacity and infrastructure**: The strengthening of telecommunications tools and networks was proposed, including through VHF, HF and satellite phone equipment, the distribution of operation manuals and increased engagement with national ETC stakeholder groups to plan, develop and test Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

ETC Information Management (IM) activities

Respondents were asked to rate how useful they find ETC IM products in terms of supporting preparedness and information sharing activities.

The findings indicate that an average of **95%** of respondents find ETC IM products useful.

The survey highlighted:

- **100%** usefulness rating on Situation Reports (**SitReps**).

- **100%** usefulness rating on **infographics**.

- **100%** usefulness rating on **factsheets**.

- **80%** usefulness rating on **dashboards**.

Suggestions to improve the usefulness of ETC IM products included:

- ***Advocacy and awareness:*** Several respondents stated that they became aware of the ETC website and ETC IM products through this survey and stated an intention to follow this information more closely. On the ETC side, the mailing list for ETC IM products will be consolidated to include as many relevant national and regional stakeholders as possible.

- ***Country profiles:*** One participant suggested completing and/or expanding the information provided on the ETC website on telecommunications infrastructure and network coverage under 'Country Profiles'.

Additional Feedback

The ETC asked survey respondents to identify the main strengths and weaknesses of ETC preparedness activities in the PICs. The feedback has been summarized as follows:

Weaknesses/requests:

- ***Advocacy and awareness***: As highlighted in other sections, participants voiced the need to advocate for greater visibility of ETC preparedness activities to promote awareness and accessibility.

- ***Country-specific presence***: There is a need to work with specific PICs – including PNG – to establish and develop an active national ETC group.

- ***Prioritizing preparedness***: Respondents recognize the competing priorities of the response community which can contribute to low implementation of emergency telecommunications preparedness activities. There is a need in some PICs to re-commit to ETC preparedness.

- ***Coordination***: Some participants would like to see improvements made in the area of regulating the coordination of ETC preparedness activities and in the development of national and regional platforms for preparedness and response planning.

- ***Technical capacity***: Respondents in some PICs are concerned they lack back-up telecommunications networks in case of emergency and would appreciate increased technical support from the ETC.

Strengths:

- ***Emergency response***: Several respondents provided positive comments on the strength of the support provided by the ETC during emergency response.

- ***Networking and coordination space:*** Participants highlighted the gap filled by the ETC in bringing together coordinated preparedness efforts between NDMOs, the humanitarian community and development partners as well as in defining preparedness roles provided by these various stakeholders and ETC partners.

- ***Localized efforts***: Some participants recognize and appreciate the ETC's efforts to strengthen emergency telecommunications preparedness and existing infrastructure at a national level to suit country's needs.

ETC response and analysis

To provide the required support for the COVID-19 response in 2020, the ETC worked with partners as part of the Joint Incident Management Team (JIMT) to develop interim guidance for ministries of health on using digital tools and systems for healthcare service delivery. This involved supporting 17 PICs to plan and launch national COVID-19 helplines including Fiji's '158' toll-free short-code number call centre. The ETC also provided technical support to equip Health Emergency Operations Centres (HEOCs). The response to COVID-19 saw a surge in the need to provide emergency telecommunications support to up to 21 PICs – the ETC had previously supported 12 PICs as part of its preparedness activities. In 2021, the ETC will continue to support the COVID-19 response in PICs.

While this survey aims to evaluate preparedness services and activities delivered by the ETC, it is acknowledged that the survey was also used as a feedback tool to highlight gaps and the absence of an ETC presence across the PICs, specifically in the provision of support in the COVID-19 response. The ETC will continue to build its capacity through national, regional and international networks.

The ETC also acknowledges the challenges experienced throughout 2020 in the delivery of in-person activities such as training and simulations, technical assessments and reinforcing infrastructure. In early 2020, the ETC facilitated two national workshops in the Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), which led to the formation of new national emergency telecommunications coordination mechanisms. No further workshops could take place due to restrictions imposed because of COVID-19. In 2021, the ETC will strive to mitigate the impact of the ongoing restrictions on movement of staff and equipment by engaging more closely (yet remotely) with national ETC stakeholders to build national capacity.

Next Steps

The ETC is taking all feedback received into consideration to improve its preparedness services and activities in the Pacific. The challenges reported by respondents will be analysed and included in the ETC workplan for the Pacific as appropriate, including the need to promote ETC preparedness services and activities more widely, provide regular coordination meetings, increase training and simulation opportunities (when the COVID-19

pandemic allows), strengthen country-specific relationships and support and explore options to develop inter-sectoral groups and agreements.

This report will be shared with survey participants and invitees, the global ETC partnership network and the World Food Programme (WFP) Pacific office based in Fiji as regional lead of the ETC. The report will also be published on the ETC website, which is accessible to the wider public.

All information related to the ETC preparedness activities in the Pacific can be found on the ETC website: www.etcluster.org/preparedness/preparedness-pacific-islands

For more information, or to be added or deleted from the mailing list, please contact: Pacific.ETC@wfp.org

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