



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

WFP Philippines: GECS-MOVE

Global Innovation in Telecoms Disaster Response

The Philippines is prone to natural calamities as it is situated in the west of the Pacific Ring of Fire. It remains on top of the list of countries suffering most from extreme weather events and sustaining weather-related losses — in 2018 and over a 20-year period from 1998 to 2018, according to the Global Climate Risk Index 2020.

When major disasters like typhoons or earthquakes strike, communications systems immediately go down. This is a blindfold for emergency responders who need to know where and how to direct urgent assistance.

THE 'GECS-MOVE' PROJECT

Through the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT)'s project, the Government Emergency Communications System – Mobile Operations Vehicle for Emergencies (or GECS-MOVE), a total of six high-tech, mobile, emergency telecommunications units have been designed and prepositioned in major disaster-prone areas of the Philippines, ready to be rapidly deployed closer to the disaster zone at immediate notice to re-establish telecommunications. These uniquely designed units, the first to be created by WFP globally, are able to quickly communicate critical information to frontline rescuers such as disaster coordinators and health/welfare responders.

In December 2018, WFP signed a ground-breaking five-year partnership agreement with the Philippine Government through DICT to launch the GECS-MOVE project.

Completed in May 2021, the project's first phase was funded primarily by the Philippine Government (US\$4 million; PHP 200 million) with additional financial support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and WFP.

In line with DICT's mandate to assist in information dissemination through telecommunications to reduce the impact of disaster-related shocks, this unique partnership has drawn on the expertise of WFP's global Emergency Telecommunications (ETC) team.

WFP'S EXPERTISE

As the world's largest humanitarian organization and the global lead of the United Nations Emergency Telecommunications Cluster, WFP responds to the most complex and largest disasters globally, where telecommunication interruptions present one of the most immediate first challenges.

WFP's specialized division, FITTEST (Fast Information Technology and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team), has been deeply involved in the design and operationalization of this project.

FITTEST is a group of humanitarian responders based in Dubai who deploy when emergencies strike to establish and restore information and communications technology services. FITTEST is no stranger to the Philippines, having deployed 53 international WFP staff and partners during the Typhoon Haiyan Response.

Each GECS-MOVE unit is composed of the following:

1. HUB – a self-contained mobile operations and coordination center housed in a customized heavy-duty truck equipped with an integrated communications system where a crew of emergency telecommunications experts can live and sleep.

2. DISPATCH - a self-sustained connectivity hub installed in a heavy-duty off-road vehicle which helps extend the reach of the Hub into disaster zone.

3. OFF-ROAD - motorcycle equipped with communications equipment. This supports the crew in reaching deeper into remote and inaccessible terrain, (e.g. mountain tops) with very high frequency (VHF) equipment.

4. TWO HEAVY-DUTY DRONES to further extend connectivity.

Re-establishing telecommunications after Typhoon Rai

Ahead of the 2021 typhoon season, the six MOVE sets were strategically dispatched across the country, ready to be immediately deployed closer to the disaster zones at first notice ahead of a natural hazard.

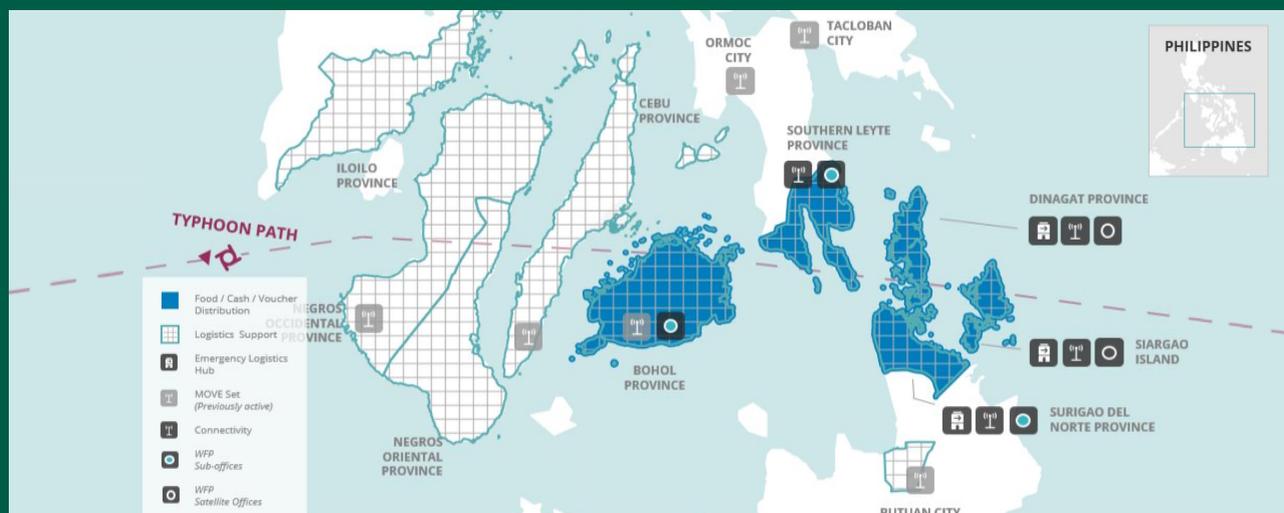
When Typhon Rai (local name Odette) – the strongest typhoon of 2021 – was approaching the south of the country in December 2021, two MOVE units were dispatched on the typhoon forecasted track in Maasin City and Surigao City. As soon as the typhoon had passed, teams who had accompanied the MOVE sets got systems up and working, thus re-establishing critical telecommunications for first responders in these areas. The teams received vital technical and on-ground support from a WFP telecoms engineer.

After the Typhoon had passed, other MOVE sets were deployed from pre-positioned bases to provide connectivity services in, Alegria (Cebu Province), Butuan City, and Carmen (Bohol Province).

In Surigao City, the two MOVE sets were the first means to bring connectivity to the government coordination and response since the communications infrastructure was damaged by the typhoon.

With telecommunications down across Mindanao and the Visayas, the four MOVE sets provided a vital communications link between government agencies, including a relay to Siargao Island and Dinagat.

The operation was hugely successful. The units indirectly helped over 650,000 people receive relief and paved the way to recovery. It helped bring connectivity to over 30 crucial sites after the storm passed, which was used by workers and leaders from the government to connect emergency operations centers on the ground, UN, Non-Governmental Organizations, and the community themselves.



Agencies who used the services included the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Office of Civil Defense (OCD), the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), DICT, the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, the Provincial Government, the Coastguard, the Navy, the Armed Forces of the Philippines, and the Philippine National Police.

ENSURING RAPID DEPLOYMENT AND MOBILITY

The mobility of the units means that ICT resources become agile able to be deployed or moved to localities where they are needed the most, depending on the disaster at hand. These enhance the capacity of the Government to act efficiently and effectively during life-saving interventions.

Ahead of the 2021 typhoon season, the 6 GECS-MOVE units have been prepositioned in the following locations:

1. Luzon Cluster 2 — Batangas City (deployed May 2021)
2. Visayas Cluster 2 — Tacloban City (May 2021)
3. Mindanao Cluster 2 — Butuan City (May 2021)
4. Luzon Cluster 2 — Mabalacat City (June 2021)
5. Davao Region — Davao del Sur (December 2019)
6. National Capital Region — Quezon City (May 2021)

SUSTAINABILITY: MOVE SETS DIRECTLY MANAGED BY THE GOVERNMENT

More than 30 highly specialized technical and capacity training courses have been conducted from June 2019 to March 2021 to train DICT personnel and disaster responders on the utilization of the GECS-MOVE units.

Part of the training and information dissemination campaign included a visit to WFP's FITTEST office in Dubai and a national information caravan in several regions in the Philippines to train local government units and first responders on how to operate the GECS-MOVE units.

MINI MOVE: STRENGTHENING EMERGENCY RESPONSE

WFP, in partnership with USAID, also designed and strategically positioned telecommunications trailer vehicles within WFP storage facilities in Mabalacat, Pampanga and Polloc, Maguindanao. These state-of-the-art vehicles called the mini-MOVE are an extension of the ongoing GECS-MOVE project.

Each mini-MOVE is equipped with its own VSAT (Very Small Aperture Terminal) and microwave connectivity, ensuring effective communication capabilities in remote or disaster-affected areas. These units can be towed by regular pickups or 4x4 vehicles, making them highly mobile and accessible in challenging terrains.



NEXT STEPS

DICT and WFP have commenced the second phase of the GECS-MOVE project (US\$3.2 million plus US\$1 million from WFP) which includes the building of four additional sets with enhanced specifications and design and a focus on soft skills training, including for new staff, to support DICT's recent mandate to lead the national ETC cluster.

WFP thanks its partners and donors, USAID and DICT, for their support and collaboration on this project.



Scan the QR code to learn more about WFP's work in the Philippines:

