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Practical Experiences Building A Government-Led CCE Platform In Vanuatu

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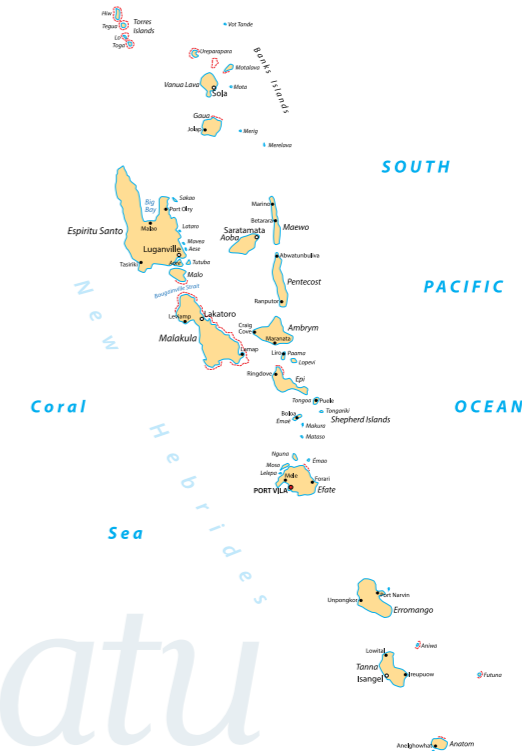




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CASE STUDIES



Vanuatu



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Practical Experiences Building A Government-Led CCE Platform In Vanuatu

Using information to save lives - a case study at the 2-year programme midpoint

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.

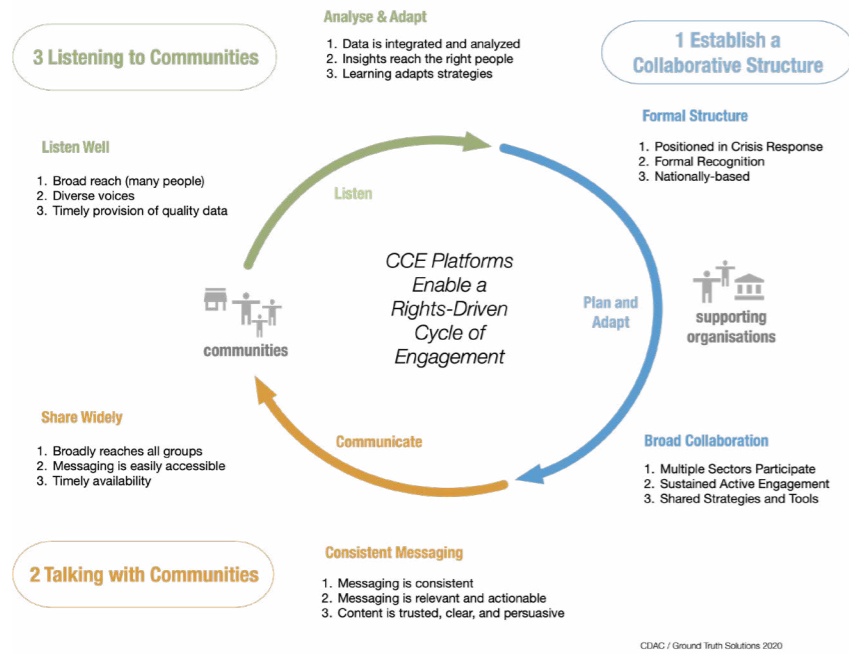
Building effective CCE capabilities is particularly important in Vanuatu, a Pacific nation spanning 83 islands, which is vulnerable to natural disasters ranging from tropical cyclones and volcanic eruptions, to disease and agricultural threats. 2020 has been a particularly challenging year for its 300,000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

Over the last two years, 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.

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

The Three Capabilities Underlying a CCE Platform



This initiative is a systems-level innovation that pursues two big 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 a snapshot of the programme’s systems building efforts at the two-year mid-point of the current initiative. To understand the scope of this vision it will be helpful to begin by exploring these dual goals more deeply. Then it will be possible to look closely at the varied paths of action needed to build out a complex national CCE system.

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 a non-trivial requirement since each of the elements involves different skills, tools and stakeholders, and has different measures of success (see diagram).

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 has 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 is the scope of the challenge undertaken in Vanuatu. Each of the capabilities needed to create a cycle of engagement (Speaking, Listening, Adapting, Preparing, Sharing, and Acting) requires its own form capability building across many different stakeholders.

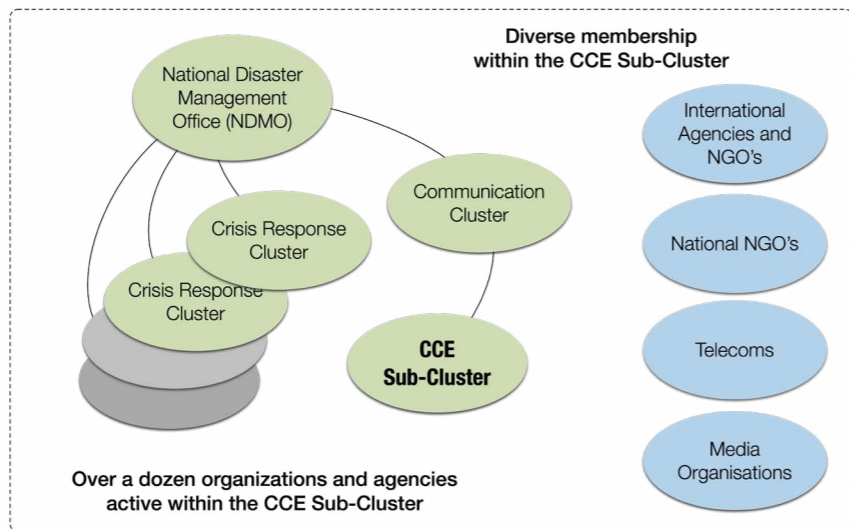
With so many moving parts, it is important to see this work as an interconnected system, rather than a series of independent tasks. The resulting “platform” is designed to bring together the varied elements needed to generate timely content, communicate through multiple channels, collect insights from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

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





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



Establishing a sustainable platform

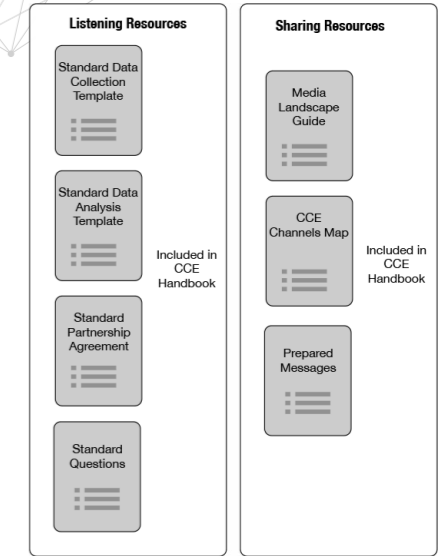
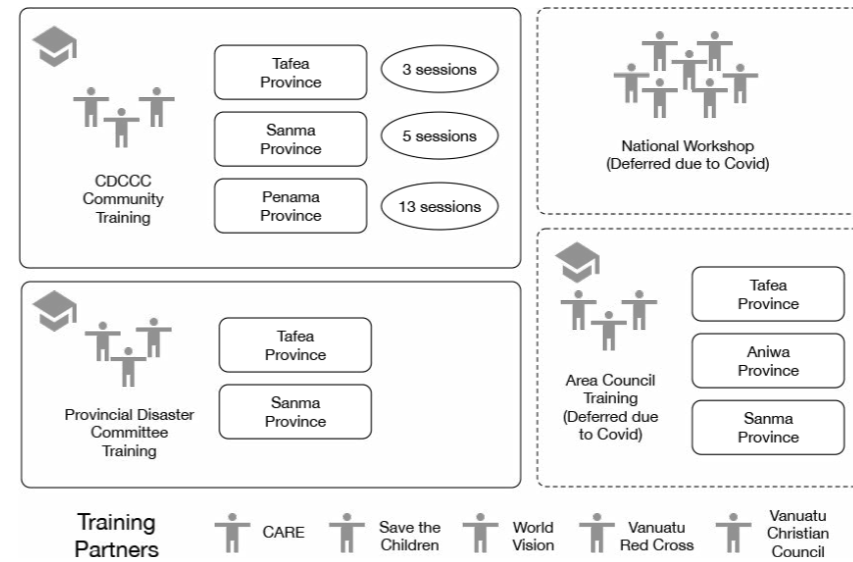
It might be expected that technology would be at the core of a communication "platform." While technology does play a part, the foundation of Vanuatu's communication work is rooted in people and organisations.

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.

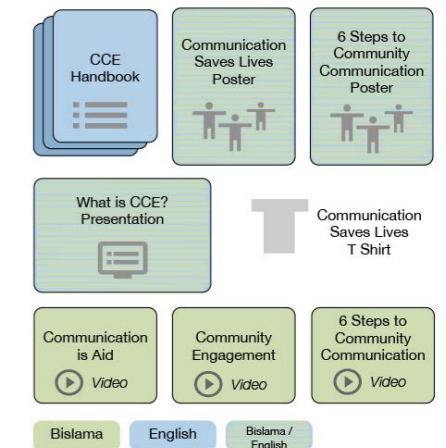
The platform seeks to extend the reach of information delivery and feedback by bringing together the government's official disaster response community communications channel with the broader national response coordinating system. The new CCE sub cluster has been set up within the government's National 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 has not been 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 a telecom providers and media channels.

Multi-level engagement



CCE Resource Pack



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 platform is seen as an ongoing programme, which can be continually extended and improved. As the third year begins, Community Feedback Forms and Community Feedback Response templates will be distributed among partner organisations with their use piloted on Pentecost Island as part of the Tropical Cyclone Harold response. Plans are also being put into place to create an online CCE resources hub on the NDMO website which should provide a way to share and coordinate information as well as provide access to tools.

Training in the art of engagement

It's common wisdom that 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.

It was recognised that a sustainable and wide-reaching training programme shouldn't be built on standalone efforts by the CCE programme. As a result, 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, as well as providing provincial level training in two provinces.

These initial training programmes have provided an opportunity to build and test a CCE Resource Pack that included both the CCE Handbook as well as presentations, videos and posters that were prepared in the Bislama language. This Resource Pack provided an opportunity to empower additional local instructors, enabling even further reach through a train the trainers strategy.





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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.

Looking forward, there will be opportunities to more broadly share these insights as part of a National CCE Workshop (which was initially delayed as a result of COVID-19). Further surveys are also planned, providing a chance to leverage additional data gathering tools such as RapidPro.

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.

As mentioned earlier, 2020 has seen two major crises in Vanuatu: Tropical Cyclone Harold and the COVID-19 pandemic. These both resulted in activations of the CCE subcluster, where multiple stakeholders collaborated on the design and execution of new communication strategies.

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. The platform has also allowed for the embrace of communication opportunities, drawing on additional collaborators who could contribute to the challenge of the moment.



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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. Fortunately, this need for ongoing commitment has been recognised by both the programme sponsors (DFAT) and the key stakeholders. The initial two-year initiative has been extended another two years.

This has emerged as a strongly Vanuatu-based initiative, with the national government and local institutions providing the foundation of the CCE platform. Increasingly, staff positions for the platform-building effort are working within government offices.

While the COVID-19 crisis and TC Harold have delayed some in-person platform building activities during Year 2, the current hands-on application of the platform has provided valuable practical insights and lessons. Looking forward, additional work is planned across the programme. As previously mentioned, work is underway to pilot and then more broadly implement feedback mechanisms, as well as making CCE resources available online.

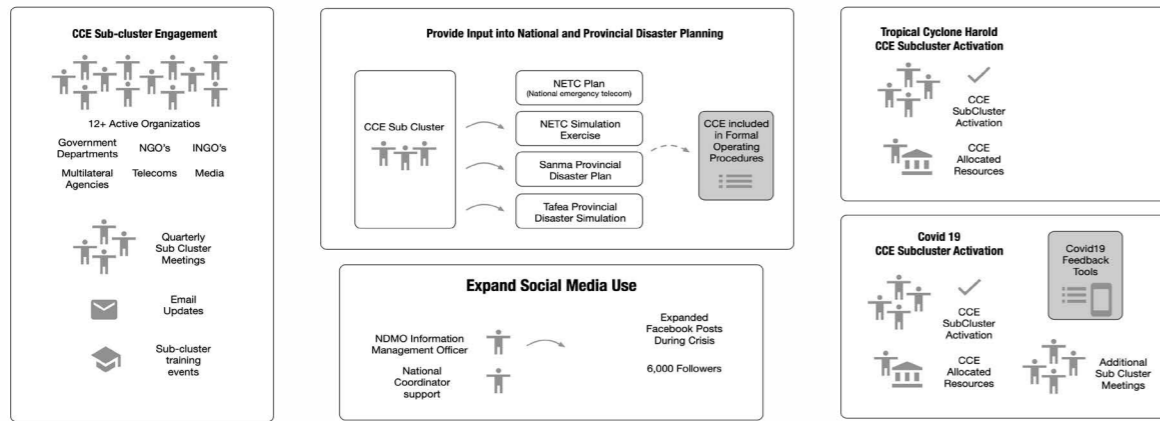
While pandemic risks continue, there have been opportunities for the CCE sub-clusters to collaborate with the Ministry of Health. As risks associated with the pandemic are managed, a National Workshop will bring together a wide range of stakeholders for training as well as to collaborate on plans to integrate CCE into the work of all organisations and clusters.

There are also opportunities to expand the focus of CCE efforts to engage more deeply in recovery work. The Office of the Prime Minister is currently leading initiatives surrounding the National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF). Effective feedback and communication with affected populations can make a substantial contribution to this work.

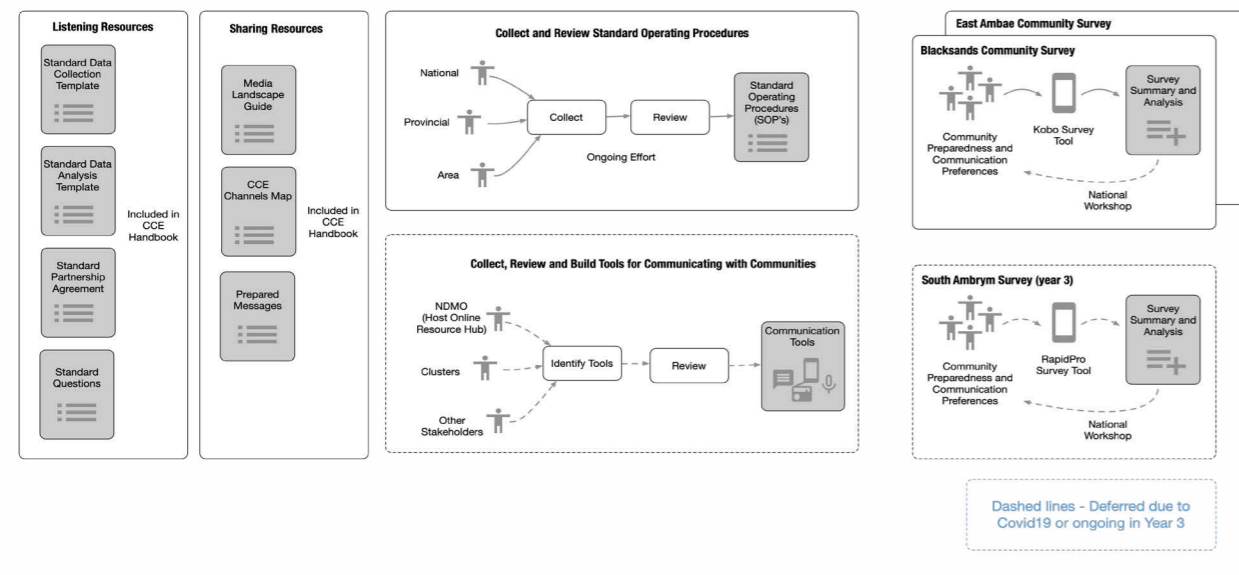
This case study was prepared and written by independent consultant Dan McClure, in collaboration with the Vanuatu team.

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

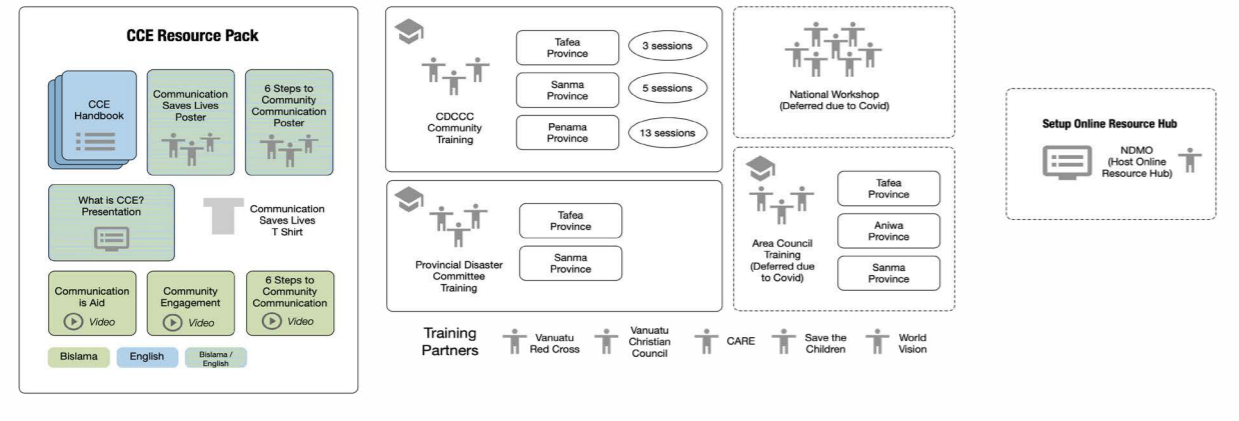
Platform Setup and Application



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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