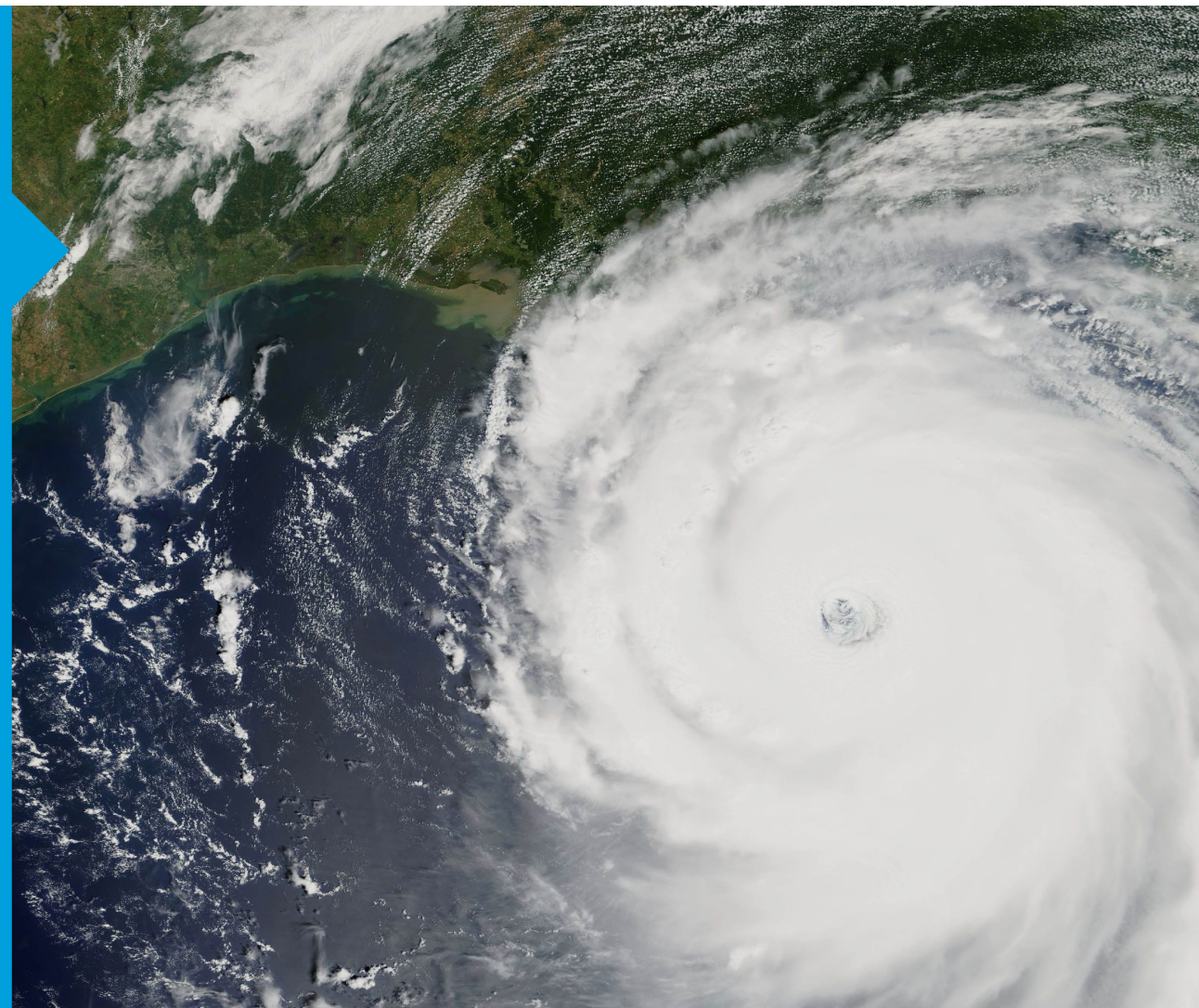**ITUWebinars**

Multi-stakeholder forum on the role of telecommunication/ICTs for disaster management and risk reduction for the Americas

14 - 16 September 2021

http://itu.int/go/TQTN

Event Overview

The Online Workshop on the Role of Telecommunications/ICTs for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management for the Americas, which took place from 14 to 16 September 2021, presented and discussed how ICT solutions and digital technologies can be used for disaster management and risk reduction. This event also considered the importance of gender inclusion on the use of ICTs for disaster management, the benefits of emerging technologies for risk reduction, the significance of early warning for early action, the Tampere Convention, and how simulation exercises can help in becoming more resilient to natural hazards. During the workshop, participants and panelists had the opportunity to exchange experiences, views and best practices in the use of modern technologies for humanitarian purposes.

Session Summary

Session 1 focused on the critical role that ICTs play in the overall disaster management cycle, including the work that ITU is carrying out through its Study Groups, particularly the ITU-D Study Question which focuses on *Utilizing telecommunications/information and communication technologies for disaster risk reduction and management.* Speakers shared lessons learned from the recent emergencies, including Haiti, and others that have taken place in Central and South America. Panelists highlighted the importance of using ICTs to collect, analyze, and correlate data in order to develop strategies that deal with highly susceptible situations, especially as climate change increases the vulnerability of many regions.

Session 2 focused on the importance of developing National Emergency Telecommunication Plans (NETPs) to facilitate disaster management at a national level through a multi-stakeholder approach. Speakers shared best practices and benefits of NETP adoption in Dominica, Ecuador, and the Eastern Caribbean Region. The group emphasized the significance of bringing all stakeholders together when developing and implementing the NETP. A clear-defined responsibility and coordination mechanisms between different parties are critical in ensuring a fast response in the aftermath of disasters.

Session 3 on the Tampere Convention emphasized the importance of having in place importation procedures to facilitate the deployment of telecommunication equipment in a timely manner. Speakers shared lessons learned in equipment importation and national coordination during recent emergencies. It was highlighted that importation also involves landing rights and transmission licenses, permissions to operate telecoms equipment. Speakers underlined that it is critical to involve all agencies and work together with the customs administrations when developing importation plans and other national strategies. This should also include plans to return equipment once support to the country is no longer provided.

Session 4 on the importance of early warning systems addressed the significance of the Common alerting Protocol (CAP), an ITU standard for exchanging emergency alerts and public warnings over all kinds of ICT networks. Speakers shared experiences from Mexico which is building up a regulatory framework to implement the CAP for delivering alerts to end-users The US formally adopted the CAP and implemented the Integrated Public Alert and warning system Open Platform (IPAWS-PEN) which is used to deliver all type of alerts and early warnings to end-users in a timely manner. Speaker from the Caribbean Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology highlighted the importance of having consistent warning messages and simultaneous dissemination and underlined that it is critical to have a multi-sectoral approach, to ensure the collection of trusted data and information.

Session 5 on the Priority and Importance of Drills and Exercises to National Emergency Telecommunications Planning discussed the benefits of developing simulations to become more resilient to disasters. Speakers from the Dominican Republic, Lumen, and Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) shared insights on how simulation exercises are being used to

evaluate the existing ICT systems and technologies. Discussions also demonstrated coordination mechanisms between different authorities and first responders on the ground, and how these exercises help to provide a faster response when disasters strike. During the discussion, speakers suggested that it is important to start from mapping the current vulnerability profile, the needs of the community, and the available resources, in order to identify and improve existing connectivity gaps. Undertaking the exercise is not enough, and the real value of exercises comes in the evaluation phase, where all gaps are identified, and lessons are learned to point out possible improvements.

Session 6 focuses on New Technologies for Disaster Risk Reduction. The Disaster Connectivity Map (DCM), a new mapping platform under development, was presented in the session. The DCM makes available a live map provides information on the status of network connectivity during times of disaster. The maps can provide real-time information on the coverage and quality of connectivity to help identify communication gaps and support decision-making on where and when to deploy resources to restore communication services in the aftermath of disaster. The session also demonstrated the use of WinLink, a network of amateur radio and authorized government-licensed stations that provide worldwide radio email using radio pathways where the internet is not present. This network has some advantages with respect to other traditional systems since it can deliver alerts and warnings to places with no ICT connectivity or services.

Session 7 on the Importance of Partnerships for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) addressed the rationale for multi-stakeholder partnerships for risk reduction and disaster resilience. It presented discussions on how commitment to collaborative efforts can support the provision of different technologies for disaster response at a national, regional, and worldwide level which can improve the humanitarian assistance to those communities who are most affected. Partnering with public, private, and academic institutions can support the development of new projects that involve different stakeholders and organizations to use technologies to deliver early warning alerts.

Session 8 addressed the importance of gender equality in the use of ICTs for disaster management. The session unpacked the intersectionality between gender, ICT, and disaster management. While connectivity is a lifeline during emergencies, there is a gender gap in accessing the ICTs. The speakers discussed the factors that lead to the gendered disaster vulnerabilities and perpetuate the gender digital divide, and the actions that could be taken to improve gender inclusion. Several case examples were presented, including as building capacity, using satellites to facilitate education, and breaking the social and cultural barriers for women.

The three-day event was attended by 68 participants from the Americas region. We encourage you to view the event recording, which is available here on the event website.