

Simulations and their use in the humanitarian sector*

El uso de las simulaciones en el sector humanitario

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Simulación; Sector humanitario; Capacidades; Habilidades.

RESUMEN Las simulaciones pueden ser una herramienta clave para el sector humanitario. Ofrecen la oportunidad de desarrollar las habilidades de un equipo y comprobar la eficacia de los planes de contingencia y procedimientos. Estar bien preparados puede reducir el impacto de un desastre. Los simulacros son una oportunidad única para construir relaciones de confianza que pueden ser la diferencia entre el éxito o el fracaso de una coordinación.

KEYWORDS

Simulation; Humanitarian sector; Capabilities; Skills.

ABSTRACT Simulations can be a key tool in the humanitarian sector. They offer humanitarian managers an opportunity to develop staff skills and capacity, test procedures and contingency plans. Being well prepared for an emergency can reduce the impact of a disaster. Simulations are a unique chance for relationship and trust building which can be the difference between failed and successful coordination.

MOTS CLÉS

Simulation; Secteur humanitaire; Capacités; Compétences.

RÉSUMÉ Les simulations peuvent devenir un instrument essentiel dans le secteur humanitaire. Elles offrent aux gestionnaires humanitaires une opportunité d'améliorer les compétences et les capacités du personnel, et tester l'efficacité

* This article initially appeared on the PaxSims blog. PaxSims is devoted to the development and effective use of games and simulation-based learning concerning issues of conflict, peacebuilding, and development in fragile and conflict-affected states, as well as to the policy application of gaming and simulation techniques. To see the full case study report in detail please visit this link: <http://www.ecbproject.org/resources/library/416-the-ecb-project-case-study-simulating-the-worst-to-prepare-the-best-a-study-of-humanitarian-simulations-and-their-benefits>

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des procédures d'essai et des plans d'urgence. Être bien préparé pour un cas d'urgence peut réduire les répercussions des catastrophes. Les simulations sont une chance exceptionnelle pour renforcer les relations et la confiance de l'équipe, et à la fin ceci peut distinguer l'échec ou réussi d'une opération.

The Emergency Capacity Building Project (The ECB Project)¹ was a collaboration among six of the world's largest International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and was specifically designed to improve the skills and competencies of the national staff of the six participating agencies and other stakeholders. This skills improvement process is called "capacity building". The ECB Project was implemented over a decade, between 2004 and 2014, to build the capacity of national staff to carry out faster and more effective emergency responses.

There are many approaches to the capacity building of national staff which the ECB Project has used. This includes training on a specific standard or tool, hosting learning workshops or learning events, and organising real time evaluations, after action reviews and simulations.

Simulations and drills are used in all walks of life to test and prepare specific skills and competencies—whether it is for the emergency services, health professionals, military or airline pilots—and the humanitarian sector is no different. Simulations provide an excellent opportunity to build relationships, test individual competencies and provide a safe learning space for participants to try out new behaviours or approaches.

The ECB Project published a collaborative simulation case study with other key stakeholders in the humanitarian sector, which yielded some interesting conclusions.

Perhaps of most significance was the implicit finding that simulations are increasingly recognized by NGOs, the United Nations (UN), donors, governments and the broader humanitarian community as a highly effective and engaging way of increasing disaster preparedness and building staff capacity.

As a result significant progress has been made in the humanitarian community in the way that simulations have been resourced, prioritized and used as a preparedness tool from the creation of the ECB Project's Simulation Administrators Guide, to the

¹ The Emergency Capacity Building Project was a collaboration between six of the world's largest International Non-Governmental organisations CARE, CRS, Mercy Corps, Oxfam, Save the Children and World Vision. The purpose was to improve the speed, quality and effectiveness of emergency response through targeted staff capacity building initiatives, and organisational development.

development of the United Nations Inter-Agency Emergency Simulation guidebook (UN-IAES) and the more recently drafted Local Government simulation piloted by the Philippine National Disaster Management Agency with assistance from the World Food Programme.

In addition, the United Nations Inter Agency Standing Committee (UN-IASC) developed a roster of trained simulation experts which is available for use by others within the humanitarian community.

These are all good examples of how the sector is increasingly professionalising, codifying and sharing resources and guidance on simulation design and implementation. The most interesting finding from a human resource perspective was that across the board and without fail, simulations present an excellent opportunity for relationship and trust building. Relationships and trust are so critical in humanitarian responses and can be the difference between failed and successful coordination, and in turn can determine the ultimate success or otherwise of the overall response. The fundamental objective of the simulation in a humanitarian context is to ultimately pre-position relationships, in the same way that I/NGOs might try to pre-position vital stocks of mosquito nets, water purification equipment or sanitation kits.

The study found that there were four common reasons or objectives for holding a simulation:

- 】 To identify the skills of an individual staff member that need to be strengthened before an actual disaster occurs.
- 】 To develop and practice preparedness and contingency plans.
- 】 To develop and practice organisational preparedness and relationships.
- 】 To build organisational capacity.

And while the stakeholders and organisations involved across the six simulations varied greatly (for example from a simulation held in Madagascar at the national level involving national government officials, UN officials and other key stakeholders, to a simulation held in a disaster vulnerable community in the Philippines, with community members and local NGO staff) the study revealed that successful simulation designs shared four common key elements:

- 】 Trained and skilled facilitators.
- 】 Injects² to help move the fictional scenario along and to test different components of planning, preparation, and coordination.

² A “direct inject” is a stimulus or catalyst provided by the simulation administrator to provoke a response or reaction from simulation participants. Direct injects can come from e-mails, telephone calls, situation reports, disaster data, role players and actors. An “indirect inject” is catalysed by participants following their preparedness plans, contingency plans or standard operating procedures

- » A debriefing session held after completing the simulation where the key lessons from the event are captured.
- » The development of an action plan, (individual, organisational or institutional) that outlines how the capacity or skills gaps identified during the simulation and debrief, will be addressed.

The study also revealed four common lessons about implementing successful simulations.

- » Choosing the right simulation for the context (i.e. simulating a cyclone response in a cyclone vulnerable location helped to provide realism),
- » Ensuring the right people and stakeholders are in the room,
- » That good planning improves a simulation
- » And that management commitment and appropriate budgetary support are also key factors in a successful simulation

Table 1. Summary of the six simulations

	United Nations High Commission for Refugees	National Government of Madagascar	All levels of Government in the Philippines	International NGOs and the ECB Project	Filipino Community	Harvard Humanitarian Initiative
Aim	To improve individual skills	To test internal and external coordination capacity	To practice preparedness and build local capacity	To improve individual skills and organizational preparedness	To improve individual skills and foster a culture of community preparedness	To improve individual skills
Type	Skill drills and functional	Table top	Functional	Functional	Functional	Functional, skill drills and table top
Participants	Typically 40 UN / INGO staff	UN, government, INGO, Red Cross, Private sector staff	Typically 100+ government, INGO and UN staff	Typically 30-40 INGO, Red Cross, government staff	About 80 INGO staff and community members	Typically 100 graduate and professional students as well as NGO / UN staff
Location	Sweden, Germany or Norway	Madagascar	Philippines	Bangladesh, Bolivia, Kenya, Uganda, Indonesia, Niger	Philippines	Massachusetts, USA
Scenario	Various	Cyclone and floods	Cyclones	Various	Cyclone	Various
Injects	Multi-media, video, electronic, written, verbal	Multi-media, video, electronic, written, verbal	Multi-media, video, electronic, written, verbal	Multi-media, electronic, written, verbal	Written and verbal	Multi-media, video, electronic, written, verbal
Duration	7-10 days	1.5 days	1.5 days	1.5 days	1.5 days	2.5 days
Outcome	Staff prepared for numerous outcomes likely to be faced while on deployment	Revision of national contingency plan	Testing of operational procedures, contingency plans and coordination	Better prepared staff and improved contingency plans	Staff leadership development and increased community awareness of disaster risks	Participants prepared for actual response phase

Source: Hockaday, D.; Barnhardt, D.; Staples, D.; Sitko, P. and Bulten, O. ECB Project case study. *Simulating the worst to prepare the best: A study of humanitarian simulations and their benefits*. London: Inter-Agency Working Group on Emergency Capacity, May 2013. You can find it at: <http://www.ecbproject.org/simulations>

For managers within the humanitarian community there are valid concerns about increasing frequency of disasters³ and growing impact on human life and economic systems⁴. This means that being well prepared for an emergency response in a timely and effective manner is even more critical for reducing the impact of the disaster, saving lives, and ensuring a smoother recovery.

In this respect simulations offer humanitarian managers an excellent tool to develop staff skills and capacity, test procedures and contingency plans, build relationships and trust and bring a greater degree of predictability into humanitarian planning and response.

3 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Session Concept Paper “World Conference on Disaster Reduction,” January 2005, P. 1.

4 Guha-Sapir, D.; Vos, F., Below, R. with Ponserre, S. *Annual Disaster Statistical Review 2011: The Numbers and Trends*, Brussels, CRED, 2012.