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Catholic Relief Services: Information and Communication Technology in Monitoring & Evaluation

by Nguyen Tuan Phong and Ta Thi Hai Yen [Catholic Relief Services]

In February 2015, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Vietnam initiated a new project to support the reintegration and rehabilitation of survivors of accidents involving landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW). With funding from the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA), CRS' Access and Reintegration (A&R) project takes a comprehensive approach to serving the needs of 3,219 survivors of landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) in Quang Binh and Quang Tri provinces. Through collaboration with the Government of Vietnam's provincial Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (DOLISA), CRS provides survivors with access to medical care, rehabilitation, and social and livelihood support services. The key to success has been establishing an effective and functional coordination

system at the local level for referrals, strengthening a network of community-based workers, and supporting families to provide appropriate, home-based care and support. CRS' A&R project creates a network of support that ensures increased access to comprehensive services for survivors and advances their reintegration into society. The A&R Project has established a model for scaling to six affected districts in the targeted provinces and beyond.

Information and Communication Technology, Application Development, and Deployment

To ensure increased efficiency and effectiveness of project monitoring and evaluation activities, CRS has applied Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning



A community-based worker uses digital forms to collect monitoring data in Ham Ninh commune, Quang Ninh district, Quang Binh province.

Photo courtesy of Nguyen Huu Thong/Catholic Relief Services (CRS).

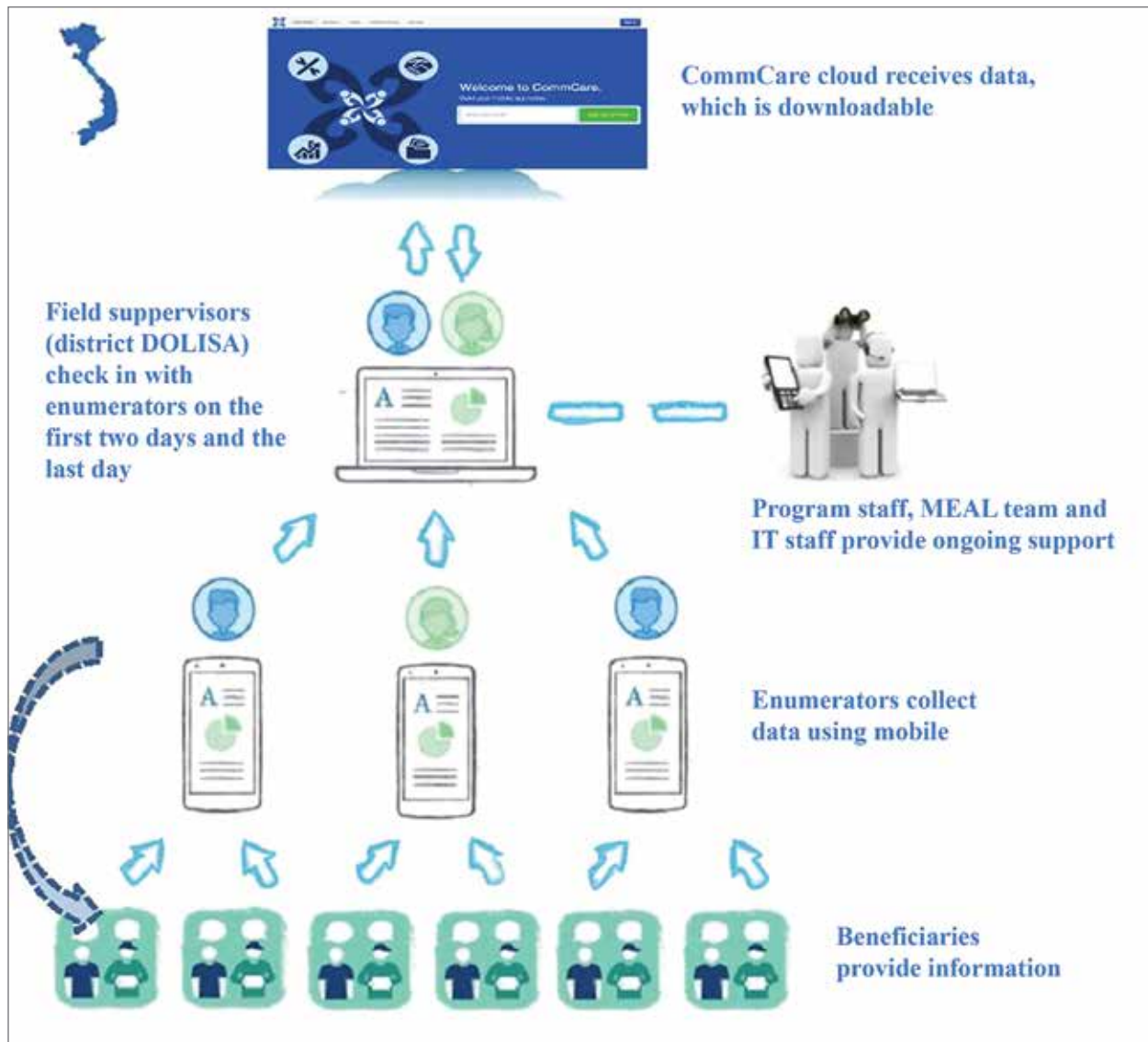


Figure 1. Data management structure.
Figure courtesy of Catholic Relief Services (CRS).

(ICT4MEAL) solutions to collect data for baseline survey as well as for monitoring project implementation. The package of six digital forms, used for data collection in both baseline survey and monitoring activities, was developed by CRS with Dimagi CommCare software running on an Android operating system, then installed in Samsung Galaxy Tablets 3 for data collection.

In order to successfully apply the ICT4MEAL solution, CRS, in close coordination with DOLISA, developed a detailed design and feasible deployment plan. After four months of designing and testing, the digital forms were ready for use in August 2015. CRS trained 110 data collectors and partner staff on how to use mobile devices and digital forms. As

a result, personnel collected data from 3,219 landmine survivors in 98 communes of six target districts in Quang Binh and Quang Tri provinces. Following the baseline survey, 107 community-based workers in Quang Binh province were trained on how to use digital forms to collect monthly monitoring data. They have continued their monthly data collection since March 2016.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

Use of this technology has enhanced the quality, timeliness, and accessibility of collected data. Quality checks are built into the digital forms with an automated skip pattern and data validation check between connected questions, which

contributes to the overall data quality. In addition, required answers must be filled out before moving on to the next question, thus ensuring data completeness.

Data can be collected on the digital forms offline and synchronized to the cloud once an internet connection is available. It can also be accessed by several authorized users at any time. The accessible real-time data assists staff in checking data and fixing errors in a timely manner during data collection and quickly making quality data readily available for analysis and use for decision making.

The ICT4MEAL solution saves a significant amount of time, work, and money compared to a paper-based data collection system. Despite the initial cost of the tablets, CRS saved approximately US\$9,886 by not having to print paper questionnaires and in staff time that would have been needed for data entry and data cleaning. In addition, it also helped shorten the surveys' timespan by about 50 days on data entry, data cleaning, and transport of questionnaires from the field to the CRS office.

Using the Real-time Data for Adjusting Project Activities

Thanks to the real-time data collected on a monthly basis, project decision makers were able to make timely adjustments for project activities as needed. According to the design of the project, landmine survivors only receive financial support for transportation from their home to national standard hospitals. However, from the monitoring data that is disaggregated by each type of service, the project team realized that landmine survivors needed medical support that was not being covered by existing service providers. Using this data, CRS and partners adapted the program activities to provide the necessary medical support for landmine survivors.

In addition, real-time data also helps in monitoring the project's quality. The community-based workers, who are also data collectors, are required to visit landmine survivors on a monthly basis to update their needs into the digital forms and provide appropriate referrals. Since the data is automatically uploaded into the cloud, the project management team can easily track the community-based workers' performance with real-time data. In this way, community-based workers are assessed, and reminders are sent to their supervisors if they have not fulfilled their responsibilities.

Lessons Learned

Since using this ICT4MEAL solution application, CRS has identified a number of lessons learned. Firstly, from the initial planning and designing stages and throughout the life of the

project, close collaboration among relevant staff (program, monitoring, evaluation, and IT) is essential. Each staff has specific expertise that is critical to the application's success. Secondly, planning and preparing before the activity begins is important to ensure all aspects (and potential problems) can be addressed. Finally, close supervision during implementation is necessary to ensure on-the-spot error fixes and the adjustment of plans in a timely manner. The quality of the system has contributed to improving the support that landmine survivors receive in Quang Binh and Quang Tri. ©

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Ta Thi Hai Yen has been with CRS Vietnam since 2007 and is an experienced program manager and specialist in UXO/mine risk education and survivor assistance. She is experienced in participatory assessment, project design, preparation, and management of budgets, results-based reporting, and leading teams. She has successfully managed projects funded by PM/WRA for the past seven years. She is also a graduate of the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery's 2012 Senior Managers' Course in ERW and Mine Action.