

Humanitarian Supply Management System in the Western Pacific Region

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In response to a request of the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) of the government of the Philippines for assistance in humanitarian supply management, the World Health Organization commissioned a consultant to visit the country in June 2003. The objective was to assess the feasibility of strengthening the emergency supply management system through the implementation of SUMA which is a comprehensive information management system developed and implemented by WHO in the Americas.

It was observed that the response mechanism in case of disasters in the Philippines involves many agencies and actors, most of them active in the management and distribution of supplies. There is an absence of an agency-wide computerized stock-management system. The reliance on manual inventory control (cards) is precluding advanced processing and analysis of the data at the agency level as well as complicating the coordinating task of the NDCC to oversee the complex flow of relief supplies directed to a specific emergency situation.

Thus SUMA, because it is a simple and standardized registration and stock control system, will be ideal for the situation in the Philippines. Furthermore, it will serve as an integrated instrument to improve daily management of the flow of supplies (donated or not) in any agency independently of the presence of international donations or even the occurrence of an emergency.

After the consultancy, the Office of Civil Defense, Department of Health, and WHO organized a training committee to start the first activity on SUMA. Thus on 20-24 October 2003, the Humanitarian Supply Management Course was conducted in Manila. The sponsors of the course were the Asian Disaster Reduction Center and the WHO.

Participants of the course included representatives of various line agencies of the government, national NGOs, Asian Disaster Reduction Center, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNDP-Philippines, and the disaster management office of Timor Leste.

With the course evaluation, it was recommended: (1) to expand the training to other regions of the Philippines; (2) to customize the software to agencies' needs and country context; (3) to consider translation to other languages of the region; and (3) to expand the programme to other interested countries in the Western Pacific region.

Aside from strengthening inter-agency/inter-organization cooperation at the country level (Philippines), the activity was a also good example of inter-agency collaboration amongst the various regional offices of the WHO, but also regional humanitarian organizations like the ADRC and UN OCHA.