



2020 GDPC PORTFOLIO REVIEW



Introduction

The GDPC was created in 2012 as a joint initiative between the American Red Cross and the IFRC. Over its 8-year history it has piloted a number of innovative projects and methodologies including the Universal App program, the PrepareCenter knowledge management platform, the WhatNow platform and many others. The use of technology and employment of a light-touch, demand-driven approach has been central to many of these projects' success. At the same time, several projects have seen slowing growth and engagement during the last year and new innovative ideas have been slow to develop.

To ensure the GDPC continues to evolve as a center of innovation within the RCRC network, a more strategic and concerted push is needed to develop new products and services, as well as discontinuing lower-performing ones. In addition, the GDPC could benefit from a wider base of partnerships and funding to increase financial sustainability and inject innovative ideas from outside its current network of partners.

This portfolio review seeks to document the current status of specific GDPC projects as well as the GDPC's involvement in different areas. Outlined below are key initiatives the GDPC is engaged in, as well as more general areas of focus. Under each section, a short overview of the current status is provided followed by an analysis and recommended actions.

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First Aid App Data & Analytics

The First Aid (FA) app launched in 2013 and has steadily grown its audience with more than 6 million end users worldwide and 105 national society partners contextualizing content. National society partners are given access to Google Analytics (GA) for their specific app content (called a “property”) and GDPC is able to access and review all national society app bundle data in GA.

As each NS FA app bundle is shown in a separate property in GA, aggregating data for overall program management and understanding of user behavior is difficult. This complex manual process introduces opportunity for error and difficulty reporting for multiple purposes/audiences, as each request is done manually. Competing priorities and activities of the GDPC team makes it challenging to pull a complete data picture on a regular basis obfuscating access to important decision points. The GDPC has recently engaged a team of volunteers (beginning early 2020) to expand team capacity specifically in the area of data analysis and visualization across all digital tools with a focus on the FA app. So far, this team has been primarily focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and associated data across its tools and services.

Action plan includes:

- 1) Expanding the volunteer team with specific skill in GA, to work from the GDPC KPIs and ensure the appropriate data is being accessed and aggregated as needed.
- 2) Creating reporting exports and dashboards so that app data can be accessed more effectively and efficiently.
- 3) In addition, we will need to employ an appropriate software package or platform to facilitate data visualization and ease of sharing.

We plan to generate an in-depth data analysis for all FA app properties from the launch of the project to the present.





2 Hazard App Retirement

The Multi-Hazard app was launched as part of an OFDA funded project in 2013. Since then the app has scaled to more than 25 countries but has faced challenges in scaling due to technical considerations and availability of compatible alert feeds. In comparison to the First Aid app demand for the Multi-Hazard (HZ) app has not been as high as anticipated with comparatively few national societies utilizing the application. Concerns about the cost effectiveness of maintaining current HZ apps and recurring challenges with alert feed availability and the reliability of alerting in the apps has led to concern about the continuing utility and cost-effectiveness of the app. While the container app transition has lowered monthly support and maintenance costs, it has not had the expected benefit of reducing enhancement costs. The maintenance of the Hazards apps and associated platform is costly, especially in relation to the number of NS utilizing the application.

A comprehensive review of the HZ apps took place in late 2019/early 2020, including:

- 1) Analysis of HZ app analytics across all NS bundles.
- 2) Focus group and individual interview calls with NS focal points.
- 3) Cost-benefit analysis.
- 4) Review of alert and notification data for the past year.
- 5) Review of user reviews and ratings from app stores.
- 6) Analysis of bugs and other issues submitted to the developers specifically related to the HZ app.
- 7) Investigation of available alert feeds capable of linking to the HZ app platform.

Action steps:

- 1) The GDPC is working with the app developer to sunset the Multi-Hazard app. This will be completed by the end of December 2020. The phased retirement approach include detailed communications to national society partners, removing the app from stores, notifying users of impending retirement of the app and signposting to other apps/resources as relevant for each national society, archiving app content, turning off alerting functionality, and ceasing updates to the app.
- 2) Content from the HZ app will be reviewed and, as appropriate, merged into the “Prepare” section of the First Aid app.
- 3) GDPC will work with IFRC and other partners to find other mechanisms to delivery key functionality to end users (i.e. CAP alerts).



3 Common Alerting Protocol

The Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) is an XML-based data standard for exchanging public warnings and emergencies between alerting technologies. CAP allows a warning message to be consistently disseminated simultaneously over many warning systems to many applications, such as Google Public Alerts and Cell Broadcast. CAP increases warning effectiveness and simplifies the task of activating a warning for responsible officials. The GDPC has been the CAP champion within the IFRC network during the last few years. At different CAP related meetings, GDPC staff have presented and represented the wider-IFRC position on behalf of the Secretariat. In addition, GDPC has worked closely with national society partners implementing the Multi-Hazard app to promote and expand the use of CAP formatted alerts.

The forthcoming development and launch of an Alert Hub is in line with IFRC's ambitions to ensure early warning messages reach "last mile" communities and realize the goal that communities everywhere receive timely emergency alerts. Emergency alerts on the IFRC Alert Hub will use the international standard CAP format. With around 14 million volunteers, the IFRC network is present in hundreds of thousands of local communities, reaching more than 160 million people every year with lifesaving and life-changing support. The IFRC at the international level will use its role as the world's largest humanitarian network to amplify and disseminate messages to international actors, including governments, UN agencies and international humanitarian organizations.

As the IFRC takes on the responsibility of managing an Alerthub it is expected that the GDPCs role in championing CAP will shift to the IFRC Secretariat. With the IFRC assuming more of the championing role, the GDPC can focus more on the development of tools and services for the dissemination of alerts. The WhatNow partnership with Google (see below) is an example of how partnerships with the private sector and specific tools can be combined to increase the research of efforts.

Actions:

- 1) Identify opportunities to link the WhatNow service and Public Awareness and Public Education (PAPE) key messages to the CAP.
- 2) In close coordination with the IFRC, provide technical support to NS and MET Offices for the implementation of CAP.
- 3) Develop partnerships with the private sector to increase access to technical support and funding for CAP implementation.



4 WhatNow Service Launch & Next Steps

In 2018, the GDPC introduced the WhatNow Service to increase the dissemination and speed of RCRC National Society key actionable guidance on how community members can safely prepare for and respond to local hazards. National Societies adapt IFRC's public awareness and public education key messages for disaster risk reduction, 'publish' them on the WhatNow portal, and form partnerships with media networks that can access the messages through an open API to broadcast across their platforms. To date, 25 National Societies have published messages and the WhatNow portal and toolkit have been enhanced with features (i.e.: image generator; feedback option) and guidance to facilitate increased engagement.

In August 2020, Google launched WhatNow Messages within their SOS Alerts as 'Safety Tips' across Google Search, Google Maps, and Android's Google apps. National Society uptake in the WhatNow Service has been slower than anticipated. The Google launch will lead to increasing NS participation as (1) it will showcase concrete usage; (2) it will exponentially increase the reach of RCRC messaging; (3) it can be leveraged by National Societies to form new media partnerships.

Actions:

- 1) The GDPC plans to leverage the opportunity presented by Google's launch to increase engagement across the network and with the media in order to reach more people with the service.
- 2) National Societies will be equipped with a promotional plan to leverage the launch amongst national media networks, along with a soon-to-be commissioned partnership building toolkit - addressing a pre-identified challenge of building partnerships with the media to use the service.
- 3) The portal will also be enhanced by allowing for multiple language functionalities and potential sub-regional messaging. On a global level, a promotional plan will be rolled out announcing the Google launch with the anticipation of increased interest from other National Societies.
- 4) Training materials will be created in video format to meet potential high demand. Partnership building on a global level will continue, targeting larger media partners (ie: Weather Channel; Twitter) and networks focused on forecast-based action (ie: REAP). Ultimately, the goal is to target alerting agencies through the CAP Alerting Hub approach, which will allow for wider reach beyond individual media agency usage.

Following these actions, the WhatNow Service will complement RCRC commitment to enhancing early warning and early action by delivering harmonized messages across multiple channels.

5 MICRO Business Content development for Atlas: Ready for Business

Recognizing that small and medium sized enterprises play a crucial role in the economic and social health of a community, the GDPC created the Business Preparedness Initiative to address the preparedness and resilience of these important entities. Composed of the Atlas: Ready for Business mobile app and Workshop-in-a-Box wrap-around tools. The BPI toolkit is currently available in 18 languages for national societies and partner organizations to use to better understand and address the importance of SME preparedness for disasters. Following a successful pilot with the Ugandan Red Cross, the GDPC has worked to expand the availability of the program for national societies interested in the scalable approach that uses a mobile app in reaching vulnerable SMEs. Lessons learned from the Uganda pilot along with additional feedback from national societies has made a strong case for expanding the features to accommodate microbusiness, livelihood and support income-generating activities.

The expansion will be particularly relevant in today's context of COVID-19.

Actions:

- 1) Identified as valuable to National Societies, a gap-analysis of the BPI will be commissioned to provide recommended micro-business content for both Atlas and Workshop-in-a-Box.
- 2) Together with the Livelihoods Center, the GDPC will integrate livelihoods components within BPI and pilot it across five countries in the Latin America region while concurrently implementing it with the French Red Cross in the Caribbean.

The longer-term vision is for nuanced tool enhancements that reach both formal and informal sectors, and a programmatic approach of area-based network building of MSMEs (micro, small, and medium sized enterprises) for future forecast-based financing support.





Strategy for Knowledge Management & Research

The RC/RC network generates a substantial amount of knowledge through research initiatives and the day-to-day implementation of projects. The GDPC offers preparecenter.org. It is a collaborative, user-friendly knowledge-sharing platform available to the global RCRC network and the wider humanitarian community. In FY19, in collaboration with the University of Washington, the GDPC worked to develop visualizations of how information is accessed and used across networks to help inform our knowledge management work. Recent activities to enhance knowledge management include: a complete audit of the resource library (2000+ documents) on PrepareCenter.org to identify relevance for migration to the new website; establishment of the blended learning working group and work plan for the First Aid app, identification of solutions to address user confusion regarding app store configuration, and assist in the development of business requirements for the redevelopment and redesign of the PrepareCenter website. The underlying rationale is to boost peer-to-peer learning, knowledge generation and dissemination.

Next steps are:

- 1) Conduct a knowledge management assessment within the GDPC to examine the current structures and flows, better understand and define the needs, detect gaps in the system, and tailor the GDPC KM framework.
- 2) Refine research strategy and approach focused on outcomes with complementary resources allocated to test and implement research results.



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PrepareCenter Data Analytics

The PrepareCenter.org website, originally launched in 2013, recently underwent a complete redesign and redevelopment, transitioning from a Drupal platform to WordPress. This rebuild allows GDPC to more effectively and efficiently manage content, administer users, and expands capabilities of the site to better serve existing users. Additionally, the development of a “microsite” functionality positions GDPC to host and facilitate RCRC Movement partner content more cost-effectively, particularly in instances where budgetary constraints or project needs prohibit the development of a complete partner website. For example, immediately after the relaunch of PrepareCenter, the site began hosting a COVID-19 Resource Compendium serving the entire RCRC movement with key guidance and resource documents in an easily navigable and editable format.



With the changes in site platform and increased potential for partnerships and microsites, there is additional need for analytics to drive understanding and changes to both content and functionality of the site. To date, GDPC has engaged a small team of volunteers (beginning early 2020) to initiate this effort, starting with the COVID-19 Compendium. However, increased attention and capacity is needed to best make use of the wealth of data available on user engagement with the website to help drive changes.

Next steps are:

- 1) To align website KPIs with available data in Google Analytics and develop timelines for data needs.
- 2) Redirect volunteer efforts to overall website performance once the COVID-19 dashboards are completed.
- 3) Install enhanced data analytics to track specific activities (such as referral clicks, language use, demographics, and searches within microsites).



8 Youth & School Preparedness

Youth preparedness is a cornerstone of RCRC National Society programming and the GDPC reflects this priority through strongly supporting IFRC's school safety file. Historically, GDPC's youth preparedness activities have included a global launch of The Pillowcase Project, coordination and technical support of IFRC's PAPE Key Messages, and co-representation in GADRRRES.

Understanding the increased demand for new tools building capacity in school disaster management and education at scale, the GDPC commissioned research around Immersive Technologies and Digital Games for School Preparedness - with the intent of applying research to new tool development.

With deep technical strength and expertise in school preparedness in the GDPC, there is an opportunity for increased attention to the school safety file and enhanced support to IFRC in alignment with IFRC's Education Strategic Framework as it pertains to preparedness/DRR.



Next steps include:

- 1) Establish a strategic approach with consultations with National Societies to identify needs and gaps within their school safety work.
- 2) Build on legacy and lessons from the Pillowcase project and make efforts to secure funding for implementation using a lighter-touch approach.
- 3) Collaborate with IFRC and Reference centers to identify new funding opportunities that consider new technologies including immersive technology.
- 4) Strengthen good practice sharing within the RC/rc network and support IFRC sharing of evidence through GADRRRES and Preparecenter.org.



9 Protection, Gender, & Inclusion

Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI) has been identified as an area of opportunity for the American Red Cross, most recently in the Community disaster-ready meta-evaluation conducted in early 2020. Looking at good practices and gaps across the broader humanitarian sector, the study identified that “context analysis is insufficient for the protection of people and programs” and it recommended to “make inclusion a reality”. Alongside its peers, the American Red Cross should therefore invest further in context analysis, target activities according to needs and capacities and scale up the education of staff, volunteers and leaders on the specific needs, capacities and vulnerabilities of all groups.

There are opportunities for increased alignment of PGI with GDPC’s work and the Preparedness Team holistically. Particularly when developing new technological tools, an understanding of PGI considerations is necessary to ensure such tools inadvertently contribute to a digital divide across groups.

Next steps are:

- 1) GDPC’s preparecenter.org provides opportunities to promote new tools and guidance throughout the network of practitioners. PGI targets can be set first through discussions with IFRC’s PGI’s team for identified areas of increased support and taking the initial step of further build-out of IFRC’s PGI content on preparecenter.org. The GDPC can furthermore propose preparecenter.org as a central place for PGI discussions - which can include blogs and webinars - in support of IFRC’s PGI team.
- 2) Additionally, the GDPC could propose working with AmCross’ preparedness team and IFRC’s PGI team in development of operational guidance around PGI in preparedness/DRR programming and PGI minimum standards for GDPC tool development.
- 3) Longer term, there is an opportunity for the GDPC to support IFRC’s PGI team around Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and/or Expressions, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) considerations - which is a particular gap and need in wider programming within the humanitarian field. This support could be in potentially establishing an external network to connect and build guidance towards SOGIESC inclusion in disaster management.



10 Stronger Emphasis on Urban & Climate Portfolios

The current trends of accelerated and unplanned urbanization in developing countries are increasing the number of people exposed to the negative impacts of climate change and disasters. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has further amplified the multiple vulnerabilities of urban communities ranging from health to socio-economic impacts and in many places compounded with floods and heatwaves (such as in Bangladesh and India). The GDPC has been supporting the advancement of urban agenda within the IFRC through a full time Urban Advisor since 2018. As a result of these efforts, urban risks and vulnerabilities and our contributions to urban resilience have been recognized as a priority in the IFRC's Strategy 2030.



To respond to these changing risk profiles, the City Heatwave Guide, published by the IFRC under the leadership of IFRC Climate Center and with contributions from GDPC last year, was expanded to include considerations for pandemic situations and a special edition for the RCRC branches. In addition, the GDPC is supporting the German Red Cross, which has recently embarked on a large-scale program to strengthen the capacity of National Societies in responding to humanitarian crises in urban contexts. GDPC has also been working with the Livelihoods Resource Center of the Spanish Red Cross to guide and assist National Societies to alleviate the immense impact of COVID-19 on household economic security and livelihoods of small and micro businesses, particularly in urban areas.





In urban disasters and crises, humanitarians find themselves face to face with systemic challenges, conventionally deemed to be “development” issues such as complex infrastructure and services needs, weak city governance, poverty, and market gaps and inefficiencies. In that sense, there is still a gap that GDPC can fill in bridging the development and humanitarian action and promoting long term thinking and more importantly the importance of preparedness in a broader sense. It is important but not enough to have the capacity to respond in cities. National Societies also need to be able to collect relevant data, build relations and make necessary connections with all the relevant stakeholders at the city and local level before the disasters hit. It is also important that not only residents, but businesses, schools and civic organizations have access to necessary information and can assess their risks and develop their action plans to prepare for disasters.

Next steps are:

- 1) Identify services the GDPC can offer that are on the nexus of development and humanitarian action in urban context.
- 2) Improve cross-pillar coordination, data collection and analysis in urban contexts.
- 3) Map availability of donor funding for urban initiatives, especially for greening, Nature-based Solutions. Explore opportunities for partnering with city networks such as C40 and cities that are at the forefront of climate change adaptation.
- 4) Strengthen risk analysis and risk informed EWEA capacities through GDPC technology partners (REAP, Google, NASA).
- 5) Develop model contingency plans and digital simulations for NSs to prepare for simultaneous and/or complex disasters in urban areas.





GDPC Steering Committee

The GDPC Steering Committee (SC) was established as part of the MOU with the IFRC in 2012. It is made up of two ARC and two IFRC representatives. The main responsibilities of the SC are to approve the annual workplan and budget, as well as narrative and financial reports. The Steering Committee also helps to ensure close coordination between the work of the GDPC and the IFRC.

Over the 8 years since the GDPC was established the SC has met on a fairly regular basis, interrupted only by structural changes within each organization that led to shifting roles and responsibilities of SC members. SC meetings have been valuable for ensuring coordination and understanding of GDPC actions at the senior leadership level of both organizations. This has helped to maintain strong buy-in and support for the GDPC within both organizations. At a more strategic level, the SC members have provided ongoing guidance, though mainly through direct interactions with the GDPC Director or Technical Advisors. During SC meetings, the SC has occasionally engaged in debates around the future strategic direction of the GDPC, though more often discussions focus on tactical questions, in addition to general updates.

Next steps:

1. Maintain regular bi-annual SC meetings, using alternative representatives or designates as required to ensure a quorum when key members are unavailable.
2. Review roles and responsibilities of SC members to identify gaps and any areas that are no longer relevant. Ensure that all SC members are aware of responsibilities and solicit feedback on ongoing and potential member contributions, as well as overall satisfaction with arrangements.
3. Engage the SC in strategic discussions about the future vision and direction of the GDPC, both during meetings and through contributions to guiding documents such as the current portfolio review.



Communications and External Engagement

In addition to engaging and providing ongoing support to National Societies, fellow resource centers and other partners in the RCRC network, the strategic communications and external engagement activities serve to communicate our mission, our activities (news, events, stories), advertise employment opportunities/consultancies, engage volunteers and publicize the outcomes of our work in the form of reports and papers. Our communications activities are also important in supporting the broader advocacy efforts around climate adaptation, resilience and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).

To execute our communications strategy, several no-cost communications channels and tools have been leveraged with a fair amount of success. A growing challenge especially since 2017 is the increasing difficulty to grow the following and achieve significant visibility in the absence of a dedicated advertising spend. Social media platforms for example, while free to access, continues to lower the visibility of organic content, in favor of paid content. Similarly, several content creation software and online platforms offer limited-use free versions but reserve the more advanced features and assets for the pay-to-use subscription packages.

As we invest more time into creating content, a small advertising investment can make a big impact. This impact, more importantly, goes beyond likes, impressions and views to conversions. For e.g. paying to boost a tweet or Facebook post which promotes the launch of a new research paper could lead more persons to our website resulting in more downloads and new subscribers.

Next steps

- 1) Develop strategy to improve pulling information from the field and increasing user-generated content on PrepareCenter.org, so that it functions as a true knowledge sharing platform, not simply a repository of curated resources.
- 2) Structure communications outputs around the global DRR calendar e.g. publish heat content during July-Aug, hurricane preparedness content in hurricane season, etc. and develop more audiovisual content as platforms continue to prioritize visual content over written copy.
- 3) Automate the email marketing process to more consistently engage the National Societies and the preparedness practitioners (subscribers) with at least Quarterly updates.
- 4) Working with the American Red Cross, IFRC and other partners, seek additional shared opportunities for brand visibility such as the Google/What Now safety messaging campaign.