

Pacific – Cyclone Yasa

ETC Situation Report #3

Reporting period 29 December 2020–5 January 2021

ETC Pacific SitReps on Cyclone Yasa will be distributed in line with the evolving situation on the ground. The ETC in the Pacific has been activated since 2016 under the structure of the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) to support the region's telecommunications preparedness activities across the Pacific Island Countries (PICs).

Highlights

- The ETC in the Pacific continues to work with regional partners and authorities in Fiji to support the response to Cyclone Yasa as part of the country's emergency telecommunications response plan.
- The ETC conducted further missions to assess mobile and data connectivity on Galoa Island on 29 December and Yadua Island on 30 December and issued recommendations to the Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) to improve or restore services in these cyclone-hit locations.
- The ETC Coordinator has finalized the assessment phase of the response to Cyclone Yasa and returned to Suva on 1 January.



ETC Coordinator for the Pacific – Shantal Boodhun – delivers training on the use of emergency satellite terminals to Fiji's Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF).

Photo: RFMF/ETC

Situation Overview

On 17 December, Category 5 super Cyclone Yasa barrelled into Fiji causing catastrophic damage and destruction. Most damage was caused on Fiji's second-largest island of Vanua Levu.

Multiple assessment teams continue to collect data in the cyclone-affected areas of Vanua Levu to establish the extent of the damage and humanitarian needs. Over 4,000 homes were completely destroyed or damaged, with some remote islands still to be assessed. Essential services continue to be restored and humanitarian assistance is being received in cyclone-affected communities.

More than 900 people remain in evacuation centres, all in the Northern Division of Fiji. Fijian authorities are focusing on ensuring all those remaining in evacuation centres are able to return home.

ETC Activities

- The ETC in the Pacific continues to work with regional partners and authorities in Fiji to support the response to Cyclone Yasa as part of the country's emergency telecommunications response plan.
- The response community is operating from two Emergency Operations Centres (EOCs) set up in Nabouwalu and Labasa in Vanua Levu, the island worst-hit by Cyclone Yasa.
- The ETC Coordinator – on the ground in Vanua Levu from 20 December-1 January – supported Fiji's National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) to conduct assessments in the Northern Division and tested mobile and data connectivity across multiple cyclone-affected sites, with a focus on distribution centres.
- The ETC conducted an assessment mission to Galoa Island on 29 December following reports of network connectivity issues in the port where humanitarian assistance items are being received. The assessment found that mobile and data connectivity services are operational for two Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) but a third has no coverage. The ETC recommended the MNOs install equipment to extend and improve connectivity services.
- During the assessment in Galoa Island, the ETC met with the community leader and established that out of 60 solar power systems supporting households on the island, only nine had been damaged due to preparedness measures taken before Cyclone Yasa hit. The affected community is using this solar power infrastructure to charge their mobile phones.
- The ETC deployed on a delayed assessment mission to Yadua Island on 30 December. It was found that there are no connectivity services on the island, and that this is a long-term issue. The affected community is unable to contact the mainland in an emergency. The ETC has recommended that one of the MNOs – which installed a communications tower on the nearby mainland in 2019 – resolve the issue of connectivity interference from the mainland and install equipment to extend connectivity to Yadua Island.
- As on Galoa Island, preparedness measures had been taken on Yadua Island to safeguard most of the solar power systems installed in 38 households, although 13 were destroyed by the cyclone. The affected community is using portable solar power banks to charge their mobile phones.
- The primary source of information for the affected community on Yadua Island is radio, which has reliable coverage on the island.
- National energy provider Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) is making progress in restoring electricity in cyclone-hit areas. This is enabling improvement of services provided by Telecom Fiji Limited (TFL).
- Following the completion of connectivity assessments in the Northern Division, the ETC Coordinator returned to Suva, Fiji, on 1 January.



Funding

- The Government of Fiji is coordinating emergency funding received from donors in response to Cyclone Yasa. Funding needs to restore and improve emergency communications services and infrastructure have been presented by the ETC.

Challenges

- The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact on various aspects of emergency response in the Pacific, including the restricted movement of equipment and personnel.

Information

- A dedicated information-sharing space on the ETC's response to Cyclone Yasa in the Pacific can be found on the ETC website: <https://www.etcluster.org/emergency/fiji-cyclone-yasa>
- On 17 December, the Crisis Connectivity Charter (CCC) was activated to support ETC response efforts for Cyclone Yasa. It is the second time the CCC has been activated in the Pacific in 2020, following the response to Cyclone Harold in April.

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