

## **Pacific – Cyclone Harold**

### **ETC Situation Report #1**

**Reporting period 1 April – 19 April 2020**

ETC Pacific SitReps on Cyclone Harold will be distributed in line with the evolving situation on the ground.

### **Highlights**

- The ETC in the Pacific is working with national partners and authorities in Vanuatu and Fiji to implement the respective country emergency telecommunications preparedness and response plans for Cyclone Harold.
- On 10 April, the Crisis Connectivity Charter (CCC) was activated for the third time in its history to support recovery efforts for Cyclone Harold.
- Working closely with partners and national stakeholders, the ETC plans to address severe communications gaps in Vanuatu by facilitating shared connectivity services for the response community and affected populations in three sites.



The ETC Coordinator in the Pacific attends an emergency telecommunications planning meeting with Fiji's National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) in response to Cyclone Harold, which hit Fiji on 8 April.

*Photo: WFP/ETC*

### **Situation Overview**

Between 1-9 April, Cyclone Harold tore through the Pacific, causing widespread destruction in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga. At its peak, the cyclone reached severe category 5 as it made landfall in Vanuatu where it became the second strongest tropical cyclone to ever hit the country. The cyclone caused extensive damage across large parts of Vanuatu – including to communications networks and broadcast radio infrastructure on the islands of Santo, Malekula, Pentecost, Ambae, Maewo, Ambrym and Epi. In Fiji, Cyclone Harold caused extreme flooding, power outages and severed communication links across the largest island of Viti Levu and Southern Lau and Kadavu islands.

At the same time, most Pacific Island countries are already in states of emergency as they respond to COVID-19 and have enforced travel restrictions to slow the spread of the virus.

## Response

- The ETC in the Pacific – based in Suva, Fiji – is working with national partners in Vanuatu and Fiji to implement country emergency telecommunications preparedness and response plans for Cyclone Harold and – alongside the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) – is working with government authorities and the private sector to support the response.
- The ETC preparedness and response plans rely on remote support and in country resources as COVID-19 travel restrictions prevent the movement of personnel and equipment.
- On 10 April, the Crisis Connectivity Charter (CCC) was activated for the first time in 2020 – and the third time in its history – to support recovery efforts for Cyclone Harold. Charter signatory Inmarsat has made a bandwidth and data package available in Fiji. With connectivity provided by the activation of the CCC, equipment in country is being used by Fiji’s National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) to carry out an assessment of Fiji’s Southern Lau and Kadavu islands, which were severely damaged by Cyclone Harold.
- In Vanuatu, critical communications gaps have been identified including damaged telecommunications infrastructure and blackouts in Internet connectivity, mobile networks and broadcast radio and television, hampering coordination efforts during the early response phase and in delivering assistance to the most affected areas.
- Working closely with its partners and national stakeholders – including Vanuatu’s Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO), CCC signatory Intelsat and their local partner, Wantok Vanuatu – the ETC plans to address communications gaps by facilitating shared connectivity services for national responding authorities, humanitarian responders and the affected population in three sites on West Coast Santo, north-east Malekula and south Pentecost islands. These services will enable coordination of the humanitarian response and be used to facilitate communications for the affected population.
- Radio Vanuatu – the primary means of communication for communities on Santo and Pentecost islands, including for disaster and emergency information – has suffered extreme damage at its main broadcast transmission sites located on the two largest islands of Santo and Malekula. Alongside OGCIO, the Radiocommunications and Broadcasting Regulator (TRBR) and Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation (VBTC), the ETC plans to rehabilitate these community radio and television services to ensure critical information reaches affected communities and national authorities.

## Funding

- US\$2.5 million has been released from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to enable the response community to deliver lifesaving assistance for the thousands of people affected by Cyclone Harold in Vanuatu. The ETC has submitted a request for US\$192,000 from the funding allocation based on its requirements.

## Challenges

- The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting on various aspects of the ETC response to Cyclone Harold, particularly the restricted movement of equipment and deployment of the ETC Coordinator. The greater Suva area of Fiji's capital city is on lockdown, meaning no personnel from this area can deploy to other locations in Fiji as part of Cyclone Harold response efforts.
- Due to COVID-19 travel and shipping restrictions, the ETC will respond in Vanuatu through the national authorities and local partners. The ETC in the Pacific is supporting the response remotely and will continue to coordinate with ETC partners and other local humanitarian organizations to map existing resources in Vanuatu.
- A lack of funding for the ETC in the Pacific is impacting ETC activities in the region and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 outbreak and response.
- Successful disaster and emergency telecommunications preparedness is a shared responsibility and requires the concerted efforts of numerous stakeholders including telecommunications ministries, telecommunications/radio communications/broadcast regulators, local and national disaster management organisations, the private sector and the local community.

## Information

- A dedicated information-sharing space on the ETC's response to Cyclone Harold in the Pacific can be found on the ETC website: <https://www.etcluster.org/emergency/pacific-cyclone-harold>
- ETC Pacific Infographic: <https://www.etcluster.org/document/etc-pacific-cyclone-harold-infographic>

## Contacts

Hlekiwe Kachali, ETC Coordinator for the Pacific

[hlekiwe.kachali@wfp.org](mailto:hlekiwe.kachali@wfp.org)

Phone: +679 331 6139

Elizabeth Millership, ETC Information Management Officer

[Elizabeth.millership@wfp.org](mailto:Elizabeth.millership@wfp.org)

Phone: +971 4581 3903