Pacific Island Countries – Preparedness

ETC Situation Report #18

Reporting period: July to September, Q3 2023

The ETC in the Pacific is led by the WFP Pacific Multi Country Office (MCO) and was activated in 2016 under the structure of the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) to support telecommunications preparedness in the region. Situation reports are distributed every quarter.

Highlights

- The interim ETC Coordinator based in the WFP Pacific Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Suva, Fiji, came onboard in early September. Recruitment for the full-time ETC Coordinator is in the final stages.

- As part of Fiji's National Emergency Response and Assessment Team (NERT) induction training carried out from 01 to 12 July, the ETC delivered four training sessions on the use of VHF handheld radios and portable satellite-based data connectivity devices. The ETC also participated in an emergency simulation exercise conducted as part of the induction training. The newly established NERT will facilitate rapid deployment of emergency response teams inside and outside the country.

The ETC IT Associate explains the features of a satellite phone to a participant at the UNOCHA event on World Humanitarian Day 2023 in August. Photo: WFP/ ETC

- An ICT Capacity Assessment (ICA) was carried out in Vanuatu from 17 to 28 July as the sixth and final country in a series across the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) to support ICT emergency preparedness in the region.

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC in the Pacific is led by the WFP Pacific Multi Country Office (MCO) and was activated in 2016 under the structure of the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) to support telecommunications preparedness in the region. All ETC funding in the Pacific is received under the WFP Multi-Country Strategic Plan (MCSP). All preparedness and emergency response activities carried out by the ETC in the Pacific are under the leadership of WFP.

An interim ETC Coordinator was onboarded in Fiji on 01 September for three months and a new dedicated Information Management Officer (IMO) for the ETC joined on 01 August. These two new staff members joined the long-term IT Associate who supports ETC activities

in the WFP MCO. There are plans to recruit a fourth staff member to coordinate capacity building activities in the Pacific Island countries.

The ETC and the Logistics Cluster coordinated with UNOCHA to present at an exhibition booth at the World Humanitarian Day event held at the Fiji Museum on 18 August. The event was hosted by Fiji's National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) in conjuction with UNOCHA. The ETC and Logistics team exhibited emergency response equipment including satellite phones and portable BGAN connectivity devices at the booth.

ICT Capacity Assessments (ICA)

The ETC conducts ICAs when requested and in collaboration with national partners in Pacific Island Countries (PICs) with support from donor USAID's Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). The ICA captures the ICT landscape of a country, including an evaluation of policies, strategies, and capacities as well as insights into how communications technologies are leveraged in response to any potential disaster to mitigate the impact.

An ICA was carried out in Vanuatu from 17 to 28 July as the sixth and final country in a series across PICs to support ICT emergency preparedness in the region. The mission engaged with Vanuatu's National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), as well as local and regulatory government bodies.

Six country ICAs have now been completed by the ETC across Q1, Q2, and Q3 2023 in Palau, Tuvalu, Tonga, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and Vanuatu. All six ICA reports have been shared with the government counterparts in each country with the exception of the Vanuatu report, which is currently being finalised. The recommendations from all ICAs are recorded and the ETC is working with the respective countries to action them.

The ETC is planning meetings to initiate a further four ICAs for the Solomon Islands, Samoa, Kiribati, and Nauru. The first three are priority to be completed by the end of 2023.

Fiji

As part of Fiji's National Emergency Response and Assessment Team (NERT) induction training carried out from 01 to 12 July, the ETC delivered four training sessions on the use of VHF handheld radios and portable satellite-based data connectivity devices. The ETC also participated in an emergency simulation exercise conducted as part of the induction training. The newly established NERT will facilitate rapid deployment of emergency response teams inside and outside the country.

The ETC is engaging with Fiji's National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) for the service subscription of the two portable BGAN connectivity terminals and six Iridium Push-To-Talk (PTT) devices donated by WFP in 2021. The service pack that was included with these devices will be deactivated on 01 November and the Fiji NDMO will thereafter set up an agreement with a national service provider.

On September 14, the ETC participated in the second planning meeting with Fiji's NDMO for the upcoming National Disaster Awareness Week (NDAW) in October. The NDAW will focus on running an earthquake & tsunami response national Simulation Exercise (SimEx) and

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) exhibition. The ETC will observe this exercise and identify the existing gaps in emergency telecommunications and work with NDMO to improve this.

The ETC is also participating in the upcoming Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT) training that will be conducted at the end of October for three days at the Japan ICT Centre at the University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji. The ETC will deliver a presentation at this training.

Infographic

See the ETC Pacific preparedness infographic here.

Funding

All ETC funding in the Pacific is received under the WFP Multi-Country Strategic Plan (MCSP). The budget available to the ETC in the Pacific to carry out preparedness and COVID-19 response activities in 2022 until the end of Q1 2023 was US$510,000. These funds were received from USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA).

A new US$367,646 allocation of BHA funding was made available in April 2023 and will continue to support the preparedness activities of the ETC in the Pacific. More funding will be needed from late 2023 to sustain and support ETC preparedness activities in the PICs.

Meetings

The ETC is actively re-engaging with ETC focal points across the Pacific to increase collaboration on the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in place and the existing emergency telecommunications infrastructure. The priority is to re-activate the ETC Working Group in the Pacific.

The ETC IMO is also engaging with the Pacific information management network and has participated in the second meeting of the Information Management Working Group (IMWG) newly established by UNOCHA in August.

Contacts

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www.etcluster.org/preparedness/preparedness-pacific-islands

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