

Vanuatu – earthquake and cyclones emergency

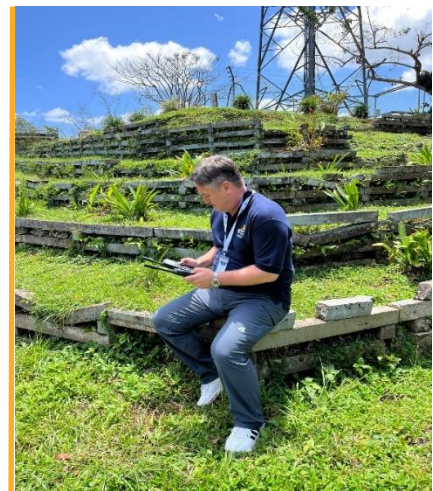
ETC Situation Report #1

Reporting period: 03/03/2023 to 13/03/2023

The ETC in the Pacific was activated in 2016 under the structure of the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) to support telecommunications preparedness in the region. The ETC in the Pacific is currently supporting the emergency response to Tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin which hit Vanuatu on 1 and 3 March 2023, as well as two 6.6 and 5.4 magnitude earthquakes which occurred on 3 March 2023.

Highlights

- The ETC in the Pacific is engaging with government stakeholders — including the Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and the Office of the Government Chief Information Office (OGCIO) — to assess the situation and mobilise support to meet the immediate ICT needs of the emergency response following Tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin which hit Vanuatu on 1 and 3 March 2023, as well as two 6.6 and 5.4 magnitude earthquakes which occurred on 3 March 2023.
- A telecommunications specialist from WFP FITTEST arrived in Vanuatu on 9 March to support the response. An additional FITTEST specialist will deploy on 16 March. Both specialists will be based in Port Vila and travel to other affected areas as required.
- An initial rapid ICT assessment confirmed that telecommunications services are operational in Port Vila. Assessments of other affected islands are planned.



The ETC tests satellite phone connectivity in Port Vila, Vanuatu. Photo: WFP/ETS

Situation overview

The national authorities in Vanuatu declared a state of emergency on 3 March. Tropical cyclones Judy and Kevin — both category 4 intensity — made landfall in Vanuatu on 1 and 3 March causing widespread destruction across several of Vanuatu's islands.

On 3 March, earthquakes of 6.6 and 5.4 magnitude were detected off the island of Espiritu Santo. No tsunami warning was issued, and no casualties reported.

The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) of Vanuatu indicates that 251,346 people have been affected by the cyclones — about 80 per cent of the population. Four priority areas have been identified: 1) Shefa and Tafea, 2) Penama and Malampa, 3) the northern region of Penama Province as well as the western region of Malampa Province, and 4) Sanma. The NDMO Rapid Assessment Teams finalized their reports for Shefa and Tafea provinces. Rapid sectoral assessments in the other provinces are still ongoing.

There are currently 5,156 people registered in 106 evacuation centres in Shefa and Tafea.

The Vanuatu Civil Aviation Authority confirmed that all airports are now approved for commercial passenger flights, with the exception of Lamap, Paama, Pele, Emae and Valesdir which remain closed for repairs. Fiji Airways resumed flights from Fiji to Vanuatu on Thursday 9 March following the repair of airport navigation equipment.

Roads have been cleared of collapsed trees and other debris in Port Vila. As of 13 March, the Vanuatu NDMO indicates that approximately 74% of the arterial road network is now accessible throughout Vanuatu.

Telecommunications impact

The two mobile network operators (MNOs) in Vanuatu — Digicel and Vodafone — were impacted by the cyclones. As of 9 March, Digicel has reconnected 75% of normal mobile and 3G data coverage. Port Vila has both functional GSM and 3G data connectivity on the Digicel network. The MNOs' technicians and engineers are working to restore connectivity in all other affected areas.

Initial ICT rapid assessments, carried out by WFP FITTEST telecommunication specialist, on 9 March confirmed the presence of functional telecommunications towers in Port Vila. Assessments of other affected areas are ongoing.

FM and AM radio coverage is functional for all three radio broadcasters in all urban centres across the islands.

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC in the Pacific is engaging with government stakeholders — including the Vanuatu NDMO and the Vanuatu Office of the Government Chief Information Office (OGCIO) — to assess the situation and mobilise resources to meet the ICT needs of the emergency response. The ETC is operating under the NDMO cluster system adopted in Vanuatu to support national government in both preparedness and response.

A telecommunications specialist from WFP FITTEST arrived in Vanuatu on 9 March to support the response. An additional FITTEST specialist will deploy on 15 March. Both personnel will be based in Port Vila working from the NDMO office.

ICT assessments are planned in the northern islands once transport to the affected islands is confirmed. The ETC has submitted transport requests to the NDMO who are coordinating. The ETC may be able to leverage transportation assistance requested through Australian and French military assets such as helicopters.

The ETC has engaged with its global partners — including Ericsson Response and the Government of Luxembourg — for potential personnel and equipment support to the operation.

Data connectivity

The ETC is planning to assess data connectivity needs across the affected islands, including the Shepherd Islands in the Shefa province of Vanuatu which was badly hit by the cyclones. The NDMO confirmed that three provinces, Malampa, Penama and Torba, have poor to no internet connectivity at the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC). This has hampered communication between the NDMO's Headquarters (HQ) in Port Vila and the PEOCs. These provinces may require support with VSAT connectivity. Currently the provinces have functional High Frequency (HF) and Very High Frequency (VHF) radio communication, installed over three years ago with assistance from the Australian government.

One portable BGAN satellite connectivity terminal is operational in Port Vila to provide back-up connectivity support for the planned ETC assessments. The BGAN was deployed from the prepositioned stock in the WFP Multi Country Office (MCO) in Fiji. ITU provided the pre-paid SIM card to activate the BGAN terminal.

Telephony

Three push-to-talk (PTT) satellite phones have been configured and are operational in Port Vila ready to be assigned to responders. The three satellite phones were deployed from the WFP MCO prepositioned stock in Fiji.

Services for communities

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has set up evacuation centres across the country. The ETC is planning to visit the biggest evacuation centres in Shefa and Tafea provinces on 17 March to assess the need for ETC services for communities.

Mapping

ITU activated the [Disaster Connectivity Maps \(DCM\)](#) campaign¹ on 5 March to track mobile network and data connectivity across the 13 islands. The DCM showed an initial fall in mobile data connectivity following the earthquake and two cyclones to 50% of the normal status on 3 March. By 9 March, 3G data connectivity had been restored to 77% of the normal status. The coverage area stood at 57% by 11 March with outages (undetected cellular network) remaining outside the main towns on the islands of Efate, Espiritu Santo, Malekula, Pentecost and Tanna.

¹ The DCM data comes from four sources: 1) Worldwide baseline, 2) Ookla (open source for global fixed broadband and mobile network performance datasets), 3) Speedchecker (draws data anonymously from mobile phones application) and 4) Meta (parent company of Facebook and WhatsApp). All data collected is with users' consensus.

Funding

ETC funding for the emergency response in Vanuatu will be allocated via the WFP Pacific MCO based in Fiji, which is funded for the response by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA).

Challenges

Domestic travel remains restricted. The Vanuatu Civil Aviation Authority confirmed that all airports are now approved for passenger flights except for Lamap, Paama, Pele, Emae and Valesdir remain closed for repairs.

Although 60% of the electricity power supply has been restored in urban settlements, there are areas of Vanuatu which remain without power following the impact of the cyclones.

Meetings

The next Global ETC Partners Teleconference on the earthquake and cyclones state of emergency response will take place on **Thursday 16 March 2023** at **08:00 UTC**.

Contacts

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All information related to the ETC response in Vanuatu can be found on the website:

www.etcluster.org/emergency/vanuatu-earthquake-and-cyclones-judy-and-kevin

For more information or to be added or deleted from the mailing list please contact:

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