

# Vanuatu – earthquake and cyclones emergency

## ETC Situation Report #4

Reporting period: 30/03/2023 to 05/04/2023

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 continues to support the ICT needs of the government-led emergency response in Vanuatu following the impact of Tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin in early March.
- The ETC has pre-configured and activated all 10 Starlink terminals supplied to the Government of Vanuatu by Starlink, on loan to facilitate communications in the emergency response.
- One Starlink connectivity device is deployed in Port Vila while installation of a second Starlink device is planned to take place on Tanna Island from 11 to 13 April. The devices enable communications from the islands to the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) headquarters in Port Vila.



The ETC configured 10 Starlink satellite devices to link government responders on the islands to the mainland. Photo: WFP/ETC

## Situation overview

Tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin—both category 4 intensity—made landfall in Vanuatu on 1 and 3 March causing widespread destruction across the islands of Vanuatu. Over 251,000 people (80% of the population) were affected. The national authorities in Vanuatu declared a six-month state of emergency on 5 March.

Five priority areas have been identified by the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO): the provinces of Shefa and Tafea, the Shepherd Islands, and parts of Penama and Malampa provinces. As of 29 March, the NDMO of Vanuatu reports that 24,657 households (123,288 people) have been affected by the cyclones in the worst hit provinces of Shefa and Tafea. 90% of houses were destroyed in those provinces.

Road network accessibility dropped to 70% and all airports were closed after the disaster on 5 March. Latest data shows that approximately 90% of the road network is now accessible and Vanuatu airports are operating at 80% for emergency purposes, while commercial services are operating at approximately 70% of its usual capacity.

The national electricity company, UNELCO, continues with repair and restoration of the national power grid.

## Telecommunications impact

The two Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) in Vanuatu—Digicel and Vodafone—continue to restore their connectivity services in all areas impacted by the cyclones. Vodafone confirmed 90% service restoration in Port Vila, 77% in Shefa Island and 100% in Malampa—all areas recovering from a baseline of 50% service operations recorded after the cyclones. Digicel has restored connectivity to an average of 90% across Vanuatu’s urban settlements spread across the different islands.

Nationwide, average mobile network coverage is now estimated to have been restored to 95% of the baseline level prior to the cyclones, after an initial drop of approximately 50%<sup>1</sup>.

The [Disaster Connectivity Maps \(DCM\)](#) campaign<sup>2</sup> initiated by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) on 5 March continued to track mobile network and data connectivity across the 13 islands until 24 March. Data tracking was discontinued as the data connectivity stabilized, matching baseline levels recorded before the cyclones.

FM and AM radio coverage is functional for all three radio broadcasters in all urban centres across the islands. Vanuatu’s High Frequency (HF) and Very High Frequency (VHF) radio networks—which were established with support from the Government of Australia following Cyclone Harold in 2020—also remain functional following the cyclones.

## ETC Activities

### Coordination

The ETC in the Pacific continues to engage with the government-led response through the NDMO and the Vanuatu Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) to assess the situation and mobilise resources to meet the ICT needs of the emergency response. The ETC is operating under the NDMO national cluster system, which coordinates humanitarian interventions, using varied national response cells including planning, operations, communications, and logistics.

The FITTEST Specialist deployed with the ETC—Semso Sabotic—departed Vanuatu on 28 March. Another ETC Officer—Abdul Halim Yousufzai—is on the ground in Vanuatu to continue supporting the response. His mission has been extended until 22 April at the request of the Vanuatu NDMO.

The WFP Country Director (CD) of the Pacific Multi Country Office (MCO) is on mission in Vanuatu from 3 April to meet Vanuatu national counterparts to discuss progress in the disaster response and areas of assistance needed, including from the ETC.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on open-source data from IODA, Cloudflare, and Google.

<sup>2</sup> 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).

### Data connectivity

Based on a priority request from the NDMO, the ETC in the Pacific is supporting the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC) on Tanna Island with installation of a Starlink broadband satellite data connectivity service. The installation of the Starlink terminal at the Tafea PEOC—which was delayed due to transport challenges and bad weather—is now confirmed to take place from 11 to 13 April using a charter flight arranged by the Vanuatu NDMO. The connectivity at the Tafea PEOC will facilitate efficient communications with the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) at the NDMO headquarters in Port Vila.

The ETC pre-configured and activated all 10 Starlink terminals that were supplied to the Government of Vanuatu by Starlink. The terminals are on loan from Starlink to facilitate communications in the emergency response. The ETC trained two NDMO ICT staff on how to configure, activate and use the Starlink terminals. The ETC has also prepared a Starlink installation guide for technicians and a user guide for the Vanuatu national clusters. The user guide is available in both English and French.

The ETC has assessed the local market for solar solutions with the capacity to power the Starlink terminals. Two local private companies have been identified and next steps are being discussed with the NDMO.

Further, the ETC is supporting the Vanuatu NDMO to expand data connectivity services at the PEOCs. The ETC is scheduled to join the Vanuatu NDMO on a mission to Ambae departing on 18 April to install a Starlink connectivity device at the Penama PEOC. This will improve communications capacity between the PEOC and the NEOC at NDMO headquarters in Port Vila.

### Telephony

To support the initial response, three Iridium satellite phones and six Iridium SIM cards with prepaid airtime were dispatched to Vanuatu from the WFP Pacific MCO in Fiji. As local telephone services now largely restored, the need for satellite phones to support the response has reduced.

## Dashboard

See the [ETC Dashboard](#) for an overview of ETC activities and service locations.

## Funding

ETC funding for the emergency response in Vanuatu is being allocated via the WFP Pacific MCO, supported by a grant from USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). A budget plan has been developed to seek additional funding support based on activities in the ETC Concept of Operations (CONOPs).

Under the WFP Pacific MCO, ETC response activities have been allocated resources for a period of two months starting from March and will be actualized based on needs articulated defined by the Vanuatu National ETC and additional ETC assessments of affected locations.

## Challenges

Access remains difficult, however, this has eased with confirmation of charter flights booked scheduled by the NDMO.

Although electricity remains in short supply, restoration is ongoing in parts of the country. Fuel-powered generators are in high demand and challenging to procure on the local market.

## Meetings

The date of the next Global ETC Partners Teleconference on the earthquake and cyclones emergency response is scheduled on **Tuesday 18 April 2023**.

## 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](http://www.etcluster.org/emergency/vanuatu-earthquake-and-cyclones-judy-and-kevin)

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