

Vanuatu – earthquake and cyclones emergency

ETC Situation Report #5

Reporting period: 06/04/2023 to 12/04/2023

The ETC in the Pacific, led by the World Food Programme (WFP), 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 government-led 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

- An ETC officer from WFP – lead agency of the Pacific ETC – pre-configured and activated 10 satellite connectivity terminals loaned to the government of Vanuatu by Starlink to facilitate communications in the emergency response.
- The Pacific ETC officer trained technical staff from the National Disaster Management Organisation (NDMO) on the configuration, activation, and maintenance of the terminals, and prepared a guide for users from Vanuatu’s national clusters active in the emergency response. The user guide is available in English, French and Bislama.
- On 11 April the Pacific ETC officer travelled to Ambae Island and installed a Starlink satellite data terminal at the Penama PEOC, at the request of the NDMO. The data connectivity service is now activated, enabling users to communicate with the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) at NDMO headquarters in Port Vila.



The ETC installing a Starlink satellite data terminal at Penama PEOC in Ambae. 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. 251,000 people have been affected (80% of the population) by the two cyclones and approximately 90% of houses have been destroyed in Shefa and Tafea provinces. The national authorities in Vanuatu declared a six-month state of emergency on 5 March.

Five priority areas have been identified by the NDMO: the provinces of Shefa and Tafea, the Shepherd Islands, and parts of Penama and Malampa provinces.

According to the government, road network accessibility has been restored to 90%. 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 to work to repair and restore 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. 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%¹.

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, led by WFP, continues to engage with the NDMO and the Vanuatu Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) to support the government-led emergency response. The ETC is operating under the NDMO national cluster system, which coordinates humanitarian interventions through nine national clusters including Shelter, Education, Food Security & Agriculture, Gender & Protection, Health & Nutrition, WASH, Emergency Telecommunication, Logistics and Displacement & Evacuation Centre Management.

The WFP Pacific Multi-Country Office (MCO) deployed a telecommunications specialist from WFP’s Fast IT and Telecommunications Emergencies and Support Team (FITTEST) to serve as a Pacific ETC Officer in support of the government-led emergency response. The Pacific ETC Officer’s mission has been extended until 22 April at the request of the Vanuatu NDMO, to support the deployment of connectivity solutions at PEOCs. The Pacific ETC Coordinator based in Australia is also engaging with partners to support the response remotely.

Data connectivity

Following the pre-configuration and activation of all 10 Starlink terminals that were supplied to the Government of Vanuatu by Starlink, the ETC is supporting the NDMO in deploying and installing the terminals at five priority PEOCs across the islands. The Vanuatu NDMO has advised that the remaining Starlink terminals will be used by the nine national clusters for communications when on missions across the country.

¹ Based on open-source data from IODA, Cloudflare, and Google.

On 11 April the Pacific ETC Officer travelled to Ambae and installed a Starlink terminal at the Penama PEOC, which was prioritized by the NDMO. The connectivity at the Penama PEOC is now operational and will provide reliable data connectivity for communication with the NEOC at the NDMO headquarters in Port Vila.

The ETC is scheduled to join the Vanuatu NDMO on a mission to Tanna Island on 18 April to install a Starlink device at Tafea PEOC. The installation team includes two NDMO ICT staff who were trained by the Pacific ETC Officer from WFP 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 English, French and Bislama. The installation schedule for the other four provinces is yet to be finalized by the Vanuatu NDMO.

Telephony

To support the initial response, one BGAN, 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 are now largely restored, the need for satellite phones to support the response has reduced. The BGAN and satellite phones have been returned to the WFP MCO in Fiji where they will be part of prepositioned equipment for any emergency that may arise in the region, in future.

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 to the affected areas remains difficult; however, this has eased with the confirmation of charter flights 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

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

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