

# Vanuatu – Tropical Cyclone Lola [FINAL]

## ETC Situation Report #2

Reporting period: 26/10/2023 to 10/11/2023

The ETC in the Pacific was activated in 2016, led by WFP under the structure of the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) to support telecommunications preparedness in the region. The ETC in the Pacific supported the emergency response to Tropical Cyclone (TC) Lola which hit Vanuatu on 24 October. This is the final SitRep on the ETC response to TC Lola.

## Highlights

- Following the impact of Cyclone Lola in Vanuatu on 24 October, the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), has reported significant progress in restoring the essential national communications networks, including radio and satellite systems, aiding coordination and information sharing for disaster response and recovery.
- The WFP-led Pacific ETC deployed three satellite phones and five prepaid SIM cards to support the NDMO teams with reliable field telecommunications for the initial rapid damage assessment in the outer islands.
- The private sector have been restoring telecommunications services in the areas affected and significant progress has been made. Further, the national cluster is managing the response and no further regional support has been requested.



Staff at the Central Pentecost (west coast) Bwatnapni School, which was affected by the cyclone. VSAT connectivity was restored at the school where a free community Wi-Fi service is currently provided. Source: 3Link

## Situation Overview

On 22 October 2023, Tropical Cyclone (TC) Lola formed on the northern tip of Vanuatu's Torba Province. It tracked towards Northern Vanuatu before making landfall on the evening of 24 October as a Category 5 storm. TC Lola is the South Pacific's earliest Category 5 cyclone outside the official cyclone season. By 25 October, it downgraded to a Category 4 storm, with the Vanuatu NDMO issuing an 'all clear' message to all provinces on 26 October.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), four provinces are most impacted—Torba, Penama, Malampa, and Shefa—with an estimated 110,750 people affected in 20,000 households.

A State of Emergency was declared on the 27 October in Torba, Sanma, Penama, Malampa, and Shefa provinces for the next six months. Although five provinces were impacted, only four provinces reported the need for humanitarian assistance after initial rapid assessments.

The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) and the Office of the Telecommunications, Radio communications and Broadcasting Regulator (TRBR) are working to restore all national communications. According to the NDMO, significant progress has been made in restoring essential communication networks, including radio and satellite systems, aiding coordination and information sharing for disaster response and recovery.

## Telecommunications impact

Initially, telecommunications infrastructure and power were significantly impacted by TC Lola, with large parts of the network suffering outages due to links affected by the cyclone. Most of the wider connectivity outages were restored quickly with reconfiguration.

Vodafone and Digicel, the two Mobile Network Operators (MNOs), have assessed the damages to the infrastructure and commenced the restoration of services which are now over 96% operational.

There is currently a shortage of solar panels on the market, which is required to restore power to remote sites – mobile connectivity gaps remain in North Pentecost and South Malekula, however, services are on target to be restored by service providers within two weeks.

A number of VSAT sites located in places impacted by the cyclone and used by members of the affected communities need realignment. A stable power supply also remains a challenge.

## ETC Activities

### Coordination

The WFP-led Pacific ETC has been engaging with the National ETC in Vanuatu to support the immediate needs.

The ETC in the Pacific deployed three satellite phones and five prepaid SIM cards to support the NDMO teams with reliable field telecommunications for the initial rapid damage assessment.

The national cluster is managing the response and no further regional support has been requested.

### Connectivity

VSAT connectivity has been confirmed to be active on Pentecoast, Ambae, Maewo, Malekula, Ambrym, and Sola island groups. Teams from Vodafone and 3Link are currently at the VSAT sites to realign or repair the equipment to restore connectivity, around 70% of sites currently have connectivity.

Starlink terminals—set up and supported by the ETC in Provincial Emergency Operations Centres (PEOCs) during Cyclones Judy and Kevin earlier in March—are reported to be functional and providing connectivity. Government responders in the PEOCs are using the

devices to communicate with the NDMO on the mainland of Efate. There are five Starlink terminals deployed at each PEOCs in Torba, Sanma, Penama, Malampa, and Tafea.

## Funding

ETC Pacific funding is allocated as part of USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) support to the WFP Pacific Multi Country Office (MCO) based in Fiji.

## Challenges

A shortage of supply in solar panels has been reported, which is required to power stand-alone sites.

Transportation of personnel and equipment to repair telecommunications services in some affected areas has been a challenge due to a lack of road access and limited air travel service to the remote sites.

## Meetings

A Global ETC Teleconference on the response to TC Lola in Vanuatu was held on 27 October. In line with the needs, no further global teleconferences on Cyclone Lola in Vanuatu are required.

## Contacts

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