

Vanuatu – earthquake and cyclones emergency

ETC Situation Report #3

Reporting period: 23/03/2023 to 29/03/2023

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 Officer deployed by WFP FITTEST on the ground since 9 March left the operation on 28 March. A second ETC Officer deployed by FITTEST remains in Vanuatu and is based in the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) headquarters in Port Vila to engage in coordination activities as well as assess and support the communications needs of the response.
- The mission to install a Starlink terminal for connectivity at the Tafea Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC) on Tanna Island has been delayed due to transport challenges. The ETC is planning to reschedule the postponed mission, which will link the PEOC to the NDMO headquarters in Port Vila.
- On 23 March, the ETC assessed four evacuation centres managed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on Efate Island, Shefa province. The assessment found availability of data connectivity, power, and FM/AM radio broadcasting services across all four sites.



The ETC tested Starlink satellite coverage on Tongariki Island, Vanuatu, where 3G connectivity and mobile networks are not yet fully recovered. Photo: WFP/ETC

Situation overview

The national authorities in Vanuatu declared a six-month state of emergency on 5 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, affecting over 251,000 people.

Five priority areas have been identified: the provinces of Shefa and Tafea, the Shepherd Islands, and parts of Penama and Malampa provinces. As of 22 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.

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.

Although electricity remains in short supply, restoration of the national power grid is ongoing.

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. Digicel has restored connectivity to an average of 90% across Vanuatu’s urban settlements spread across the different islands. The status of GSM and 3G connectivity are yet to be identified on other islands, especially for the remote settlements.

Nationwide, 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.

The [Disaster Connectivity Maps \(DCM\)](#) campaign² 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 latest data connectivity had stabilised; matching baseline levels recorded before the disaster.

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 government stakeholders, including the Vanuatu 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 in Vanuatu.

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

² 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

The mission to install a Starlink terminal for connectivity at the Tafea Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC) on Tanna Island has been delayed due to transport challenges. The ETC is coordinating with NDMO to reschedule the postponed mission which will help to link the Tafea PEOC to the NDMO headquarters in Port Vila. The ETC has prepared a rapid Starlink installation guide and training session to equip the NDMO with the skills to install and maintain the service.

The ETC has assessed the local market for solar solutions to power the Starlink device to be installed in the PEOC on Tanna Island. Vanuatu continues to experience a limited power supply—the national grid infrastructure is still being repaired and does not extend across the whole country.

The ETC is working with the Vanuatu NDMO to develop an expanded data connectivity services plan. The ETC has recommended the installation of a Starlink device at each of the five PEOCs, based in each affected provinces of Shefa, Tafea, the Shepherd Islands, and parts of Penama and Malampa Provinces, to enable communications between the provinces and the NDMO headquarters in Port Vila.

Telephony

Three Iridium satellite phones and six Iridium SIM cards with prepaid airtime have been deployed from the WFP Pacific Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Fiji to Vanuatu to support the emergency response. The satellite phones and SIM cards have been handed over to the NDMO ICT Officer for deployment to areas of need.

Security communications

The ETC has liaised with local representatives managing the Vanuatu Government National Emergency Radio Network (VGERN). The emergency VHF/HF radio network connects police posts across Vanuatu's six provinces, enabling inter-island communication during emergencies with police headquarters and the Vanuatu NDMO.

Services for communities

On 23 March, the ETC assessed four evacuation centres managed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on the island of Efate in Shefa Province. The assessment focused on the availability of connectivity and power to charge devices, as well as the availability of radio broadcast as a source of information for affected communities staying at the centres.

The ETC assessment found that GSM and 3G data connectivity are available from national service providers in all four evacuation centres. Power is available in the centres, and FM/AM radio from the national broadcasting service is also functional across all four sites.

Dashboard

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

Funding

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

Under the WFP Pacific MCO, ETC response activities will be allocated resources for a period of three months starting from March and will be actualized following the planned ICT assessments on the affected Vanuatu islands.

Challenges

Access to some of the islands in the most affected areas remains difficult as all modes of transport are limited.

Electricity remains in short supply, but 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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