

Vanuatu – earthquake and cyclones emergency

ETC Situation Report #6

Reporting period: 13/04/2023 to 19/04/2023

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

- On 18 April, an ETC officer from WFP—lead agency of the Pacific ETC—travelled to Tanna Island and installed a satellite data terminal at the Tafea Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC). The data connectivity service is now activated, enabling users to communicate with the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) in Port Vila.
- The ETC officer briefed six staff at the Vanuatu Meteorology and Geo-Hazards Department on the configuration, activation, and use of Starlink satellite data devices on 17 April.
- The ETC officer's mission in Vanuatu ends on 22 April, having supported the installation of connectivity solutions at two priority PEOCs and the NEOC.



The ETC installing data connectivity at Tafea PEOC in Tanna. Photo: WFP/ETC

Situation overview

Tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin—both category 4 intensity—made landfall in Vanuatu on 1 and 3 March causing severe infrastructure destruction across the islands of Vanuatu. According to the government, 251,000 people have been affected (80% of the population) by the two cyclones, leaving them without food, power, shelter, and telecommunications. 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 Organisation (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 approximately 90%, across the different islands. Emergency relief flights are operating at 80% while commercial flights are operating at 70% of baseline before the effects of the cyclones.

The national electricity company, UNELCO, continues to work to repair and restore the national power grid.

Telecommunications impact

Nationwide, average mobile network coverage for both Digicel and Vodafone—the two mobile network operators (MNOs), is now estimated to have been restored to 95% of the baseline level prior to the cyclones, after an initial drop to approximately 50%¹.

The government further confirms that power supply has been restored at all telecommunications tower sites in Port Vila.

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 WFP-led Pacific ETC 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—Shelter, Education, Food Security & Agriculture, Gender & Protection, Health & Nutrition, WASH, Emergency Telecommunications, 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 an ETC officer in support of the government-led emergency response. The ETC officer's mission will end on 22 April after having supported the deployment of connectivity solutions at two priority PEOCs.

The Pacific ETC Coordinator based in Suva, Fiji will continue to engage with partners and Vanuatu government authorities on other needs that may arise, such as training and capacity building of staff.

Data connectivity

On 17 April, the ETC officer conducted a demonstration on configuring, activating, and using Starlink data connectivity devices for six staff at the Vanuatu Meteorology and Geo-Hazards Department. The presentation was part of the capacity building and skills transfer from the ETC to Vanuatu government staff, in support of the ongoing emergency response and improving future resilience to disaster.

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

On 18 April the ETC emergency officer travelled to Tanna Island and installed a Starlink satellite data terminal at the Tafea 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. A 3KVA generator was also installed during the mission to act as a power back-up to the newly installed Starlink satellite data device.

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).

Challenges

Access to the affected areas remains difficult; however, this has eased with the confirmation of charter flights scheduled by the NDMO.

Although electricity supply is still intermittent, 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 25 April 2023**.

Contacts

NAME	POSITION	LOCATION	CONTACT
John Bursa	ETC Coordinator- Pacific (acting)	Fiji	pacific.etc@wfp.org
Abdul Halim Yousufzai	ETC Officer	Vanuatu	halim.yousufzai@wfp.org
Mufaro Masuka	ETC Information Management	UAE	mufaro.masuka@wfp.org

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:

Pacific.ETC@wfp.org