



HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN THE PACIFIC

An Evaluation of Australia's Response to Cyclone Pam

FEBRUARY 2017



Communities affected by Cyclone Pam were very appreciative of Australian humanitarian emergency relief supplies. The photo shows Marie Nowai collecting a hygiene kit from a distribution point at Port Narvin School, Erromango Island, organised by members of the local Community Disaster Committee (wearing orange jackets) with support from CARE. Hygiene kits include soap, a bucket, washing powder, toothbrushes and toothpaste. Photo: Pallen Philip, World Vision.

When Cyclone Pam hit Vanuatu in March 2015, it was the most powerful cyclone ever recorded in the southern Pacific region. Over half of Vanuatu's population, an estimated 188,000 people, were affected. Many homes, livelihoods and essential services were damaged or destroyed (Figure 1).

As the scale of destruction exceeded the response capacity of national systems, the Vanuatu Government requested international assistance. Many governments and humanitarian organisations responded and a global appeal raised A\$58 million.

The Vanuatu Government activated comprehensive disaster plans, and made it clear that it intended to lead and control the humanitarian response. This was challenging given the size of the international response and because many responders, working in the ways they are accustomed to, prioritised speed over aligning with and supporting local systems.

Australia responded rapidly to specific requests for assistance from the Vanuatu Government allocating over A\$15 million to a relief and recovery operation (Figure 2). The Australian Defence Force also made a major contribution providing personnel and assets at a scale and with a functional capacity that would not have been available otherwise (estimated to have cost A\$17 million).

The Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) evaluated Australia's response to Cyclone Pam to identify what should be done to improve the effectiveness of future humanitarian responses in the Pacific. The evaluation focussed on the most severely affected islands—Tanna, Erromango and Efate.

Overall, the evaluation found that Australia's response aligned with commitments in the department's Humanitarian Action Plan and was effective in supporting the Vanuatu Government to deliver much needed assistance to communities.

Figure 1: The path and impact of Cyclone Pam

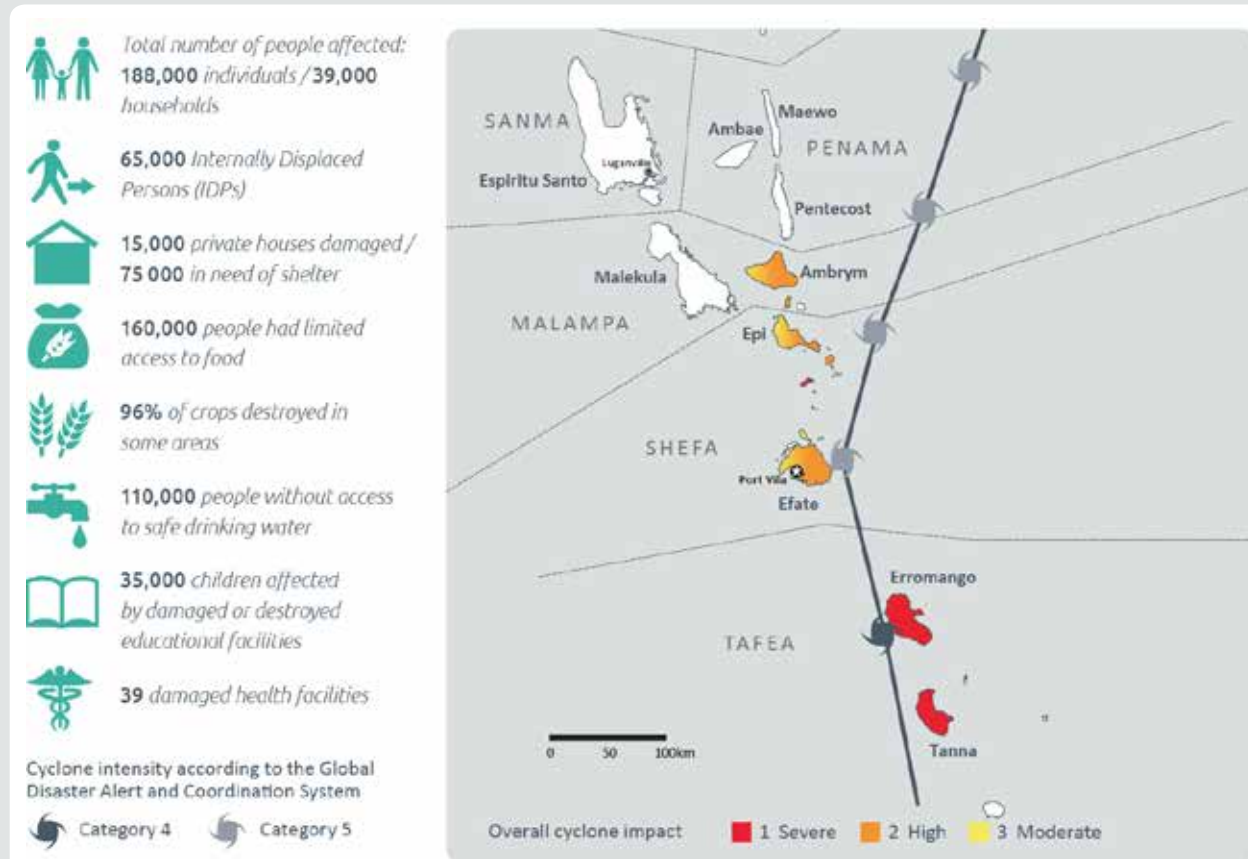


Figure 2: Some of the achievements of Australian Assistance



Summary of Evaluation Findings

- Australia's rapid, large response was justified.
- The Australian whole-of-government response was coordinated and coherent.
- Strategic use of established partnerships facilitated the fast and efficient delivery of much needed assistance.
- After the initial rapid response, assistance could have slowed down to align with the speed of local systems.
- A clear priority for DFAT was supporting local ownership. Providing technical assistance to support government capacity was crucial in the response phase. Direct funding to the health and education ministries enabled them to lead recovery processes.
- Local private sector and civil society expertise and capacity could have been more fully utilised.
- Distribution of relief items focussed on the most severely affected provinces and key needs for shelter and food.
- The distribution of relief items was uniform as requested by the Vanuatu Government and communities.
- Disadvantaged communities and individuals that were more vulnerable were not given additional assistance.
- Assistance could have better supported a broader range of needs including livelihood recovery.
- Cash transfers could not be used as suitable mechanisms had not been established in advance of the crisis.
- The capacity to build on Australia's development programs was limited by the lack of suitable funding mechanisms.
- The scale of the response and complexity of balancing competing priorities stretched the capacity of the Australian High Commission in Port Vila.
- Lessons learned were used to improve the response to Cyclone Winston in Fiji.



Local people have the knowledge to deliver effective solutions to local problems. After the cyclone, food was in short supply on the eastern side of Tanna, but in the fertile Middle Bush area, perishable food was abundant. John Bill (pictured), drawing on a long tradition of barter between these areas, borrowed a truck from the local government organised a food exchange. Fallen coconuts from the east were exchanged for cabbage, taro and cassava from Middle Bush. Photo: Karen Ovington, DFAT.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation made five recommendations to improve the effectiveness of future humanitarian responses to rapid onset crises in the south Pacific region.

RECOMMENDATION 1

DFAT should continue to progress work to support nationally led responses and localisation by:

- defining what is meant by localisation and unifying implementing partners around a common understanding of localisation;
- in advance of a crisis, identifying local, national and regional partners, including from the private sector and civil society, who could contribute effectively to a humanitarian response, and mechanisms that could be used to support them in the event of a crisis; and
- exploring options for Pacific crisis response teams.

RECOMMENDATION 2

DFAT should seek to improve the targeting of assistance to those most in need and to better match needs by:

- working with partner governments ahead of and during a crisis to identify how assistance can be targeted to those most in need;

- working with all implementing partners and Australian agencies to increase, where possible, alignment of assistance with strategic priorities, notably gender equality and women's empowerment, disability inclusiveness and protection;
- exploring mechanisms through which small and medium-size businesses can be supported to recover after crises; and
- establishing mechanisms and relationships so that cash transfer programming can gradually become a standard feature of humanitarian responses in the Pacific.

RECOMMENDATION 3

DFAT should work to further bridge the humanitarian–development divide by:

- identifying prior to a response the strengths and relationships within the bilateral program that can be leveraged in a humanitarian response and incorporating surge funding capacity into bilateral contracts.

RECOMMENDATION 4

DFAT should strengthen its communication and accountability by:

- developing a short written statement or action plan that outlines the overall purpose, strategic priorities, suite of partners and approach of Australia's assistance, and making the plan available to partners at the outset of a response; and
- encouraging and supporting implementing partners to improve accountability to national governments by providing timely, concise reports.

RECOMMENDATION 5

DFAT should ensure its internal capacity to deliver humanitarian action is appropriate by:

- ensuring staff at posts have been provided with appropriate training about humanitarian principles, policy and operations; and
- exploring mechanisms for lengthening and improving the phasing of short-term humanitarian deployments.

DFAT management has agreed with all of the recommendations. The full evaluation report, including the management response, is available at dfat.gov.au/ode.



Stallholders from the Local Mamas Business Group.
Photo: Linda Kenni, Port Vila.

The Local Mamas' Business Group was established 15 years ago. The 87 members had stalls at a market place in Port Vila that was destroyed by Cyclone Pam. The Mamas were allocated space in a new market to establish their stalls. While this was very welcome, many of them struggled to find the funds needed to build their new stalls, since, at the time, they were also trying to repair their homes.

A year after the cyclone, the group was still struggling to survive. Tourists had started to return, but sales were still small. One Mama told how previously she could afford the bus fare to the market but now had to walk for about 90 minutes to reach the market. As most of the Mamas are the main breadwinners for their families, they estimate that the livelihoods of about 500 people have been compromised by the impact of the cyclone on their businesses.

The management response to the evaluation has identified opportunities and actions to hasten the recovery of local enterprises and markets in future crises. These include, increasing access to insurance and providing cash transfers to vulnerable groups to inject cash flow into local markets.

Office of Development Effectiveness

DFAT's Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) monitors the performance of the Australian aid program, evaluates its impact and contributes to international evidence and debate about aid and development effectiveness.

<http://dfat.gov.au/aid/how-we-measure-performance/ode/other-work/Pages/evaluation-of-effectiveness-australias-response-cyclone-pam.aspx>