

TC Harold Impacting Vanuatu

Vanuatu is not the same place it was a few weeks ago.

On Monday, 6 April 2020, Tropical Cyclone Harold made landfall in Vanuatu on the island of Santo and continued east again making landfall on south Pentecost. This Category 5 severe tropical cyclone was the first to strike Vanuatu since Cyclone Pam in 2015, bringing gusts above 275 km/h and 250–450 mm of rain.

Gone were the COVID-19 social distancing restrictions as people scrambled for places of safety. They emerged to find piles of rubble with the majority of homes and schools on the northern islands impacted, including Santo, Malekula, Ambae, Ambryn, Pentecost and Maewo. Approximately 160,000 people (more than 50% of Vanuatu's population) have been affected by the destructive force of TC Harold.

At Londua/Bombua School on Santo, the Boarding Master's House lost its verandah. The Principal's house survived, but leaked significantly, and the old original classrooms survived with some wind-blown damage. Everything else was flattened. One of the teachers suffered a severe break to her upper arm when she slipped on the wet floor at home during the cyclone. She was sent to Port Vila Hospital to have a metal pin inserted.

Ranwadi High School on Pentecost also experienced significant damage to 40% of their buildings. Remarkably, the Conference of Churches of Christ buildings in Luganville are largely unaffected, with uprooted trees falling mostly into open areas. Power was restored on 23 April.

Rebuilding

The Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) is coordinating the relief effort. This has involved sending out teams to conduct rapid assessments, liaising with in-country humanitarian partners and international donors and then to start the process of providing assistance. While providing assistance in terms of food, water, shelter and health care, attention is also given to child protection, prevention of gender-based violence, disability inclusion, community cohesion, women's participation, and psycho-social support and psychological first aid.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the Vanuatu Government is only accepting supplies and not personnel. All supplies are directed to Port Vila first to be sanitised and then forwarded to the relevant islands.

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The latest information from NDMO is:

SANMA Province:

- Main priorities: health, food security, water access and shelter
- Water access in Luganville has been restored but only in a few other places on Santo
- Food distribution commended on Friday, 10 April with emphasis on providing island food.
- Road and debris clearing is still ongoing.
- Medical teams have been deployed in the province to provide medical assistance and to assess damage to health facilities.
- Telecommunications in Luganville have been re-established.
- Electricity has been partially restored (60%)

PENAMA Province:

Pentecost

- Main priorities: food security, water access and shelter
- Large number of public buildings including schools, health dispensaries have been destroyed.
- Debris and overflowing rivers have caused major road blocks and clearing work is continuing.
- First shipments of dry-ration and bottled water have arrived.
- Extensive damage to schools: Ranwadi College has 60% damage; Melsisi College 90-95%

Ambae

- There is an urgent need for safe drinking water in West and East Ambae due to the contamination of drinking wells.
- Reports of worst damaged houses in West/South Ambae.

Maewo

- Minor damage reported in South Maewo.

MALAMPA Province:

Malekula

- Main priorities: clean drinking water and food security.
- Major damage to local food crops.

Ambrym

- Main priorities: clean drinking water and food security
- Dry rations have arrived in North Ambrym on 20 April
- Most homes in North Ambrym were destroyed.
- Roads are blocked from debris.

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Peter Bryant, Principal at Londua/Bombua School reports, "Cleaning up has started. We are looking forward to shade as the trees spring back to life as the weather has been very hot, but some recent small showers of rain have taken the edge off the heat. Praise God for His daily provision as we share our goods, food, clothes etc. Pray for ongoing wisdom, physical assistance and stamina throughout the future days."

Our grateful thanks to all those who have partnered with Vanuatu at this time of need to assist them with emergency supplies and rebuilding. We will keep you updated as news comes to hand.

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