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Aid** 

After the Storm

Recovering from Tropical Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu



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What happened in Vanuatu in 2015?

Between 12 and 14 March 2015, Tropical Cyclone Pam struck Vanuatu as a category five cyclone, causing 11 deaths and severe damage to housing, health centres, schools and other critical infrastructure. The cyclone affected the livelihoods of around 195,000 people across four disaster-affected provinces – Tafea, Shefa, Malampa and Penama¹.

How were people affected?

The tropical cyclone caused extensive destruction to crops and compromised the livelihoods of at least 80% of Vanuatu's rural population. The total losses from TC Pam were estimated to be 64.1% of Vanuatu's gross domestic product (Vatu 48.6 billion, USD449.4 million)². To make matters worse, the country was also hit by El Nino-fuelled drought later in 2015, further exacerbating recovery and livelihood issues.

How is RedR Australia and the Australia Assists program contributing to recovery?

In the wake of Tropical Cyclone Pam and the drought, **RedR Australia** deployed twenty humanitarian experts in key technical fields such as food security, protection, logistics, coordination and information management to UN agencies to support the country's response to the disaster. Through the **Australia Assists** program, **RedR Australia** has also been able to deploy five experts focused on supporting longer term recovery and disaster risk reduction, through the project management of primarily DFAT³-funded initiatives in livelihoods, water, sanitation and infrastructure. These projects form part of the Australian Government's \$35 million (AUD) recovery fund for Vanuatu.

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1. DFAT - Australian support to Vanuatu following Tropical Cyclone Pam – Fact Sheet
2. Government of Vanuatu 2015a, SPC 2016
3. DFAT refers to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Government of Australia)



Livelihoods (through the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity, Australia Assists deployee: Jodie Clark) – In agriculture, there is a move towards mechanisation, involving the purchase of tractors and moving to more high value crops. The establishment of provincial nurseries has facilitated this, along with improved efforts in reforestation. In livestock, new breeds of critical livestock, such as goats, chickens, pigs and ducks have been introduced, significantly improving the genetic breeding stock and productivity. These have operated like “banks” in local communities, sharing the benefits of new animals. In fisheries, this has involved installing Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) to boost fish stocks affected by cyclones and therefore local food security; and fish freezers, so that fishers can store their catch before taking to and selling at market. Previously all catch had to be consumed quickly and locally.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity has also been working with hospitals and schools to improve their food security. According to the Director General of this ministry, Benjamin Shing, Jodie has been instrumental in achieving these goals. Her strength is in project management and Mr Shing states that she “gets things done, understands the mission and what needs to be achieved.”

Water (through the Department of Water Resources, Australia Assists deployee: Kieren Davis). This project is designed to provide consistent emergency water supplies during disasters and times of greatest need. The rain water harvesting and gravity-fed water systems are being designed in consultation with local communities to ensure appropriate design, usage and management. Kieren is working closely with national colleagues to manage these programs, liaise with communities and establish structures to support ongoing maintenance and management of infrastructure. Kieren’s strong engineering skills have meant that he has been able to strengthen designs for water systems. According to the Director General of this ministry, Erickson Sammy, “Kieren is working well and is the interface with DFAT for the project. He has strong engineering skills and approves the design of water systems projects.”

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Infrastructure (through the Ministry of Public Works, Australia Assists deployee: Ted McDonnell). This DFAT-funded public building recovery project is designed to assist with key infrastructure recovery post TC Pam. This has included projects such as airport upgrades, market expansion and upgrade of sanitation amenities and police accommodation. The Ministry's Director General has seen Ted's project management role as significant in achieving this: "I am happy with progress on public buildings – it has all been completed within budget and on time. Ted's assistance has been important in achieving this. The new Police housing in particular has been getting praise as this has been a need since TC Pam in 2015, causing significant safety and security issues for Police."

What is Build Back Better?

The Build Back Better approach being taken in the recovery projects was universally lauded in a recent RedR Australia monitoring visit because it allows communities in Vanuatu to not only recover from TC Pam, but actually improve their day to day lives. An example of this is improving yields in agriculture through increased mechanisation. This allows for more land under cultivation and through the provision of higher value crops.

What does all of this mean for people in Vanuatu affected by TC Pam?

With the example of support to fisheries and the installation of FADs and freezers, community members on the island of Lelepa claim that these initiatives have allowed previously subsistence-level farmers, particularly women, to boost food security as well as develop incomes and increase resilience to future shocks.

With agricultural projects, a wide range of people in local communities have been involved in the collection of seeds and management of community nurseries, including women and people with disabilities who traditionally did not play such a significant role in this sector.

As deployee Jodie Clark explains,

"We are focussing on how we can have sustainable outcomes with increased community participation when planning our long term projects like nurseries – how we can build back better and make them disaster-proof".