

TC Winston – Fiji

13 March 2016

TC PAM

- The eye of category 5 Tropical Cyclone Pam passed close to Efate Island in Shefa Province, where the capital Port Vila is located one year ago.
- The cyclone recorded winds of around 250 km per hour, and gusts peaking at 320 km per hour.
- 188,000 people were affected and 11 people died.
- Early warning systems and the provision of evacuation centres by the Government of Vanuatu prevented a higher death toll.



Port Vila during TC Pam in 2015. Credit: Alice Clements/UNICEF

Tropical Cyclone (TC) Pam struck Vanuatu on the evening of 13 March. The category 5 cyclone caused widespread damage across five provinces of the archipelago – Shefa, Tafea, Malampa, Penama and Torba.

Pacific resilience in the face of disaster

A year after Tropical Cyclone Pam cut a path of destruction across Vanuatu, Tuvalu, the Solomon Islands and Kiribati, the Pacific is again grappling with the devastating aftermath of a Category 5 cyclone – the worst ever to hit the South Pacific. After impacting on the islands of central Tonga, Tropical Cyclone Winston unleashed its El Niño-fueled fury on Fiji on 20-21 February, killing more than 40 people and leaving 40 per cent of the population in humanitarian need. Like the people of Vanuatu a year ago, Fijians are again proving the Pacific’s resilience to the natural disasters which are affecting the region with increasing unpredictability.

TC WINSTON

- On 20 and 21 Feb, Cat 5 Tropical Cyclone Winston hit Fiji.
- Winston was the strongest cyclone to make landfall in the Pacific.
- Whole villages have been destroyed, especially on the hardest hit outer islands.
- 350,000 people or 40 per cent of the population are affected.
- 250,000 people are without access to water and sanitation.



Turaga ni Koro Simione Koroicakau surveys the damage to Verevere Village on Fiji’s north east coast. Credit: Danielle Parry/UNOCHA

Rebuilding after the storm

Village Headman Simione Koroicakau looks out with tears in his eyes at all that is left of his once-beautiful coastal community of Verevere on the north east coast of Fiji’s main island, Viti Levu.

“After the cyclone, my village has gone down to almost ground zero. Living is very difficult at the moment. Everything is gone. Now the people are crying for their houses so they can get back to normal life. It’s very difficult for us to start but we are confident to carry on,” Mr Koroicakau said.



Devastated Verevere Village in Ra Province on Fiji's north east coast. Credit: Danielle Parry/UNOCHA

Every building in this village was damaged and the vast majority destroyed as TC Winston battered the coast. More than a hundred people are currently living in tents and a small local hall but it's a situation the village headman knows can't continue.

"You can see now that we started building our houses. At the moment, the whole village still lives in the community hall. It's not a very big hall. It's overcrowded and there's a risk of disease too," he said.



The people of Verevere Village in Fiji's Ra Province are working hard to rebuild after the devastating affects of TC Winston. Credit: Danielle Parry/UNOCHA

Neighbouring forestry plantations provide the perfect materials for a longer-term rebuilding effort but there remains a need for more tools and equipment.

"We need some chainsaws or a portable sawmill because we've got a mahogany forest here that's all destroyed and we can use it up," he said.

Shelter Assessments¹ conducted within weeks of Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu revealed a similar capacity for self-recovery with almost three quarters of affected people reporting that they had carried out their own housing repairs.

¹http://sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/shelter_cluster_report_shelter_and_settlements_vulnerability_assessment_after_cyclone_pam_may2015.pdf



Rebuilding after TC Pam in Vanuatu. Credit: UNICEF Vlad Sokhin

“Pacific Islanders are extremely resilient and are keen to get on with the task of rebuilding their homes. Shelter supplies funded through the UN’s Central Emergency Relief Fund have arrived in Fiji and include tarpaulins, tools and fixings to support people to get back on their feet. An Emergency Cash Grant has also funded US\$50,000 in equipment for clearing debris including chainsaws. Fijians face a long road to recovery and have our full support as they rebuild,” Humanitarian Coordinator, Osnat Lubrani said.

Food for thought

Impacts on agriculture were extreme in both cyclones with added food security risks associated with El Niño.

“Between 70 and 80 per cent of coconut, coffee, leaf vegetables and taro crops were wiped out in the worst affected areas of Vanuatu. Stockpiles of food were also destroyed leaving families with little to eat. This impact was compounded by the El Niño drought which followed, stopping replanted crops from growing, leaving thousands reliant on emergency food distributions and putting children at risk of malnutrition,” Humanitarian Coordinator, Osnat Lubrani said.



Eight year old Joanna Kawenu reflects on TC Pam, a year after the cyclone hit
Credit: UNICEF

Such was the impact of these food shortages in Vanuatu that even the youngest minds are now conscious of the need to store emergency food supplies in case of future disasters.

“Me, my mum and my sister are going to plant our crops and after our crops are ready, we will harvest them before another cyclone comes. So if another cyclone strikes we will be lucky, because we will still have food to eat,” eight year old Joanna Kawenu said a year after the cyclone.

In Fiji, farmers have spent the past year grappling with the impacts of El Niño and after TC Winston, authorities are working hard to prevent a repeat of the food insecurity seen in Vanuatu. Total damage to agriculture from the cyclone is estimated at US\$57 million with cash crops badly hit, limiting their availability and increasing prices at local markets. Food rations have been delivered to affected communities to meet immediate humanitarian needs. To kick-start the longer-term agricultural recovery process, the Fiji Government has been distributing seeds and seedlings but some farmers are already taking steps to begin their own recovery.



Sesarina Lisi's vegetable farm was destroyed by TC Winston but she and her husband are already re-planting. Credit: Danielle Parry/UNOCHA

Sesarina Lisi's vegetable farm at Tova settlement, near Mataso in Ra Province, was completely destroyed just as crops were about to be harvested. She and her husband have used their church connections to quickly source seeds so that replanting can begin.

"The cassava is just uprooted and the crop is just rotten now. We've got a little bit of taro and plantain which is all down. We paid two men to come and help so now they are re-planting stuff. It will be about eight months before we can start harvesting," she said.

Emergency Appeal

While Fijians are strong and resilient, there remains enormous humanitarian need. On March 4, The Fijian Government and the United Nations jointly launched an emergency appeal to help fund projects to support the 350,000 people affected by Cyclone Winston. The international community is urged to give generously to this Appeal.

FIJI FLASH APPEAL TROPICAL CYCLONE WINSTON

US\$38.6 MILLION
REQUIRED

COVERS FEBRUARY- MAY 2016

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