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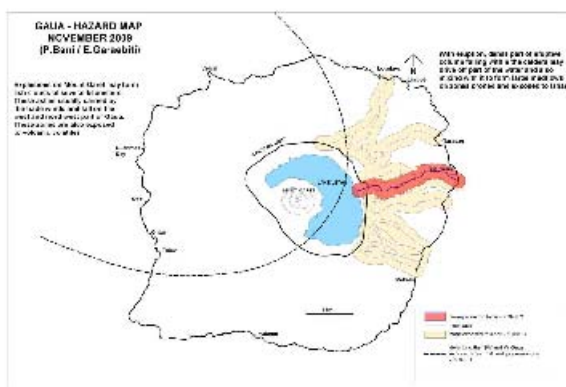
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OCHA Situation Update No 1. on Gaua Island Volcanic Activity, Vanuatu 27 November 2009

1. Summary of the Situation

Gaua volcano on Gaua Island, TORBA Province, Vanuatu, has erupted on 18 November 2009. This explosion has been followed by very thick and high emissions of ash columns that were covering the areas exposed to trade winds in the West. Until present, the activity of Gaua volcano remains significant according to the Geo-Hazard Section, Department of Geology, Mines and Water Resources. It is recommended that the alert level of the volcano be maintained at level 2 while close monitoring of the volcanic activities is on-going. The probability of the volcanic activity going up to level 3 is low to moderate. Level 2 requires on-island evacuation mainly from the West to the East while Level 3 requires evacuation of the whole island population, which is estimated to be 3,000.

The danger persists almost on the entire island except the South-Western part. The North-Western part of the island is particularly at risk of ash fall and volcanic degassing while the eastern part is prone to lahar flow, especially along the area of Waterfall which is a lahar flow path. An area of at least 1 kilometre surrounding the river is highly prone to mudflow. The areas further away from the river of Waterfalls are also threatened with mudflow hazard in case of a highly explosive eruption, at least 6 kilometres north and south from the Waterfall River, which covers from Losalava to Makeliu Village. (Refer to the Gaua Hazard Map November 2009 P5 of Bulletin No3, Gaua Volcano activity Gaua Island, 24 November 2009, Department of Geology, Mines and Water Resources).



There are 3 phases of Operations activated by NDC:

- Phase 1 - Monitoring and information dissemination/Awareness and Planning
- Phase 2 - Evacuating of Western communities to the Eastern part of the island/awareness
- Phase 3 - Evacuation of the whole island population to Vanua Lava Island

In-land Evacuation

On 26 November 2009, the evacuation of people living in the risk areas in the Western part of the island has started, prioritizing vulnerable groups. Currently there are 3 boats available to transfer the people. Lack of fuel for the boat was identified as a logistical constraint, but it was clarified that the government (NDMO) will be able to cover the needs. In total, 31 people have been evacuated including 2 new born babies on 26 November. According to the Red Cross, the evacuation is taking place slowly due to limited sea transport means and rough seas.

Those living in the risk areas of Western side, approximately 350-400 population in total, are going to be evacuated in the coming week, with daily evacuations. The TORBA Provincial government, police and Vanuatu Red Cross are conducting the registration of evacuees. So far, all evacuees are accommodated with relatives on the eastern side of the island, but the government is already planning for setting up evacuation centers, and Namasari is considered as one of the locations. The field operation team already has some evacuation plan (who goes to which villages), but it still to be confirmed how many people need to be accommodated at evacuation centers, what facilities are going to be used, and what equipment/resources/facilities have to be available at the evacuation centres. In addition to these 350-400 population in the West who need to be evacuated to the East, there are an additional 200 people living along the area of Waterfall on the eastern side of the island, which is prone to the lahar or mudflows. They also need to be evacuated since if a serious volcanic eruption occurs causing drain off of the lahar, the impact will be fatal. Therefore, in total around 600 people need to be evacuated from their current residence to safer locations on the island. It is assumed that it will take 5-10 days to evacuate all 600 people to these locations. In addition to the currently available 3 boats, the government is looking for other ships/boats for transportation. A French Naval ship will depart on 30 November to Port Vila for a routine exercise from Noumea (New Caledonia), and the Vanuatu government requested France for logistical assistance with the evacuation.

3. Actions taken by the government

- Deployment of police team (4 Police/Vanuatu Mobile Force officers) to support the field operation and information gathering. They aim to establish additional communications, a link with Torba Provincial Government/Santo police/National level and an Emergency Operations Centre.
- Deployment of a Geo-hazard team to monitor the volcanic situation
- NDMO supports the Torba Provincial Disaster Committee to assess and arrange evacuation centers in the eastern part of the island
- The government field team to organize and monitor the evacuation process including the registration of evacuees
- Regular NDC meeting for information sharing with the key stakeholders
- Conducting awareness raising on volcanic situations, its threats and actions to be taken

4. Actions taken by the non-government agencies

- Vanuatu Red Cross dispatched the assessment team
- The Vanuatu Red Cross provides support for the registration of evacuees and distribution of relief items. It has mobilized prepositioned relief items in Sola on Vanua Lava Island, approximately 60 km from Gaua, which includes 42 water containers (20 ltr) and 77 tarpaulins.
- French Red Cross in New Caledonia provided extra relief items, which are arriving in Vanuatu with a French Naval. These include 300 tarpaulins, 150 hygiene kits and 300 water containers.
- Donor agencies and UN agencies are on stand-by to provide support upon request of the government.
- A Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) lead agency meeting was held in Suva, linked up with Vanuatu based agencies and government to review the current situation and discuss possible support that the PHT can provide.
- OCHA deployed a staff for providing coordination support in Vanuatu