Protection Cluster Focus: increased awareness

Following the pattern of responses over the last few years, and the recent cyclone season, the Pacific Humanitarian Protection Cluster has confirmed the need to build further awareness – amongst government, non-government and community actors of what protection means in emergencies. It is important to underline that protection covers a wide range of activities and principles that are aimed at ensuring safety, security and wellbeing but also more importantly respecting dignity and the rights of all individuals, regardless of their age, gender or social, ethnic, national, religious or other background.

The Protection Cluster Coordinator, members of the UN Gender Group and the Pacific GenCap Advisor have recently participated in two different missions to the Western Division of Fiji to assess the impact of the recent floods on several issues, including gender and gender-based violence. The findings confirmed that other protection issues must also be addressed. Such issues are among others the increased pressure on families due to the losses of personal goods and in some cases, livelihoods which can lead to negative coping behaviours such as increased substance abuse, domestic violence and illness due to high stress levels. There is a need for referral capacity for psychosocial services to assist communities to return to normalcy. These services are needed for both the affected community members as well as the first responders who were traumatised by the plight of the people they encountered and their capacity to provide adequate assistance.

In addition, the need for sex and age disaggregated data collection (including data on persons with disabilities) and gender analysis is essential in order to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable are met more systematically.

The finalised assessment data will feed into capacity building activities for first responders and other stakeholders to enhance their capacity to prepare and respond to disasters more effectively.

Pacific Humanitarian Protection Cluster partners are now developing advocacy posters to target affected populations, humanitarian actors and first responders to ensure that key protection principles promoting safety, wellbeing and dignity for vulnerable people are effectively addressed during emergencies.

Vanuatu Humanitarian Team working with National Disaster Management Office in disaster response

The newly formed Vanuatu Humanitarian Team (VHT) faced its first challenge on 10 February this year when Tropical Cyclone Jasmine struck off the coast of Vanuatu's Tafea Province, causing damage mainly to agriculture and water supply.
The Vanuatu Humanitarian Team was established in late 2011 as a collaboration between Vanuatu based NGO’s, the Red Cross, UN and government agencies. It is coordinated by Oxfam and features a network of non-government humanitarian actors focused on improving the coordination of humanitarian preparedness and response in support of government agencies. The European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Office (ECHO), AusAID and Oxfam are the core donors for the VHT, with guidance from the OCHA Regional Office for the Pacific.

While the Vanuatu Humanitarian Team is based on the internationally recognized cluster system, it is slightly different. In Vanuatu, Government ministries act as the lead agencies in the cluster system and members of the Vanuatu Humanitarian Team, such as Save the Children, UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the Adventist Development Relief Organization, support the Government ministries with disaster preparedness and response acting as co-leads. Five clusters are currently set up: Health, WASH, Agriculture and Food Security, Logistics and Emergency Education.

The VHT responded to Tropical Cyclone Jasmine by mobilizing members in a joint rapid assessment team and sourcing logistical staff for the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) to assess the cyclone impact and make recommendations of appropriate aid in a timely manner.

Based on the success of the response to Tropical Cyclone Jasmine, the Vanuatu Humanitarian Team is now an integral part of the NDMO’s tsunami and cyclone response preparedness plans and part of their standard operating procedures.

The Vanuatu Humanitarian Team is now looking at how they can support the provincial governments in Torba and Tafea provinces to prepare for the coming cyclone season. Torba and Tafea provinces are highly susceptible to tropical cyclones and other natural disasters. From now until September, the VHT will be working closely with the NDMO to train provincial based government and VHT staff members in assessment and coordination tools and to develop provincial standard operating procedures to strengthen coordination between Port Vila and the provinces.

The VHT membership and structure also lends itself well for linkages with and support from the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT). The OCHA Regional Office for the Pacific, the NDMO and the VHT have also recently agreed on an approach to coordinated needs assessments in Vanuatu.

To find out more about the Tropical Cyclone Jasmine response click here.

Transforming Humanitarian Response

The Humanitarian Reform process was initiated by the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, together with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in 2005 to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response through greater predictability, accountability, responsibility and partnership. However, emergencies such as the Pakistan Floods and Haiti Earthquake in 2010 demonstrated that challenges still remain.

To address these challenges, the IASC developed the Transformative Agenda, a set of concrete actions aimed at transforming the way the humanitarian community responds to emergencies.

Built around three key pillars of leadership, accountability and coordination, the Transformative Agenda is now being rolled out. Although initially meant to address challenges in dealing with sudden-onset large-scale disasters such as those experienced...
in Pakistan and Haiti in 2010, it is also meant to be used in a broader range of contexts over time. The priority actions of the Transformative Agenda include:

- **A mechanism to deploy strong, experienced senior humanitarian leadership** to guide the humanitarian response from the outset of a major crisis;
- **The strengthening of leadership capacities and rapid deployment of humanitarian leaders** at various levels, to ensure the coordination architecture functions well;
- **Improved strategic planning** at the country level that clarifies the collective results that the humanitarian community sets out to achieve and identifies how clusters and organizations will contribute to them;
- **Enhanced accountability** of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and members of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) for the achievement of collective results; and
- **Streamlined coordination mechanisms** adapted to operational requirements and contexts to facilitate delivery.

The Transformative Agenda can add value to strengthening humanitarian response in the Pacific Island region and should be used to ensure adequate leadership, accountability and coordination for future humanitarian responses.

Already, the priority actions of the Transformative Agenda are being incorporated into the functions of the PHT. As the PHT continues to strengthen, it will be important to ensure that the Transformative Agenda is incorporated to ensure improved strategic planning, enhanced accountability and streamlined coordination mechanisms.

### Fiji Floods: Lessons Learned

In January and March 2012, Fiji suffered from severe flooding as a result of two Tropical Depressions. The flooding caused significant damage, particularly to areas of the Western Division. Following the Fijian Government’s declarations of Natural Disaster, the Pacific Humanitarian Team supported the national humanitarian response and early recovery activities.

On Thursday 14 June, PHT cluster coordinators held a Lessons Learned meeting to discuss successes and difficulties experienced during the Fiji Flood responses. Clusters were asked to reflect on the twelve areas they are responsible for ensuring, as outlined in the PHT Terms of Reference and to provide practical feedback on the impact of their activities as well as recommendations for future humanitarian responses.

The PHT Education Cluster reported that the coordinated cluster approach led to greater reach into schools and to affected students. In addition, the pre-positioning of their ‘Education in Emergencies’ materials enabled the Cluster to be in a better position to respond. The Cluster identified the time taken to compile the findings of Rapid Assessments as a challenge. Though the Ministry for Education was quick to initiate the process of data collection, the time taken to enter the data, process the data and compile a report was lengthy. The Cluster will support the Ministry for Education to strengthen these processes to ensure a stronger response in the future.

The PHT Health and Nutrition Cluster reported that training on clinical practices, case definitions and health recourses provided to clinicians led to better diagnosis of...
THE PHT WILL NOW HOLD A SERIES OF SEQUENTIAL THEMATIC MEETINGS FOCUSING ON THE AREAS OF STANDARDS, ASSESSMENTS, PARTNERSHIPS AND CROSS CUTTING ISSUES AS A FOLLOW UP TO THE LESSONS LEARNED EXERCISE.

Communicable diseases. The Cluster has recommended that consistent training for medical practitioners would ensure more effective humanitarian responses in the future. The leaflet provided to health inspectors and affected populations on food safety practices during the floods will need to be further assessed to ascertain its impact.

Although there was greater coordination between the PHT Clusters in response to the Fiji Floods, the Shelter Cluster highlighted the need to ensure that the PHT Clusters were working together in response to the closure of schools as evacuation centers. In addition, they identified the issue that if all clusters are to be permanently activated in the Pacific, then they should all be represented in the PHT to prevent gaps in the response.

The PHT Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Cluster outlined the challenge of evacuation centers not having adequate access to water and basic sanitation and have suggested working with the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and Ministry of Health to develop a criteria for the selection of evacuation centers to ensure they meet basic WASH needs.

The main challenge the Protection Cluster faced was the lack of an official protection structure within the authorities and the partners on the ground. Individual contacts and initiatives with a number of actors have been established and developed but a holistic approach has proven more difficult. During the March floods the Cluster was able to work successfully on inter alia evacuation centre registration processes and raise the profile of psychosocial support needs. The Cluster recommended that further work be undertaken in both of these areas but that advocacy is needed to establish official structures to provide a solid base for protection work. Psychosocial support was an issue identified by a number of the PHT Clusters, including the Education Cluster which identified a lack of psychosocial support for teachers and students.

The Food Security Cluster identified the lack of capacity within the Food Security Cluster to respond during the height of a crisis and emphasized the need to be able to deploy a Cluster Coordinator in a timely manner. In addition, the Cluster stressed the need to further build the capacity of the Cluster by seeking funding for a full-time Cluster Coordinator.

The Gender Surge Group identified the need for all PHT Clusters to visibly integrate and report on gender, with measurable indicators in place.

In the area of coordination, OCHA identified the need to work with the PHT to further develop the Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP) template to ensure that it is appropriate for the context in which the PHT works and that all stakeholders understand the purpose and process for developing a HAP.

Despite the successful response to the Fiji Floods, challenges still remain. Overall, the PHT cluster coordinators identified four key issues that they will now focus on, including standards, assessments, cross cutting issues and partnership. The information collected during the Lessons Learned will be provided to the Fijian Government and used by the PHT to inform future humanitarian responses.

To find out more about the Fiji Floods response click here.
Disasters in the Pacific Island Region Jan 2012 – Jun 2012

Legend
- Flood
- Landslide
- Tropical Cyclone
- Tropical Cyclone Track

Climate Update
Observations have shown that sea surface temperatures over the tropical Pacific Ocean have warmed significantly in recent months with further warming expected through the southern hemisphere winter. This is likely to exceed El Niño thresholds by the late winter to early spring period. The risk of tropical cyclones, especially strong tropical cyclones, increases during El Niño years, meaning there is a need to focus on preparedness activities in the lead up to the coming cyclone season from November to April.

For Further Information
https://www.phtpacific.org/Crisis