



VANUATU: Earthquake

Pacific Humanitarian Team

Situation Report

26 December 2024

This report is produced by OCHA Office of the Pacific Islands in collaboration with humanitarian partners under the Pacific Humanitarian Team. It covers the period from 17 to 26 December 2024.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Ten days after the magnitude 7.3 earthquake, the humanitarian response continues in Vanuatu under the leadership of the Government.
- Aftershocks are ongoing and at time of reporting Vanuatu is experiencing a tropical low bringing heavy rainfall (likely 100 millimetres or more in a 24-hour period), which poses a high risk of landslides and building collapse.
- The Ministry of Health has confirmed 14 fatalities (eight males, five females, one unknown) and 265 injuries, with 11 surgical cases admitted at Vanuatu Central Hospital (VHC).
- As of 24 December 2024, 2,435 individuals remain displaced across six evacuation centres and 67 host households (HH).
- The State of Emergency (SoE) ended on 24 December 2024. According to the Disaster Recovery and Resilience Act of 17 November 2024 operations transition to the National Recovery Committee (NRC) under the Prime Minister's Office. The coordination responsibility passed from the National Emergency Operation Centre (NEOC) to the Recovery Operations Centre (ROC) which was activated on 25 December.
- Some roads are still blocked in Efate, including access to the main commercial Sea Port.
- Key infrastructure, including Tagabe bridge, sustained significant damage and are at high risk of collapse if heavy rainfall and aftershocks continue.
- Communication challenges persist with intermittent connectivity and limited internet coverage.
- Key immediate needs include healthcare support, emergency shelter, access to food and water, protection, psychological support and the restoration of communication networks.



80K

People Affected



2.4K

Temporarily Displaced



14

Fatalities



265

Injuries

SITUATION OVERVIEW

The situation in Vanuatu remains critical following the 7.3 magnitude earthquake that struck on December 17, 2024. Aftershocks are ongoing and Vanuatu is currently experiencing a tropical low carrying heavy rains (100 millimetres or more in a 24-hour period), which poses a high risk of landslides and building collapse.

Infrastructure damage is extensive, with landslides obstructing road and route access in Efate and the outer islands, including to the main Sea Port. Telecommunication services are being restored gradually. Domestic mobile phone communication is functional but with intermittent disruptions, while international phone services (voice and SMS) remain stable. Internet services, however, are still down on Efate island, complicating coordination efforts. Access to the Government Broadband Network (GBN) has been restored by the Department of Communications and Digital Transformation (DCDT). Most banking services in Port Vila have been restored although some ATMs are still non-operational due to a lack of power access.

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HUMANITARIAN NEEDS AND RESPONSE

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Needs:

- Access to safe water remains a critical issue, with several areas reporting partial or no water supply due to damaged infrastructure.
- Two major water reservoirs in Port Vila have sustained severe damage.
- Water storage tanks at schools, health facilities and communities were damaged.
- Water intake structures suffered cracks and leakages at some of the village water sources.
- Current assessments indicate that a total of 10,000 people in Mele, Melemaat, and Teouma Ville have unmet needs. Assessments are ongoing in other areas including Etas, Tanvasoko and other affected communities.
- Water supply continues to be interrupted at the hospital affecting hospital departments supporting emergency surgery and other critical services.
- Sanitation and hygiene for temporarily displaced people is lacking.

10K

People targeted for extensive support

Response:

- The national WASH cluster response plan has been developed, targeting 20,000 people for water supply and an additional 10,000 people for extensive support, including hygiene kit distributions.
- UNICEF has supported the installation of two 6,000-litre water bladders at Vila Central Hospital (VCH) and assisted with restoring water services both within the hospital compound and in Mele Health Centre through quick fixes.
- UNICEF, Department of Water Resources, World Vision, ADRA and Vanuatu Red Cross Society (VRCS) have provided water trucking services to the most affected communities, including Mele (Dispensary, Mele Village, Malariku), Mele Malaripu, Melemaat, and Malapoa, Teouma Ville Stage 1 and 2, Eluk Plateau, Tanvasaka Area delivering over 69,200 litres of water. Tanks were also filled to ensure water supply is available during the Christmas break.
- The VRCS and World Vision have distributed jerry cans supplied by UNICEF to improve access to water.
- UNICEF has handed over two 1,500-litre bladders to World Vision, while one 6,000-litre bladder and one 5,000-litre bladder were provided to the Department of Water Resources (DoWR). Additionally, 4,000 water containers and three centrifugal pumps were supplied to partner organizations to assist with water trucking efforts.
- The VRCS is actively distributing hygiene kits provided by DFAT to address sanitation needs.

Gaps & Constraints:

- Updates from UNELCO regarding the status of water supply restoration and water quality results are needed to inform the needs assessment and enable partners to allocate resources effectively and efficiently.
- Logistical constraints, including a shortage of flat-bed truck for water trucking and water system assessments, hinder effective operations.

- Funding shortages are impacting the mobilization of logistics and operations necessary for deploying field teams.
- Many local shops are closed, hindering the WASH Cluster's ability to procure essential items required for water trucking and quick fixes of water systems.
- Additional data is required from Displacement Evacuation Centre Management (DECM) cluster to verify WASH needs and ensure comprehensive planning.

Health & Nutrition

Needs:

- The Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 14 deaths and 265 injuries, with 11 surgical cases admitted to VCH.
- 18 out of the 22 health facilities in Efate Island remain functional.
- Health facilities face WASH deficiencies due to ongoing water shortages. Britano Aidpost which has a catchment area that includes one of the largest evacuation centres (Forkona Primary SDA School), lacks water and power, and has sustained structural damage.
- Although operational, health facilities are overcrowded and in urgent need of additional medical supplies, including zinc, oral rehydration solution, nutrition therapeutic supplies, micronutrient powders, and portable anthropometric equipment.
- Eight health facilities in the affected region have suffered minor damage; while they remain functional, repairs are necessary.
- VCH is urgently requesting surge support and the acquisition of essential medical consumables.
- Malnutrition risks are heightened due to loss of livelihoods, disruptions in food supply chains and limited access to nutritious food, especially in remote areas.
- Temporarily displaced populations and those who have lost their livelihoods require both immediate and long-term support to access healthy and nutritious foods to meet the nutritional needs of their families.
- Expected adoption of reduced coping mechanisms is likely to affect health-seeking behaviors and access to health and nutrition services in health facilities. There is an imminent need to intensify community health and nutrition outreach activities that require significant logistics costs and additional supplies.

14

Reported deaths and 265 injuries.

Response:

- The Ministry of Health, supported by WHO, has activated sentinel surveillance sites in Port Vila and across Efate island.
- WHO and UNICEF collaborated with the Ministry of Health on rapid health facility assessments in eight facilities across Efate Island, including the National Vaccine Store. This was followed by succeeding assessment and monitoring support to the remaining 14 health care facilities.
- The Health Cluster is actively supporting VCH. Respond Global, UNFPA, and UNICEF have deployed high-performance tents to serve as temporary aid stations, extensions for pediatric and dialysis wards, and units for maternity, laundry, and kitchen services at the hospital. Additionally, UNFPA deployed five Fijian midwives to support VCH, who arrived in Port Vila on December 22. WHO deployed satellite communication (Starlink) to VCH and the National Health Emergency Operations Centre to facilitate effective communication and response actions. The VRCS is supporting the cleanup efforts at the hospital.
- WHO shared key earthquake-related messages in English and Bislama, alongside a fact sheet to assist the Ministry of Health in communicating with disaster-affected communities. The VRCS is conducting awareness programs for blood services and promoting blood donations, as well as carrying out hygiene promotion sensitizations.
- In coordination with the MOH, UNICEF and WHO shared a breast feeding advisory and support regulating breastmilk substitute donation. Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) have mobilized to support the response, including Vanuatu's national EMT, VanMAT:
 - Respond Global's HELPR-1 ship, operational during the earthquake, established satellite communication, initiated assessments, and provided tents to VCH.
 - A six-member forward team from the Australian Medical Assistance Team (AUSMAT) has been deployed to support VCH, with a second rotation focused on surgical support arriving on December 23, which includes an occupational therapist and physical therapist.
 - A three-member forward team from the New Zealand Medical Assistance Team (NZMAT) was embedded in operations at VCH and demobilized on December 22.
 - The Japan Disaster Relief (JDR) EMT is providing remote support to the Vanuatu Ministry of Health to manage clinical data and plans to deploy two personnel in the coming days.

- The Pasifika Medical Association's Medical Assistance Team (PACMAT) is on standby to provide mental health services.
- WHO deployed one logistics officer to support coordination and logistics for Emergency Medical Teams.
- UNFPA deployed specialists in sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence (GBV), and a humanitarian analyst to support the Reproductive Maternal Newborn Childcare Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) unit for one month. They distributed one hundred ninety-five dignity kits and two hundred ten menstrual hygiene kits in partnership with ADRA. UNFPA has provided also the MoH with six Interagency Reproductive Health kits,
- On December 24, the Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Working Group was activated, headed by the RMNCAH Coordinator. The group aims to ensure coordination across the different SRH actors to strengthen service provision.
- Respond Global, UNICEF and WHO supported Shefa Provincial Health Emergency Operations Centre with their Earthquake Response Plan, which prioritizes PHC services restoration and integrated community outreach services.
- UNICEF dispatched 240 first aid kits to the Ministry of Health, of which 128 were allocated to VCH and 112 to the health post set up at the Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF) camp in coordination with Promedical Vanuatu.
- The MoH in collaboration with VRCS and other partners are providing Psychological First Aid (PFA) to those in need.
- The National Nutrition sub-cluster was activated on December 21. Since its activation, daily sub-cluster meetings were organized with MoH as lead and UNICEF as co-lead. A Nutrition Initial Rapid Assessment is ongoing at displacement sites, in preparation for the rollout of a nutrition response plan which will be integrated into existing community outreach services.
- The Nutrition sub-cluster is closely coordinating with MoH and Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity (MALFFB) as well as WHO and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to promote international and national guidelines on unhealthy food donations and breastmilk substitutes.
- UNICEF drafted and distributed, in hard copy, the final version of the Statement on Nutrition advisory on unhealthy food donations.

Gaps & Constraints:

- VCH has urgently requested coordinated surge support to acquire essential medical consumables.
- Vanuatu experienced an uptick in diarrheal cases in November 2024. While both influenza-like illnesses and watery diarrhea have declined steadily over the past four epidemiological weeks, this remains a concern, as water and sanitation disruptions due to the earthquake have been reported, along with displaced individuals and instances of open defecation.
- Scabies, varicella (chickenpox), conjunctivitis, ciguatera fish poisoning, and sexually transmitted infections (including Hepatitis B and syphilis), were present before the earthquake and will require close monitoring in the weeks and months to come.
- There is a need for mental health and psychosocial support as individuals report feelings of shock and trauma.

Evacuation Center Management & Displacement

Needs:

- 2,435 individuals remain displaced across six evacuation centers and 67 host HH.
- Key assessments in areas such as Mele, Pango, and Eratap indicate a shift in displacement patterns, with a decrease in populations in evacuation centers and an increase in host HH.
- Ongoing assessments are informing targeted response efforts from all clusters. Food, water, shelter kits, and tarpaulins remain the highest priorities, while lighting, medical supplies, and toiletries are also essential for addressing the immediate needs of displaced communities.
- Assessment teams have identified a need for psychosocial support for displaced populations.

2.4K

Temporarily displaced persons

Across **6** evacuation centres
and **67** host communities

Response:

- The Vanuatu National DECM Cluster co-led by IOM is monitoring displacement trends. Cluster referral processes are ongoing; all data have been transferred to a live dashboard and provided to all clusters with relevant sectoral indicators to assist in the distribution and servicing of displaced populations.

- ADRA, in collaboration with UNICEF and UNFPA, supported 221 HH (822 individuals, including 328 children) across five evacuation centers and host families in the Tanvasoko Area Council. Essential items distributed included 197 hygiene kits, 201 dignity kits, 4,390 litres of water, and Psychosocial Support/First Aid (PSS/PFA).
- The WASH Cluster (national cluster) has been coordinating water trucking efforts, ensuring the delivery of water to locations where displaced populations are residing.
- ProMedical, in coordination with NDMO and IOM, distributed first aid kits to two evacuation centres and several host HH, providing essential medical supplies to support the health and well-being of displaced populations.
- World Vision conducted psychological support activities in the Etas and Teouma areas.
- The DECM Cluster coordinated community awareness sessions in areas at high risk of flash flooding in Mele, La Colle, and Tepukoa Rivers. These sessions were conducted in collaboration with the NDMO Communications Team, Vanuatu and Australian Federal Police Forces and USAR Engineering teams.
- The DECM Cluster, with the support of IOM, conducted a “willingness-to-host” assessment of evacuation centres to determine activation readiness and ensure a swift response in the event of further displacement or the need to reduce the burden on host HH.

Constraints:

- There is a gap in coordination with technical assessment teams to evaluate the structural integrity of evacuation centres and host HH,
- Inaccurate flow-monitoring data and changes in displacement trends may pose targeting constraints.
- The lack of agreed and approved policies or positions on how implementing partners can service evacuation centres and host HH complicated response efforts.
- There is a gap in triangulating needs, particularly in addressing trauma and providing adequate psychosocial support.

Shelter

Needs:

- As of December 26, 2024, 210 houses have been assessed as damaged, with 10 houses fully destroyed, affecting 1,050 individuals.
- Both displaced and non-displaced families with damaged homes will need immediate support to assess the risk of structural damage and determine if it is safe to return.
- All families with damaged houses deemed unsafe will need support to repair or rebuild against future risks.
- There is a need for an awareness campaign regarding the safety of buildings.
- Verified damage assessment is necessary for the targeted distribution of Shelter Kits and Essential Household Items (NFIs), and to enable safe return to homes.
- The discrepancy between the number of displaced people and those with damaged homes is likely to increase due to the fear of return (uncertainty about the structural safety of homes), trauma, aftershocks, and lack of access to water, electricity, and communication (services provided in evacuation centres).
- Temporarily displaced people in evacuation centres require immediate assistance to restore adequate domestic living, including sleeping items, cooking items, and privacy items (such as soft partitions).
- Temporarily displaced persons in host HH or self-settled in open displacement areas need immediate assistance to restore adequate domestic living, including sleeping items, cooking items, privacy items (soft partitions), and safety items (such as solar lights). They also require access to emergency shelter (tarpaulins and toolkits).

210

Damaged houses as of
26 December

Response:

- Emergency shelter assistance has reached a total of 288 individuals (reported on December 22).
- The Shelter Cluster is coordinating with the DECM to establish a distribution targeting methodology based on verified damage assessments.
- 173 HH (865 people) have received assistance (tarpaulins and kitchen sets) from VRCS in Black Sand (46 HHs), Ohlem Wota Zone area (50 HHs) and Melema (77 HHs). Assessment and distributions continue in the Bellevue Evacuation Centre and Prima.
- Options for home assessments are being scoped to determine if it is safe to return, including self-assessment checklists and providing pictures of homes to engineers for evaluation.
- The IFRC Surge Shelter Cluster coordinator is deployed in Port Vila to support NDMO and VRCS as the respective lead and co-lead of the National Shelter Cluster.

Gaps & Constraints:

- There is limited technical expertise available to conduct in-depth structural assessments to determine safety for return, especially considering the potential risks of additional impacts from heavy rain and strong winds during the ongoing cyclone season.
- Communication with communities and Shelter Cluster partners is limited due to disrupted power, internet, and mobile connections.
- Resources required for targeted assessments and distributions (including funds, staff, vehicles, etc.) are limited.

Protection

Needs:

- Many vulnerable groups, including children, pregnant women and persons with disabilities were affected by the earthquake and are temporarily displaced.
- Psychological distress is widespread, affecting children and families, worsened by aftershocks and displacement.
- Key referral mechanisms for Protection are disrupted, including the Vanuatu Women's Center hotline and in-person entry points for referral of GBV survivors to multi-sectoral services.
- Child protection concerns are urgent.
- There are increased risks of GBV affecting young girls and women in particular.

Response:

- The Protection Cluster is conducting a Rapid Gender Analysis to inform the Gender and Protection intervention. The cluster developed a distribution plan with the support of UNFPA.
- Channels to restore family links have been established by the VRCS through a Restoring Family Links helpline, and a help-desk at the Ministry of Climate Change for those wishing to report on unaccounted individuals.
- The Child Protection in Emergencies (CPIE) subcluster was activated and the response plan is ready. The plan targets 40,000 children and caregivers and includes psychosocial support (PSS) interventions, child protection case management, messaging and referrals for GBV, specialized mental health services, and where needed, family tracing and reunification services.
- UNICEF distributed 18 recreational kits for PSS outreach activities through the Just Play programme of Vanuatu Football Federation across affected communities in Port Vila. UNFPA distributed 195 dignity kits and 210 menstrual hygiene kits in partnership with ADRA in evacuation centres.
- UNICEF supported training of trainers and facilitators in preparation for the rollout of play-based activities with children.
- Messages on child protection, mental health, positive parenting practices and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse have been developed and will be disseminated through SMS, radio and by youth volunteers through community outreach, including to evacuation centres.
- On December 25, UNFPA briefed the Vanuatu health sector on Standards of Procedure for GBV.

Gaps & Constraints:

- Road blockages hinder physical access to the affected population. Telecommunication disruptions affect messages and the availability of referral hotlines.
- Lack of up-to-date sex, age, disability disaggregated data.

Emergency Telecommunications

Needs:

- Domestic mobile phone communication is now functional but intermittent. Regular mobile data connectivity is partially restored but remains unreliable, with many response partners relying on satellite internet connectivity.
- The restoration of the fibre optic cable landing station remains the priority for the DCDT which leads the national Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC).

Response:

- WFP deployed an ETC Coordinator and a Senior Telecommunications Specialist to support the delivery of emergency telecommunications services to government partners and humanitarian actors responding to the earthquake.

- The ETC Cluster has mobilized five Starlink High Performance Kits to support key government agencies in their response efforts:
 - One kit is powering the NEOC which serves as the national coordination hub for over 50 government first responders, United Nations agencies, and other international partners.
 - One kit has been installed in the central NDMO warehouse, which receives and dispatches non-food items brought in to meet the needs of the Ni-Vanuatu people after the earthquake. The internet connection eliminates the need for warehouse handlers to travel over 30 minutes several times per day to deliver stock records to the logistics cluster operating out of the NEOC.
 - One terminal has been installed in the Kaiviti Motel, the hub for the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team, and other UN agencies.
 - One kit is established in the Shefa Provincial Health Centre, supporting the coordination of the cold chain.
 - One kit has been installed in the MALFFB.
- Further operations are underway to expand networks, ensuring that a maximum number of government responders are covered by the ETC connectivity.

Constraints:

- The absence of stable mobile networks continues to pose challenges for communication between emergency teams.

Food Security

Needs:

- Assessments among health facilities and temporarily displaced people indicate that food security is increasingly becoming a critical issue.
- HELPR-1 has completed casualty, facility, and food availability assessments across South Epi and Shepherd Islands, noting a potential food security problem in Mataso.

Response:

- The MALFFB is providing food support to evacuation centres and affected communities.
- The National Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC) has provided food rations for seven days to four correctional services sites, the Department of Agriculture & Rural Development's (DARD) kitchen, and Wan Smol Bag (WSB).
- World Vision International has contributed to providing monthly food vouchers to tuberculosis patients.
- 3MT of rice, donated by France, is currently under MALFFB biosecurity unit clearance at airport customs.

Gaps & Constraints:

- Information on temporarily displaced people is continuously changing, making it difficult to accurately assess needs and plan responses.

Education

Needs:

- School buildings sustained significant damage, hindering access to education. 100 classrooms were destroyed across 45 schools, affecting access to education for 2,665 children. Additionally, 24 dormitories were destroyed. The estimated damage amounts to 3,215,000,000 VTU (approximately US \$30,000).
- The Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) has confirmed the urgent need for Temporary Learning Spaces (TLS) and e-learning tools, as well as learning materials for the affected children.
- Many children are experiencing trauma from the earthquake, leading to a high demand for Psychological Support Services.

100

Destroyed classrooms
across **45** schools

Response

- Structural assessments of school buildings are ongoing, supported by UNICEF and the Vanuatu Australia Education Support Programme (VAESP).

- UNICEF has pre-positioned 21 tents, nine School-in-a-Box kits, and 16 Early Childhood Development (ECD) kits. These supplies are ready for distribution based on assessment findings and will support up to 2,000 primary school children and 640 Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centers.
- UNICEF has provided three tents to the VRCS to serve as a volunteer hut, storage space, and information desk, ensuring immediate support for affected communities while reinforcing access to education and essential services.

Gaps & Constraints:

- The earthquake impacted students during the examination period, potentially hindering their academic progress.
- With the school year scheduled to start on February 3, damage to school infrastructure may affect children's ability to return to school.

Logistics

Needs:

- Landslides and damaged roads and bridges have hindered access to the airport and seaport. While the airport is operational, the Sea Port remains closed.
- Priorities include facilitating requests for assistance (RFAs) and ensuring that all non-food items (NFIs) arriving in-country from donors reach the clusters for distribution.

Response:

- Up to December 23, 2024, the Logistics Unit within the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) continued to facilitate approval of requests for assistance (RFAs).
- The Logistics cluster facilitated the clearance and handover of items shipped for national clusters.
- Items addressed to the NDMO were taken to the warehouse for storage, including family hygiene kits, mother and infant kits, hygiene kits, tarps, shelter toolkits, and mobile storage units.
- The NDMO completed the handover of all relief items from its warehouse to cluster leads on December 24, 2024.
- The PHAS charter flight transported 35 personnel and cargo from Nadi, Fiji, to Port Vila, Vanuatu, on December 21, 2024. The personnel represented 15 different agencies.
- The WFP has deployed a Logistics Preparedness Officer to Vanuatu to support the Logistics Unit within NDMO during the earthquake response.
- A total of 34 humanitarian flights were completed by Australia, France, New Zealand, and the WFP-supported Pacific Humanitarian Air Service (PHAS) up to December 23, 2024. These flights included aerial assessments, delivery of relief items, transportation of personnel, and medical evacuations.

Constraints:

- The absence of stable mobile networks continues to pose challenges to communication between the Logistics team members.
- The access route to the Sea Port is still blocked.

Early Recovery

Needs:

- Many small/medium enterprises and communities lost livelihood assets. A damage and loss assessment is needed.

Response:

- The ER cluster is coordinating with the Vanuatu Business Resilience Council (VBRC), the Prime Minister's Office, the NDMO, the South Pacific Community (SPC) to offer Micro-Small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and HH' loss and damage assessments.
- UNDP dispatched 650 kg of supplies (water, basic food items, medications, food, batteries/power banks, solar lights and chargers) to Vanuatu on the first humanitarian flight on 21 December to contribute to immediate relief efforts.
- The ER cluster meetings are taking place regularly to plan next steps of recovery support, including livelihood support.

Constraints:

- Household-level damage and loss assessments have not yet been initiated.

Cross Cutting Issues

Social Behavior Change Communication (SBCC)

- UNICEF has developed a U Report poll which will be rolled out today to gather key information/feedback from the community, especially young people. This is the first phase of the U Report poll and has been developed in English, French and Bislama languages.
- UNICEF is working with the Communication cluster and other partners including WHO to develop key messages on WASH, Health, Nutrition, Child Protection in response to the disaster and establish a community feedback mechanism.
- UNICEF is also working with the NDMO to trigger the Risk Communication and Community Engagement Working Group in Vanuatu.
- The MoYDS also has a team of trained volunteers who can effectively be used as social mobilisers and handle inquiries from the affected communities. Messaging can be developed for parents responding to their children's distress, based on existing programmes and in partnership with local actors, including faith-based organizations.

Accountability to the Affected Population (AAP)

- The Government has its AAP mechanism in place coordinated by the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) system. Agencies are supporting RCCE to ensure that effective AAP systems are in place.

Coordination

The NDMO led the response coordination with support from OCHA. This involved activating the cluster system through NEOC, with line ministries and lead humanitarian agencies coordinating efforts to engage support from the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) and its regional clusters.

From the onset of the crisis, the NDMO has held twice-daily cluster meetings, requesting the development of assessment and response plans to feed into a national response plan. However, due to logistical challenges in reaching some of the most affected areas and ongoing infrastructure and communication problems, this process is still ongoing. While some initial information is available, a unified and comprehensive situational picture is being established. OCHA, the Regional Coordination Office (RCO), and PHT humanitarian agencies are assisting the NDMO in this regard. There is also substantial support from key donor countries, namely Australia, New Zealand, and France, which have seconded staff to the NDMO to assist in the assessment process and support Information Management.

OCHA, as the Secretariat of the PHT, organized three meetings with Principals and Cluster Coordinators. These meetings were chaired by the Resident Coordinator (RC) – and RC a.i. - of the Fiji Multi-Country Office, discussing PHT support for the response. The PHT, through the RC, sent a letter to the Government of Vanuatu offering its services and surge capacity, to which the Government responded favourably.

The RCO organized a Development Partners meeting in Port Vila. Participants included members of the FRANZ alliance (France, Australia, and New Zealand), the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, and China and various humanitarian agencies. This platform is aimed at sharing information on ongoing activities.

The VBRC is leading the private sector in restoring commercial services and providing updated information through an online tool. In collaboration with UNELCO, the council is working to restore water, power, and banking services as well as clear blocked roads.

Civil-Military Coordination

Substantial military assets were deployed by FRANZ alliance members. International coordination was supported by the UN (OCHA and RC) engaging capitals in Wellington, Canberra and Paris (+ Noumea). At Vanuatu-level, the RCO and humanitarian partners participated in nationally led coordination mechanisms - namely the Joint Police Operations Centre. High-level engagements also took place with High Commission and Embassy staff of the three countries to ensure effective coordination, maximisation of synergies and a principled humanitarian approach. The Pacific Response Group also deployed an assessment team with representatives of the six countries involved.

UNDAC Environmental Assessment

The UNDAC team conducted an environmental damage assessment at the Cable Landing Station (CLS) and Secondary Data Center in Port Vila, Vanuatu, following an earthquake on 12 December 2024. The assessment, requested by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO), took place on 22–23 December 2024. The CLS is vital for international internet and communication services, making damage to this facility a critical concern. The earthquake caused two car batteries at the CLS to fall, spilling approximately 12 litres of sulfuric acid and triggering a fire. The fire was quickly extinguished by the automated gas suppression system. Damage was also reported at the Secondary Data Center, impacting servers and UPS systems.

UNDAC experts assessed both sites through inspections and interviews, noting that initial cleanup efforts were already underway. The sulfuric acid spill posed limited immediate environmental risks due to its small quantity and evaporation properties, but the proximity to the Prima River raised concerns. The Flash Environmental Assessment Tool (FEAT) classified the spill as a moderate environmental hazard, while structural damage to infrastructure was rated high, emphasizing the need for urgent repairs.

Key recommendations include recharging or replacing the CLS's fire suppression system, repairing and strengthening the Secondary Data Center, and improving hazardous material handling protocols to prevent similar incidents. Further recommendations involve developing disaster recovery plans, conducting regular drills, and monitoring environmental impacts through water and soil testing.

The report underscores the need for immediate repairs to critical infrastructure and long-term measures to enhance resilience against future disasters. Addressing these vulnerabilities will safeguard Vanuatu's communication systems and improve disaster preparedness.

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