



International Recovery Forum 2021

Vanuatu's early lessons in recovery from compound disasters

Malcolm Dalesa

Department of Strategic Policy, Planning and Aid Coordination (DSPPAC),

Office of the Prime Minister

Government of Vanuatu



Context

- Small island developing country with high disaster risk profile
- Regularly exposed to range of hydro-meteorological and geophysical hazards
- With the backdrop of COVID-19, Vanuatu was devastated by Severe Tropical Cyclone Harold. A new dimension to impacts from compounding disaster events. COVID-19 losses were only accounted for the period of March 2020 – June 2020.
- Total effects combined USD 617 million in losses and damages. Tourism and service related industries hardest hit
- The country was in the midst of an election and transition of power. An ongoing State of Emergency was also in place





Lesson – Assessing impacts

- Initially grappled with whether to do separate assessments and plans for TC Harold and COVID-19
- No international surge capacity to directly support with Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) and recovery planning compared to past disaster events
- Reliance now on local and in-country capacities. Mixed absorptive capacity to effectively carry out assessments
- Most sectors have minimal baselines or non-existent baselines and effective information management systems
- Excellent remote support from international agencies – UN, World Bank, bilateral donors



Lessons - Planning

- Development of the TC Harold and COVID-19 Vanuatu Recovery Strategy. Endorsed in July 2020
- Recovery Strategy makes explicit linkages to the longer term National Sustainable Development Plan (2016 – 2030)
- Three main objectives:
 1. Restore and strengthen essential social services and protections
 2. Enhance lives and livelihoods
 3. Repair the natural and built environment
- Sectors and donors now aligning activities and budgets with VRS objectives
- At the provincial/subnational level recovery mechanisms and bodies are being established
- Recovery functions at the Prime Minister's Office are still nascent with a Recovery Coordination Unit recently established in early 2020. Requires more substantive capacities and institutional mechanisms to be effectively established in particularly having permanent staffing.
- Current Disaster Risk Management Act 2019 does not include recovery





Lessons – Financing

- Policy directive for government ministries to reprioritize budgets after TC Harold. Allowed for early recovery interventions by clusters and sectors. However streamlined financial processes are still needed.
- Government economic stimulus package of USD 4 million to support businesses, small medium enterprises and communities. Implemented by the Ministry of Finance
- Over 5000 applications received, 3000 applications processed thus far.
- Businesses especially the tourism entities have been appreciative of the fiscal support. However, there are still remaining frustrations.



Lessons – Financing

- Lack of baselines and proper registration mechanisms, especially at the provincial level, has resulted in substantial number of small or informal businesses missing out on fiscal stimulus
- Timeliness or delays in processing payments
- Aid Coordination Unit is currently working with donor partners where direct financing agreements are concerned.
- Council of Ministers decision to establish a Recovery Trust Fund but yet to be operationalized



Next steps and Ways Forward

- DSPPAC now working with sectors to come up with recovery project proposals for funding.
- Consideration of putting in place a harmonized disaster recovery framework of which pandemic preparedness must become an essential ingredient
- Need to strengthen sub-national and national level coordination mechanisms for assessments
- A fit for purpose and accountable streamlined process and regulations for accessing emergency funds and procurement needs to be developed
- TC Harold recovery projects will be an opportunity for economic stimulus for the next five years
- Building back schools, health centres, water facilities and focusing on sanitation and hygiene, as well as the skills development and vocational training/livelihood opportunities that will accompany this, will assist in economic recovery from COVID. It will also assist in shifting/focusing the workforce into COVID related skills development and training areas



Thank you!

