Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs

Some six months after the entire population of Ambae Island (estimated to be 11,600 people) in Vanuatu were evacuated, and later repatriated following a month in evacuation centres (October 2017), the residents of the island are again being displaced by the increased activity of the Monaro volcano which has been compounded by a tropical cyclone and ongoing heavy rains.

It is likely families will now be permanently relocated. Ash fall and acid rain have made life very difficult in the island particularly in the northern, southern and western parts. Heavy ash fall and acid rain have defoliated trees, buried crops, damaged traditional houses and buildings, burnt foliage and contaminated water supplies. This has compromised the ability of subsistence farming communities to produce their own food and, on an island with heavy reliance on rainwater harvesting, is limiting the availability of water. The ash includes fine particles that, on inhalation, are considered a risk to long term respiratory health.

This year Ambae has experienced heavy rainfall, particularly as a result of two tropical cyclone systems which formed in the region: Tropical Cyclone (TC) Hola (March 2018) and TC Keni (April 2018). Combined with ash, this rain has caused two significant landslides in the north of the island with two villages destroyed. Currently, at least 750 people are displaced on-island and seeking refuge in host communities in less affected locations. 643 people have lost their homes to the ash fall, whilst 115 were rendered homeless by landslides. Some 1,142 students and 60 teachers from 29 schools

Highlights

- Following increased volcanic activity by the Monaro Volcano earlier on in the month, the Government of Vanuatu declared a three-month state of emergency on Ambae Island from 13 April to 13 July.
- The entire population of Ambae Island is set to be permanently relocated following heavy ash fall, acid rain, flooding and landslides caused by both volcanic activity and heavy rainfall following two recent tropical cyclones.
- On 17 April UNICEF participated in an NDMO-led multi-sector assessment that inspected on-island temporary evacuation sites and delivered relief supplies. UNICEF is supporting the government-led response through technical expertise, financial support and with essential relief items.
- For 4,775 people currently sheltering in the west and east of Ambae Island, 955 WASH and dignity kits have been provided.

26 April 2018

5,220
# of affected children

11,600
# of affected people

Source: estimate from 2016 census figures
were displaced and are currently accommodated in 16 schools. Reports suggest many displaced students have not yet returned to education.

The volcano remains at alert level 3 (minor eruption) and because of this continuing volcanic activity, the Government enacted a state of emergency on 13 April for a period of three months and declared the island a “disaster zone”. The declaration called for a phased total evacuation of residents and their relocation to the two nearby islands of Pentecost and Maewo.

### Estimated Population in Need of Humanitarian Assistance

(Source: 2016 census figures)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start of humanitarian response:</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population in Need</td>
<td>11,600</td>
<td>5,893</td>
<td>5,707</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children (Under 18)</td>
<td>5,220</td>
<td>2,652</td>
<td>2,568</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children Under Five</td>
<td>1,659</td>
<td>843</td>
<td>816</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children 6 to 23 months</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>257</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pregnant and lactating women</td>
<td>360</td>
<td></td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school students</td>
<td>937</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>461</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary school students</td>
<td>2,669</td>
<td>1,356</td>
<td>1,313</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECCE learners</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Humanitarian Leadership and Coordination

The Government of Vanuatu is leading the management and coordination of the response, with the provincial government responsible for the identification of evacuation destinations and community consultation. The government-led clusters, including those supported by UNICEF (Education, Gender and Protection, Health and Nutrition, WASH), were activated and are working to define, manage and prioritise sectoral contributions to the response. The Council of Ministers (COM) has laid out three phases for the response: phase one - short term (April – June 2018), phase two - intermediate term (July – December 2018) and phase three - long term (2019/2020).

The phase one of the response includes the transfer of all Ambae residents to the less affected east and west of the island and their relocation to more permanent sites in nearby Pentecost and Maewo islands. The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) will manage phase one through the Provincial Disaster Committee and Community/Area Disaster Committee to support the response and recovery efforts. The Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) is designated to lead phases two and three. The PMO will be supported by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA), Ministry of Climate Change (MoCC), Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources (MoLNR) and Ministry of Justice and Community Services (MoJCS).

The Government has initially ordered the Ministry of Finance to release Vt40 million (US $371,700) to support the humanitarian response. In acknowledgment of the scale of the emergency, the COM has declared its intention to seek international assistance for financial and technical support.

A delegation from the national government and Penama Provincial Government, led by the Director General of the Ministry of Climate Change, together with chiefs of Ambae, travelled to Maewo on 24 April and Pentecost on 25 April to hold separate dialogues with the respective chiefs of the two islands. The purpose was to identify and discuss the process of establishing permanent relocation sites for Ambae residents. The Government has set 30 April as the start of off-island relocation and currently expects to complete the relocation by 15 May. The NDMO has confirmed that recovery and development projects in Ambae Island are now on hold and will be re-visited at a later stage given the new realities on the ground.

The MoET has outlined how the relocation of students will be affected: secondary school students in boarding school (some 800 children) will move off-island immediately and directly into host schools in Santo, Pentecost and Maewo. Primary school students (some 2,100 children) and ECCE students (some 700 children) may move more gradually with their families to in-island host schools and communities initially before their transfer to relocation sites in Pentecost and Maewo.
On 17 April, UNICEF participated in an NDMO-led multi-sector assessment in Ambae that inspected on-island temporary evacuation sites and delivered relief supplies. As a member of the Gender and Protection Cluster UNICEF ensured that children’s voices were heard as part of the assessment to seven on-island evacuation sites visited. The team have submitted their reports with an overview of existing facilities and services in the sites alongside recommendations for improvements, to the NDMO for analysis.

**Humanitarian Strategy**

The Ambae recovery plan laid out by the government last year, which served as a basis for recovery activities following the displacement and subsequent repatriation of residents, is now on hold as a new response plan is being developed. The government-led clusters were directed to draft their respective response plans to focus on off-island relocation of the entire population of Ambae.

The implementation of UNICEF-supported activities in Ambae will therefore need to be adjusted. More funding will be needed to ensure that rights and welfare of children and women will not be compromised in the relocation process. The Government has acknowledged that it needs technical and financial assistance from the international community. However, operational details will depend on the permanent relocation sites identified for Ambae residents.

Decisions on the future of Ambae will also impact the longer-term development support to the country in general, and to the Penama province in the areas of Health and Child Protection, but especially in Education, WASH- in-Schools and disabilities, for which it is the focus province.

**Summary Analysis of Programme Response**

**Education**

- The MoET has developed a relocation plan for the Ambae schools and have estimated resource requirements. UNICEF has received a formal request for assistance from the MoET and is releasing education and WASH supplies, with support to psychosocial support activities for students and teachers.
- The plan to improve rainwater catchments and to distribute WASH in school kits and school-in-a-box kits in Ambae schools, which were part of the recovery plan developed last year with the MoET, will be reviewed given the changing context.
- UNICEF is ready to support the MoET and the Provincial Education Office in establishing educational facilities and services at permanent relocation sites.

**Child Protection**

- UNICEF is supporting the Civil Registry in the registration of all Ambae residents by providing funding for the printing of ID cards. The mobile registration team has completed the registration of IDPs and their host families in east Ambae, and will now focus on the north of the island.
- The MoET, MoYS, Save the Children and UNICEF are working to coordinate psychosocial support activities in schools and communities.

**Health & Nutrition**

- UNICEF is supporting an immunization outreach campaign for Penama province which is being run by the Ministry of Health (MoH). Priority will be given to Ambae residents who will be relocated to Pentecost and Maewo.

**Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH)**

- On 17 April, UNICEF WASH supplies were shipped to Ambae together with an assessment team. These included:
  - 955 WASH and dignity kits: 600 kits (benefitting up to 3,000 people) were provided to the east and 355 kits (benefiting up to 1,775 people) were provided to the west. Instruction pamphlets in the Bislama language on the correct use of water purification tables and 1,990 10-litre collapsible water containers were also distributed.
  - 700 10-litre collapsible water containers were provided to east Ambae (benefiting 750 displaced people) and 400 were provided in west Ambae, where residents are dependent on rain water collection for their water supply.
UNICEF is supporting the development of key messages in the Bislama language on how people can cope with ash fall, acid rain and gas emissions by the volcano. The materials will be printed as pamphlets and distributed to Ambae residents.

UNICEF provided financial support to the DoWR to support their WASH coordination operations on Ambae.

Some of the WASH projects that formed part of the previous Ambae recovery plan under the WASH cluster were placed on hold pending clarification regarding the government decision to suspend all recovery and development investments in Ambae. These include the development of community rain water harvesting, water safety and security plans and the construction of first flush demonstration and gravity fed water systems. UNICEF is working with the DoWR to determine activities which support the new emergency context.

Technical assistance has been requested and will be provided in support of provincial government planning and WASH related activities.

Communications for Development (C4D)

- Technical assistance was provided to the WASH cluster and Gender and Protection cluster in the development of their communication strategies and key C4D messages for their response plan.
- UNICEF also reviewed information materials drafted by the WASH cluster to ensure they would be accessible and easy to understand.

Media and External Communication

- Vanuatu Communication Officer deployed to Ambae the first week during initial assessments, producing content from these visits, including with children asked to express themselves and relate their stories either verbally or through drawing. Communication materials produced and shared, including quotes from children, assessment team, community members and photos of the emergency impacts. These were shared via digital platforms.
- Media interviews conducted with the Guardian, Radio NZ and Radio Australia (ABC Pacific Beat) on the emergency and needs as well as UNICEF support.
- Content shared via Facebook and Twitter on the initial assessments, visits to evacuation centres and communities, as well as the psychosocial support activities being undertaken by the Gender and Protection Cluster with affected children.

Security

A Joint Police Force was deployed during the three-month state of emergency enacted on 13 April, and will be providing security and assistance during the relocation of the Ambae Island residents. The main threats posed to residents and actors on the island relate to further natural hazards including flooding, landslides, ash inhalation and ash fall.

Funding

Whilst contributions were previously received to support recovery activities for Ambae following repatriation of residents in October 2017, more funding will be needed to ensure the rights and welfare of children and women throughout the relocation process. However, the levels of funding needed will be based on the development of the government response plans, when sites are identified for relocation.

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