Situation Overview

Severe Tropical Cyclone Yasa made landfall at 6 pm on 17 December in Bua province in the island of Vanua Levu in the Northern Division of Fiji. While it weakened as it neared Fiji, it was still a category 5 cyclone with windspeed of 250 kph when it hit Bua. The main island of Viti Levu where the capital of Suva is located was largely spared as the TC Yasa veered towards the north. The Northern Division, which is one of the most impoverished regions in the country, bore the brunt of the cyclone. TC Yasa tore through Vanua Levu and then weakened to a Category 3 cyclone when it proceeded towards the Lau group of Islands in the Eastern Division.

Highlights

- Category 5 Severe Tropical Cyclone Yasa directly hit the island of Vanua Levu north of the capital of Suva. An estimated 93,000 people, including 32,500 children, were living along its direct path.

- UNICEF is working with the Fiji Government, the Pacific Humanitarian team and the private sector in delivering immediate humanitarian aid to affected families. Some 600 WASH kits and 400 water containers, part of UNICEF’s pre-positioned emergency supplies in Fiji, were sent to the Northern Division as a first wave response. More relief items are ready to be delivered as UNICEF supplies in the Australian humanitarian warehouse in Brisbane have been mobilized for Fiji.

- Five staff have been deployed to the worst affected areas to provide support to government and other partners in the needs assessment and in the coordination of the initial response.

- The app #FindMyEC which UNICEF helped develop for locating evacuation centers and contacting government officials has been accessed more than 21,000 times during the TC Yasa period.

Situation in Numbers

(Estimated Impact)

- 93,000 people affected, including
- 32,500 children
- 23,000 people severely affected including
- 8,000 children
The casualty recorded so far are 4 deaths (one of them an infant) and one missing adult. The NDMO estimated that some 93,000 people (21,000 families), including around 32,500 children, were living along the direct path of the cyclone. There were 4,328 persons with disabilities in the Northern Division, according to the 2017 Census. Some 154 evacuation centers, over 90% of them are in the Northern Division, have still been active at the time of writing this report, housing close to 7,000 evacuees.

Ground assessments are ongoing while aerial surveillance has been done through the support of the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF). In Lau, 247 houses were reportedly damaged with 36 of them totally demolished. The Fiji Government has provided a list of priority relief items that they have requested from diplomatic missions and humanitarian organizations. The list includes WASH kits, water containers, water purification tablets and soap.

The Fiji Government has declared TC Yasa as a natural disaster for the entire country last 16 December 2020 with effectivity for 30 days. This declaration grants the Permanent Secretary as the “National Disaster Controller” special powers such as giving directions to other government agencies during an emergency situation.

COVID-19 restrictions remain in place. Fiji’s international borders are still closed and 14-day quarantine and multiple testing are required for returning citizens and residents. The government has been very successful in containing the spread of COVID-19 with only 46 total reported cases with no large-scale community transmission. All the recent cases have been imported or travel-related and the last community acquired case has been at least 246 days ago. However, Fiji has not escaped the detrimental effects of the pandemic to the economy. According to the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Fiji commissioned by UNICEF, the poverty rate in Fiji has increased during the pandemic from 2.29 to 13.29 percent with the Northern Division having the highest poverty rate. Children were also harder hit than the overall population as the child poverty rate was estimated to have increased from 3 to 15.3 percent.

**Summary Analysis of Programme Response**

In addition to providing technical support to the national clusters for WASH, Education, Health and Nutrition and Gender and Protection for the coordination of the response, UNICEF staff have been deployed to the affected area to help in the assessment and local coordination. Five staff were sent to different locations to get information, document the situation, facilitate aid relief and ensure that children and vulnerable families are given priority.

Emergency supplies prepositioned in-country were mobilized for the first wave of response. Every available opportunity was considered for the quick delivery to the affected areas. UNICEF accepted the offer of the cruise ship Nai’a to deliver relief supplies to the Northern Division. WASH kits, water containers and education supplies are currently being delivered to affected people in three areas in Vanua Levu. The cruise ship is also currently helping with filling 200 UNICEF water containers with drinking water through their on-board desalination plant.

UNICEF supplies stored in the Australian humanitarian warehouse in Brisbane are also being mobilized to augment the supplies for TC Yasa. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Australian Defense Force (ADF) are providing transport assistance to UNICEF for their delivery to Fiji.
Health and Nutrition

- Eight of the 41 health facilities in the Northern Division (with five still unreachable) reported damages to their infrastructure. However, all vaccines have been secured in safe locations with power generators before the cyclone struck.
- Regular health and nutrition services remain uninterrupted with health surveillance, water supply, sanitation and food safety services extended to the evacuation centers. Medicines and medical supplies from the Inter-Agency Emergency Health Kits (IEHKs) given to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MoHMS) and distributed to the divisions were used in these services.
- A country-wide nutrition screening scheduled early next year is still being pushed. MUAC (Mid-Upper Arm Circumference) tapes for nutrition assessment, Vitamin A, deworming tablets have been released to MoHMS.

WASH

- Technical support is being provided to the MoHMS-led WASH Cluster to ensure coordination of assessments and training of government staff on damage assessment tools. Health inspectors in the Northern and Eastern Division have started the Immediate Damage Assessment (IDA). Initial reports indicate serious damage to WASH systems including those in schools and health care facilities.
- Staff are currently on the ground working to support the Fiji MoH who are undertaking damage assessments and distributing WASH kits by boat/truck to the most affected families on Kia Island and northern coastal areas of Vanua Levu.
- 400 WASH Kits and 200 water containers have been delivered to Bua and Savusavu in the Northern Division on 21 December through the MoHMS-contracted vessel. This initial batch is being distributed to 7 evacuation centers with 714 evacuees. An additional 200 kits and 200 water containers will arrive in Savusavu through a private cruise ship on 23 December.
- Surge support has been requested for cluster coordination and information management. Potential candidates from a standby partner already in the country are being considered.

Education

- Technical guidance was provided to the Ministry of Education and Heritage arts (MEHA) in the finalization of the tools for damage assessment tool. A staff has been deployed in the North to join the assessment team and lay the groundwork for the equitable and systematic distribution of the education supplies to the affected schools.
- Education supplies, including 22 tarps, 8 school-in-a-box, 5 ECD kits and 5 recreation kits are on their way to schools in Savusavu, Qamea and Yanuca aboard the cruise ship Nai’a. Other education supplies are ready to be distributed once damage assessment is done and distribution logistics are arranged with MEHA.

Child Protection

- Child protection questions to be included in initial rapid assessments of other sectors have been shared with other Clusters. A detailed assessment form for child protection is available for later use.
- UNICEF is ready to provide financial and technical support to the Child Services Unit under the Social Welfare Department of the Ministry of Women Children and Poverty Alleviation to:
  - lead the Child Protection Working Group (CPWG) under the Fiji Safety and Protection Cluster, to coordinate the child protection response (both Cluster and CPWG met 21 December for 2nd time)
  - deploy their personnel from National, Division and District level to the affected areas to provide psychosocial support to the children and advice to parents on how to help their children recover from the trauma, including through the establishment and facilitation of child-friendly spaces where socio-recreational activities can be conducted by teachers and/or community volunteers trained to this effect; and to identify and care for and/or refer children in need of protection
- UNICEF has pre-positioned recreational kits in Suva (17) and Brisbane (145) and can also purchase additional ones locally.
- UNICEF is also ready to work with the Education sector on psychosocial support for students and teachers.
Communications for Development (C4D)

- The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) was supported by contracting Fiji Broadcasting Corporation (FBC) to air key messages over national television and six radio networks. A detailed media plan focusing on pre-cyclone preparedness messages and post-cyclone lifesaving messages guides the overall ‘Get Ready’ campaign over multiple channels at prime time. The same are also being carried on FBC and UNICEF social media platforms.
- In close collaboration with Health, WASH, Education and CP sectors, pre-positioned IEC materials for children are being dispatched to be used in evacuation centers and schools.

Communication and Advocacy

- Ongoing campaign on UNICEF Pacific across all social media platforms: focus on staying safe during the cyclone and now on recovery
- Communication support is being provided with supply deliveries of the Nai’a cruise ship, the Australian Defence Force, and government partners.
- Providing advocacy on the needs of communities to partners, National Committees and public
- Communication support to WASH and Education response teams in Vanua Levu together with MHMS and MoEHA to highlight response activities and provide advocacy on ongoing needs
- Support to communication in communities on WASH and Education advocacy priorities

Innovation

- The app #FindMyEC for locating evacuation centers and contacting government officials has been accessed more than 21,000 times during the TC Yasa period. The app, powered by RapidPro, was developed by UNICEF for NDMO and uses SMS, Viber and Facebook Messenger.
- Health Emergency assessment forms have been designed on Ona and installed to 5 tablets for WASH team.
- Sample reporting from school teachers on the degree of damage in schools and their status as evacuation centers are being shared through an SMS platform designed by UNICEF using RapidPro.

Humanitarian Leadership, Coordination and Strategy

UNICEF leads the clusters for WASH, education (with Save the Children), and health and nutrition (with the World Health Organization (WHO)) and is co-lead of the protection cluster (with UNWomen) under the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT). The PHT is a network of humanitarian organizations that works together to assist Pacific Island Countries and Territories in preparing for and responding to disasters. It is composed of UN agencies and international humanitarian organizations and co-chaired by the UN Resident Coordinators and the head of OCHA. UNICEF and the PHT support the leadership of governments and work within their respective political structures. Fiji have officially adopted the cluster approach in their humanitarian architecture. Unlike cluster systems in other countries, these mechanisms are active year-round and are the coordinating bodies not just for emergency response but also for disaster risk management and preparedness. UNICEF is providing support to the national clusters of Fiji in preparing for the cyclone, particularly the clusters where UNICEF is co-leading with the government ministries on WASH, Education, Health and Nutrition, Gender and Protection and the sub-cluster on communication and community engagement.
Next Situation Report: 24 December 2020

UNICEF Pacific: https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/

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