



Key Lessons from the Agriculture Response to Severe Tropical Cyclone Pam

Risk & Resilience Unit (RRU)
of the
Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries, Biosecurity
Lessons Learned Workshop
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Facilitated by Leina Simon & Grayleen Lapi, CARE International

WORKSHOP REPORT BY

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Introduction

On 13 March 2015, category 5 Cyclone Pam slammed into Vanuatu severely affecting over 200,000 people and destroying and damaging agricultural livelihoods, infrastructure and food resources across the sectors of agriculture, livestock, fisheries, forestry and biosecurity.

The Risk and Resilience Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity (MALFFB) immediately activated its long-existing Food Security & Agriculture Cluster¹ to coordinate the relief and recovery response. The RRU/FSAC membership was led by government but included non-government, private sector and international partners working collaboratively to both respond to the immediate food security needs of those affected and plan and implement long term recovery, rehabilitation and sustainable development. The activities of the RRU/FSAC built on strong collaboration in disaster preparedness and climate change adaptation work prior to Tropical Cyclone Pam.

Immediately after the cyclone, the RRU/FSAC established an online repository of informal reports coming from island affected areas. These reports have provided, and continue to provide, the most immediate on-ground information on which the Ministry of Agriculture has based its planning. During the Government's 1st push of emergency food rations (21-28 March), the RRU/FSAC sent agricultural experts alongside the food to observe distributions, provide extension advice and collect first-hand expert assessments of damage and emergency needs. Leading the Agricultural section of the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA), the RRU/FSAC undertook economic analyses of the damages, losses in the agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and livestock sectors. Coordination and communication was a core function of the RRU/FSAC, a role which the Ministry of Agriculture continues to hold as Vanuatu prepares for the oncoming El Nino.

¹ The Ministry's FSAC has been operational since 2012, led by the Department of Agriculture & Rural Development, and supported by FAO and SPC/GIZ.

Simultaneously with the emergency response, the RRU/FSAC prepared a strategy for the post-humanitarian phase wherein, from 2015-2017, all stakeholders including Government will work together to rebuild the food and agriculture sector, covering subsistence and commercial farmers. The Strategy is fully aligned with existing Government policy. This Ministry-led recovery and rehabilitation work has a strong climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction element to ensure that Vanuatu emerges more resilient than before Cyclone Pam.

Overall Purpose

The overall purpose of the workshop was to identify how, based on the wide array of experiences and lessons from Cyclone Pam, the RRU/FSAC is able to perform better in future disaster contexts.

Summary

Summarized here are 10 key lessons and recommendations gathered from over thirty participants representing Government of Vanuatu, local and international NGOs, development partners and the private sector.

The analysis of lessons learned has been categorized into 5 thematic areas, which are broadly linked to the functions undertaken by the Ministry's RRU/FSAC in before, during and after Cyclone Pam.

- *Coordination, Policy & Strategic Planning*
- *Communication, Messaging & Information Sharing*
- *Assessments*
- *Seed, Tools & Planting Material Distributions*
- *Recovery Programming & Proposals*

The comprehensive documentation from the workshop is attached in Annex1. The participants list is in Annex2. Responses below represent the top two priorities for each thematic area in order.

Electronic copies of the Lessons Learned Introduction presentation, MLRRS, Post-Cyclone Timeline, Assessments, Meeting Minutes and other relevant documents on these two sites:

- <http://foodsecuritycluster.net/countries/vanuatu>
- <http://www.nab.vu/projects/food-security-agriculture-response-cyclone-pam>

An online survey has been developed for those stakeholders wishing to contribute additional lessons learned will be available until early June:

http://esurv.org/online-survey.php?survey_ID=LNLNLH_a1960378



Key Lessons and Recommendations

Coordination, Policy & Strategic Planning

1. Continue to develop and build strong relationships at all times among NGO's and government institutions and other actors for agricultural crisis response

In most disaster response situations, local actors are the first responders. Response must use pre-existing links where possible, enabling, facilitating and supporting local actors, including private sector. Coordination at national, provincial and community level is necessary for a nationwide response to be effective. The Ministry of Agriculture's RRU/FSAC is the default coordinating mechanism for all local and international agricultural actors in a crisis response, and should be maintained and strengthened for future responses.

2. Central Government agencies should be involved in the RRU/FSAC immediately to avoid duplications, misunderstanding and disconnects.

Strong leadership and direction is of primary importance in a disaster response. Timely evidence-based decision making is the role of government ministries and parallel or novel systems should not be constructed in competition with the pre-existing systems and processes at the Ministry, Department and sector level. The National Disaster Committee and the Prime Minister's Office should be better aligned to and responsive to the Ministry's disaster response planning and coordination activities.

3. State of Emergency Declarations should be made to enable early recovery.

It was very encouraging to have VAT and DUTY exemptions for agricultural tools and materials granted at the request of the RRU/FSAC. However, emergency policy decisions should strive to avoid unintended consequences that inhibit access to emergency livelihoods (keeping markets closed unnecessarily etc.). Recognising that local actors are the most active in the immediate aftermath and facilitating their response is vital to early recovery.

Communication, Messaging & Information Sharing

4. Communications by a centralized and Ministry-led secretariat

As the central coordinating mechanism, the Ministry's RRU/FSAC was the focal point for communications to all stakeholders in food security and agriculture sector during the Cyclone Pam response. The ability to condense a wide range of technical advice into simple and regularly communicated messages (on radio, sms, newsprint, air drops and online) was paramount in enabling the public to quickly recovery. All agencies has prepared messages before the cyclone (with the help of the RRU/FSAC) which were immediately available for dissemination post-cyclone. As novel information became available (e.g. seed import guidelines, food rations), regular memorandum were disseminated to all stakeholders. Near-daily press releases were well received and informative.

5. Emergency SMS communications were critical; before and after cyclone Pam

Emergency communications are vital in any response. Interactive SMS messaging on cyclone preparedness several weeks before Cyclone Pam reached an estimated 120,000 people in all provinces. The broadcast SMS info messages sent immediately after the event were a successful way of getting information out to those communities with functioning telephone systems. Soon afterward, the use of SMS technology to understand food security needs in remote communities provided an efficient way to collect information from inaccessible places. SMS updates were also used by some island managers to ensure the public was aware of food distribution schedules and plans.

Assessments

6. Mobile and electronic data gathering techniques should be used for field assessments

The use of paper-based data collection resulted in slow and laborious transcribing and affected timely analysis of impact and damage data. Reliable and timely data informs decision making. A new system of field-based disaster damage assessments must be developed using mobile phones or tablet computers that enable immediate and standardized disaster impact analysis. Planning, training and assessment methodology preparation for impact assessment data collection should be undertaken pre-disaster.

7. Assessment must be coordinated and be directly linked to response.

Assessment fatigue was a great concern in the aftermath of Cyclone Pam. Multiple and uncoordinated agriculture and food security assessments were undertaken in affected communities by a range of stakeholders, many of which were not linked to official RRU/FSAC response activities. It is recommended that the Ministry's RRU/FSAC immediately develop clear guidelines on disaster assessments for the agriculture and food security sector. These guidelines and SOPs must take into consideration and likely information gaps and seek to manage potential overlaps from well-meaning, but uncoordinated action by various partners (including UN agencies and international agencies). Vanuatu's own standard agricultural assessments templates must be used, and must be linked to existing reporting mechanisms and capacities of community leaders, CDC's, Provincial Area Councils and volunteers. Better coordination of agriculture and food security assessments is required, and lead should be taken by the Ministry's RRU/FSAC. The timing of assessments is critical, some of the RRU/FSAC assessments were delayed (including analysis), and therefore were not used in critical decision-making. A review of the sequences of agricultural and food security assessments, analysis and collection of results is required.

Seeds, Tools and Planting Materials Distribution

8. Distribution processes for agricultural materials must be streamlined and coordination with other clusters improved

The Ministry's RRU/FSAC ensured that emergency seed distribution occurred with the first food push which ensured that affected populations immediately had materials in hand to recover their own resilience. The largest hurdles faced for distribution was 1) the estimation of beneficiary numbers

and 2) the mode of fair, equitable and effective sharing with limited stocks. While providing small quantities of random seeds to each household may have been an equitable option, it is likely not the most effective way to ensure that fast growing vegetables are quickly available for consumption, which may be best achieved by providing certain varieties of seeds to farmers associations and key farmers only. Similarly, the distribution of materials was uncoordinated with duplication by multiple agencies because there was no clearly elaborated plan for these items. For example, some beneficiaries received the same tools from both agriculture and shelter focused agencies. The beneficiary numbers and modes of distribution must be worked out, and approved by decision-makers (including provincial authorities), well before a crisis situation.

9. Targeted seed, tool and planting material distribution to vulnerable groups

Vulnerable groups (the elderly, infirm, women, children, and people living with a disability) require proactive and special attention during in distributions to ensure fair and equitable access to resources. Transport, a buddy system, separate lines for women and children, and distribution timings can all be considered in assisting vulnerable populations within the community. The Ministry's RRU/FSAC received credible information that area council wide and even household level distributions did not reach these most vulnerable beneficiaries.

Recovery Programming and Proposals

10. Early recovery planning, and rapid endorsement by Central agencies is crucial

The Ministry's RRU/FSAC placed medium and long-term recovery and rehabilitation at the forefront of its activities immediately after the Cyclone. Rather than recreate new strategies, the Ministry's approach was to ensure that recovery matches existing development priorities/policies and makes these programs more resilient that they would have otherwise been. The major success of the recovery programming was the full and comprehensive engagement of the private sector, non-government agencies and all five relevant government departments. The biggest challenge to date has been the lack of support for (and even acknowledgement of) the Ministry's recovery needs by Central Agencies (Prime Minister's Office, NDC) and in direct consequence, the donor community. By publishing the draft recovery and rehabilitation strategy very quickly (10 days after the cyclone), some quick acting development partners were able to mobilize relevant recovery support immediately.

Annex 1 Detailed Lessons and Recommendations

	What worked well?	What did NOT work well?	How can we improve?	Required outcomes
Assessments	High quality rapid assessments	Repetition of assessments (duplicated efforts, inefficiency)	Mobile phones or tablets should be used in future data gathering	Operational / Government through NDMO
	Strong community cooperation from CDC's, area councils, volunteers, etc	Methodology of assessments: paper-based assessments too slow to extract data from, questions on the survey were too complex and required calculations, staff were not trained	Better coordination of assessments from inception. Create an assessment focal point for the cluster to lead coordination.	Operational / Government
	Assessments used to shape government policy	Lack of coverage to remote communities – too many assessments in easy to reach villages (ex airport villages)	Improve baseline data; 2009 census insufficient	Operational / Government
	Good support from NGOs, government and the private sector	Disaggregation of data	Combine assessments with an initial emergency distribution of food	Operational / Government
	Improved capacity of government staff	Area Secretaries lacked proper records for population stats	Improve speed of government decision-making process based on assessments	Operational / Government
		Private sector expertise not utilized	Shorten or simplify the assessment form	Operational / Government, NGO's, Private sector
		Assessment fatigue	Place cluster members under the authority of NDMO Act to give data collectors authority	Policy
		Speed of assessments was quite slow		
		Quality of aerial assessments questionable		
Communication, Messaging & Information Sharing	The FSAC Meetings are well structured	Information sharing final reports of assessment to stake holders was delayed and we have to request a copy that we finally received but it delay our every plan.	Put HF Radio satellite phones permanently in villages like in Health centers or clinic	Operational / Government
	Good Coordination of FSAC team for recovery after cyclone PAM – Example; The setting up Of the FSAC Secretariat	Confusion on communication for NGOs and Government	Develop or build strong relationships between NGO'S and Government institution	Operational / Government, NGO's
	SMS Messages right after cyclone Pam	Radio not covering all activities of each week	Information in regards of FSAC meetings every Wednesday afternoon should be send to SMS and email as many people are busy and do not spend a lot of time on email.	Operational / RRU
	More Seta light phones	No clear explanation on distributions (Create Confusion)	Brochure must be compiled into a info booklet for FSAC used before, during and after cyclone	Operational / RRU
	FSAC meetings were discussed in Bislama language which is very useful for the locals to understand the information.	FSAC communication breakdown between information and communication within the team	Making sure that central unit for all information on assessments, reports, releases etc	Operational / RRU
	FSAC Meetings were very open and inviting for any one to attend and give ideas un like any other clusters.	No Weekly updates on the Radio	Try using traditional communication networks Like chiefs, woman, man, or young people	Operational / Government through NDMO
	Constant weekly and regular meetings for FSAC	No Brochures printed and distributed to the locals	Get standby communication tools	Operational / Government
	Very good coordination and communication process (Food /seeds/tools)	No information's to what website is updated daily regardless of FSAC	Document all information/ Experience files on TC PAM	Operational / Government & RRU
	Flexibility of team members on sharing information's within the cluster areas	Coordination of information sharing between sectors within FSAC	For communication and information needs that people need to know if a disaster would strike	Operational / Government, NGO's, Private sector
	Equal participation of both genders working in the FSAC cluster	Rural setting of Radio Phone messaging	Need to strengthen communication with each area under RRU	Operational / RRU & Government
		Government lack of communication with private sectors/NGO'S/Church and provincial Government	Proper network coverage	Operational / Government
		Messages do not reach some people living in the rural area with poor reception and no electricity	More messages on national TV and local TV station	Operational / Government
		Some remote villages have no radio, no mobile phones or network, and didn't get the information that cyclone Pam is approaching Vanuatu.	Build more internet network group	Operational / Government, NGO's, Private sector
		Not enough information on the ground in area where there is no coverage of both radio or phone.	Need to have regular meetings once each month if the cluster project ends, just to keep us up to date and be prepared if a disaster strikes again.	Operational / RRU

Recovery Programming and Proposals	The recovery strategy was opened for public comment and feedback very quickly (10 days after the cyclone), and allowed several weeks to collect feedback before being finalized ++	Central Government was unconnected with the RRU/FSAC	The Prime Minister's Office (and other central Government agencies) should be involved in cluster work immediately to avoid disconnects and misunderstandings later.	Operational / Government
	Donors and development partners were quickly able to access the draft recovery strategy for their own planning purposes +	Central Government was too slow to plan for recovery and rehabilitation, far behind the RRU/FSAC +++	The State of Emergency declarations should be made without hampering or inhibiting early recovery (e.g. closing or blocking women in markets, or evening travel to markets/gardens) +	Policy
	The recovery programming had input from all stakeholders, especially all government departments under Ministry, private sector and NGOs ++	Donors have waited a long time for the Central Government to present its national recovery program, while they already had the agriculture and food security recovery strategy +	The Sector Acts may need to be revised to enable emergency/crisis issues, at present they are too stringent to enable quick and sufficient flows of relief materials (e.g. seeds)	Policy
	The programming for agricultural recovery by the FSAC/RRU was excellent, more comprehensive and the most detailed planning done to date across the whole of government +	Donor timelines were at times unrealistic for all partners (e.g. small grants closing too soon, too high expectations on quickly spending funds)	Working groups under the cluster (seeds/tools, assessments etc) should be better organized and empowered to lead the work and planning of the cluster +	Operational / Government & RRU
	The recovery programming was fully aligned with and supportive of exiting national policies and strategies (Overarching Productive Sector Policy, National Forest Policy, Agriculture Sector Policy, National Livestock Policy, Integrated Coastal Zone Management Framework)	Too much money flowed initially to UN agencies and NGOs, with no finance received directly by private sector or government	There must be opportunities for Government, NGOs AND Private sector to access support for recovery	Operational / Government & RRU
	It was a good strategy to utilize the already existing industry groups to take the lead in cluster/RRU activities (e.g. fruit and vegetable association, livestock industry group etc)	The State of Emergency declarations actually hampered early recovery; by closing and blocking women in markets they were unable to buy the tools and material they needed immediately,, also by closing evening travel many people couldn't get to and from their gardens on time to replant +	Information from the RRU/FSAC on recovery should include an executive summary in order to reduce the time of stakeholders required to analyze documents etc.	Operational / RRU
	It was a good strategy to trial a few key recovery strategies quickly before they are upscale to national programs (e.g. live chicken trial on Pele).	There needs to be improved coordination of donors and development partners in the RRU/FSAC. More donors should be involved in programming from the beginning	The Central Government should replicate the cluster and have a draft recovery and rehabilitation plan available immediately, which is accessible to donors, and open to feedback and revision for a period of weeks	Operational / Government
	There was excellent support from Partners to get the early recovery activities happening immediately with relief (e.g. Okoanos/VRDTCa with planting materials, GIZ with Chickens, Government/NC/FAO seeds)	Some of the aid requirements set by donors were too rigid and unrealistic in a crisis situation (e.g. where seeds go and what monitoring information was required)	The Central Government's National Disaster Committee (NDC) should be better organized and play a greater role in facilitating recovery programming dialogue among sectors +	Operational / Government
	Donors and development partners were involved in RRU/FSAC activities very early (SPC/GIZ, FAO, World Bank, EU etc)	The Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP) process was very poorly organized, with unrealistic timeframes and also the inability of RRU/FSAC to adequately include its food security and agriculture needs in the HAP contents	More clarity and distinction is required in recovery programming on immediate relief and longer term recovery that is Cyclone specific (and not just normal sustainable/resilient development)	Operational / Training
			Monitoring and Evaluation plans should be fully elaborated and published alongside the recovery and rehabilitation strategies, the M&E would drive an iterative process of reprioritization if required.	Operational / RRU
Distributions (seeds, tools & planting materials)	Fast and timely access to seeds and planting materials	People who hadn't been specifically involved in the seed and tool distribution commented on a lack of communication and coordination – no communication to wider groups about what had been procured, where it was going, the basis for decision-making, no inter-cluster communication with Shelter cluster about other tools being distributed, confusion as to why so many tools were coming into communities, lack of information to seed recipients about planting, lack of locally available seed/tools	People not directly involved talked strongly about the need to be prepared. Two points of view emerged: the need to stockpile/grow in country to be self-sufficient in disaster versus the need to research and plan supply lines to import in the event of disaster.	Operational / Government
	Good quality checks on seeds	People who had been involved in the process commented on the difficulty of managing the seeds that had been procured and the added challenge of inaccurate population data	People more involved in the distribution advocated for the need to simplify the process and improve population data	Operational / Government, NGO's, Private sector & Everybody
	Good coordination with partners on the ground	Logistics poor (one disagreement)	Seed centres at multiple points in outer islands	Operational / Government, NGO's, Private sector & Everybody
	Most of the affected areas received seeds and planting materials	Limited local supply of seeds	All seeds need to be coordinated with FSAC	Operational / RRU
	Information on seed planting was provided	Coordination of tool and seed distribution between cluster and NGOs (need more transparency and communication)	Coordination of local access (more locally available stock)	Operational / Government
	Lots of seeds imported	FAO seeds too complicated to handle	Stockpile seeds and tools before a disaster	Operational / Government, NGO's, Private sector
	No GMO seeds imported	Delays in seed stock and supply	M&E of seeds in areas of distribution	Operational / RRU
		Confusion about food rations – why was this amount given? Definition of a household?	Targeted distribution to vulnerable groups (single women, single headed households, people with disabilities)	Operational / Government
		Low participation on women in distributions – teams, offloading, decision-making all done by men	Limit seeds to only a few varieties, not too many	Operational / RRU
		First distribution failed to consider providing good coverage, distribution and planting information	Machinery is highly recommend (with one disagreement tick)	Operational / Government
		Seed distribution not well coordinated – some still waiting to receive their share	Need a standard seed kit	Operational / RRU
		Distribution of seeds and tools to most communities saw youth excluded from the distribution, even if they were in a separate house from parents.	Participation of women in distribution teams	Operational / Government, NGO's, Private sector
		Information on growing and distribution of seeds	Better communication with private sector and industry stakeholders, too much involvement with NGOs	Operational / Private stakeholders & Industry stakeholders
		Provincial coordination not well managed	Plan well for supply lines in preparation for disasters (sources of seeds and quality checking in advance)	Operational / Government & RRU
		No available per diems for volunteers who distributed food and seeds	Needs updated population census in order to calculate fair distribution of seeds and food	Operational / Government
		Some communities received tools before the seeds, from different organisations	Provincial coordination or distribution needs to be strengthened	Operational / Government
		Area Council lists for distribution excluded single women and widows		
		Lack of communication with private sector and industry stakeholders		

Co-ordination, Policy & Strategic Planning	Establishment of RRU 2 months after the disaster (5 ticks)	Early stages the communication to external stakeholders to attend meetings and the times was not reaching them.	Communication and awareness of the cluster system (especially FSAC) to the private sector and Industry Stakeholders	Operational / RRU, Private sector & Industry stakeholders
	Coordination in terms of response of FSAC was quick and effective	Lack of awareness and understanding by some stakeholders of the importance of the FSAC, that you could just attend if you had an interest in it (some thought you had to be invited)	Establish a Government unit to represent NDMO on clusters to ensure communication/ coordination with higher levels of government.	Operational / Government
	Leadership was very strong and effective delegation (4 ticks)	Gender and Protection issues not included in recovery strategy	Take food on the first round of assessments, certain assumptions could be made that food would be needed, worst case scenario people have extra food. (2 ticks)	Operational / Government
	Availability and effective consultation with experts	Sometimes political decision making was slower than the FSAC required	Institutional strengthening of HR, staffing, work plans for all stakeholders	Operational / all stakeholders
	Regular meetings and number of meetings was appropriately scaled up and down and communicated well.	Coordination between clusters eg WASH and FSAC could be improved (2 ticks)	Amend policy based on these recommendations from disasters	Policy
	Policy's and strategies developed worked well and covered everything (2 ticks)	Actual strategy decided on not communicated clearly (as to why chose that and who got the final say) and if you missed a meeting (which some smaller organisation did as not enough men to be on the ground and at meetings) then you did not know where things were coming from.	Representation by Prime Minister's office in all ministries at FSAC meetings. (3 ticks)	Operational / Government
	Cyclone brought everyone into one room together to begin collaboration for future.	Did we choose the right strategy: assessments then distribute as opposed to initial emergency distribution, and assess at the same time. The second strategy would mean the food would get out faster. We wouldn't have to wait until after assessments are finished.		
	Secretariat co-ordination worked very well, people fed information in and it was processed, shared and used effectively (3 ticks)	First 2 weeks were very slow process for practical on the ground response – 2 weeks is a long time for people on the ground recovering.		
		Coordination and communication of FSAC with higher levels of government. (5 ticks)		

Annex 2 Participant List

Name	Organization
Meilinarti	Oxfam
Sanford Nako	Oxfam
Dave Colsert	Butterfly Trust
James Roberts	WFP
Adelyne Nelson	ADRA Vanuatu
James Wasi	DARD
Abel Tapisuwe	MALFFB
Lonny Bong	DOL
Nambo Moses	DOL
Marian Loughman	TVET Program
Mathias Bule	DARD
Joshua Mael	DARD
Antoine K	DARD
Mark Vurobaravo	DARD
Isso Nihimei	SPC-GIZ
Godfrey Bome	Department of Forestry
Vincent Potier	Save the Children
Sannine Shem	Save the Children
Siobhan Talty	CARE
Lucy Watt	UNHCR (Gender + Protection cluster)
Sylvio Bule	Bio-security Vanuatu
Terry Adlington	Tanna Coffee
Christopher Bartlett	SPC-GIZ
Kelly Parshall	SPC-GIZ
Tony Goodrick	FAO-NDMO
Paul Worwor	RRU/FSAC
Nikita Solzer	SPC-GIZ
Tim Anderson	RRU/FSAC
Sera Bani	RRU/FSAC