

H2H Vanuatu activation 2020

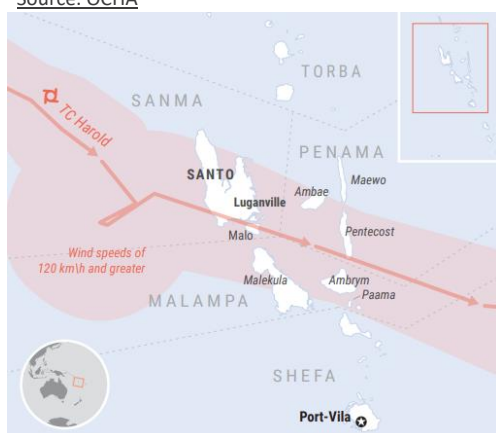
Case Study: June 2021

This case study explores how the H2H Fund activation for Vanuatu in 2020 contributed to an improved humanitarian response. It examines a chain of ‘humanitarian value’ beginning with H2H Fund inputs, through to the products and services delivered by grantees, and onto to their key users and discernible contributions made to responses. It was conducted in June 2021 for the H2H Network by Itad monitoring and evaluation advisers, based on six key informant interviews, two project reports, and wider communication documents from H2H. The Vanuatu case study, selected among 10 activations 2017-2021, aims to understand how the Fund strengthened a local humanitarian response to Tropical Cyclone Harold in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1 Cyclone Harold and COVID-19

In April 2020, Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold hit the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, and Tonga, leaving a trail of devastation. Vanuatu was the hardest hit of the four Pacific Island nations, with the cyclone making landfall on 6 April 2020 on Espiritu Santo Island as a Category 5 storm (OCHA). The cyclone directly affected more than 160,000 people, approximately half of Vanuatu’s total population (OCHA).

Source: OCHA



The government of Vanuatu requested international assistance on 9 April to help national agencies meet immediate needs including shelter, non-food items, protection, food, and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) assistance (IFRC). On 13 April, the United Nations (UN) Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) released US \$2.5 million for the response in Vanuatu (Relief Web). However, communications networks in the most affected provinces of Sanma, Malampa and Penama were completely down for more than three days, delaying response and needs assessments. Roads were damaged and blocked by debris, especially on Pentecost Island and in Luganville, normally a hub for transportation. This

further complicated the deployment of humanitarian staff to these remote locations with limited infrastructure (ACAPS).

Logistics in the response were not only hampered by difficult local conditions following the cyclone but compounded by the state of emergency enacted in Vanuatu for the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 restrictions posed a challenge for humanitarian personnel arriving from outside the country and the importation of goods, which require a three-day quarantine (ACAPS).

2 H2H Activation

The H2H Fund was able to provide appropriate and timely technical and financial inputs that allowed the two projects to strengthen the local response in Vanuatu.

Activation design: The H2H Fund activated on 23 April 2020 with a service package aimed at strengthening the local response in Vanuatu and nearby islands. The Network put a call out for proposals and received 2 proposals. The independent grant panel made the decision to fund both proposals as the H2H members were already operating in Vanuatu. Field Ready and the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network were funded between May to September 2020 with a grant total of £203,000. The service package design required CDAC and Field Ready to work in collaboration, disseminating CDAC-supported printed materials and promoting their communications channels while Field Ready distributed their aid products. CDAC would help Field Ready develop and localise communications materials (such as ‘user guides’ or ‘how to wash your hands after toilet’ messaging) for their products. Both would coordinate their information on needs identification, cluster engagements and COVID-19 factors in the TC Harold response.

Technical input: The H2H Core Team, in consultation with the UK’s FCDO, recognised that an overall international response to TC Harold was lacking. ‘All eyes were elsewhere,’ observed Helen Kearney, the H2H Head of Network Development, due to the disaster happening during the COVID-19 pandemic. An absence of a large international response meant that local actors struggled to respond to the immediate needs of affected people. In response, the Core Team convened H2H members to consider what could be done and asked those in the country to scope out the situation on the ground. This convening of relevant actors was considered a strength by CDAC’s Executive Director, Marian Casey-Maslen, as it ensured the decision to activate ‘fit the criteria of H2H to meet needs in often forgotten crises.’

Technical input: H2H also identified that COVID-19 restrictions were making it challenging for international responders and supplies to enter the island. Unlike traditional responses which would rely on international responders to fly in and emergency supplies to be shipped from global warehouses, alternative procurement strategies were needed. This presented an opportunity to promote a localised response, and the decision was made to fund two members already on the ground, Field Ready and CDAC, who could support local responders.

Financial input: The process for the two projects to receive funding was very quick, straightforward, and clear. Both members found that having preparatory calls were helpful to understand what H2H was requesting from their proposals. Also, communication from the H2H Core Team was timely and helpful when members needed clarification or guidance. As a result, there was less time taken up by grant negotiations and contracting, and funds could be realised quickly.

Learning points: First, for the Fund to activate in response to TC Harold, having members already present in Vanuatu was a prerequisite. In this situation the products and services Field Ready and CDAC deliver were aligned with identified gaps in the response (essential WASH supplies and communication channels to and from affected people). The continued COVID-19 restrictions on international travel could also mean an increased need for a localised response to future crises. Second, both members indicated that applying for H2H funds is a relatively smooth and quick process. The access to rapid funding allowed them to quickly pivot their activities from disaster preparedness to response. The Fund was able to address a specific gap in the system and enable a more efficient response to TC Harold.

3 Localised communication and engagement

Project design: The CDAC project, ‘Embedding communication and community engagement from the start of the response’, built upon the existing CDAC Network and Ground Truths Solutions ‘localisation’ project in Vanuatu, funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The project had helped to set up the Vanuatu Communications and Community Engagement (CCE) Sub-Cluster in 2019 which is comprised almost entirely of Vanuatu people and organisations, with members including representation from governments, NGOs, INGOs, multilateral organisations and

media and telecommunications entities. The funding of £96,177 from H2H was intended to ‘focus on getting timely, accurate and relevant information to diverse groups so that they can stay safe and make the best-informed decisions for themselves’.

Service delivered: CDAC, in partnership with CARE Vanuatu, worked through the CCE Sub-Cluster to support the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) to coordinate communication and provide crucial information on shelter, food and water and protection issues around COVID-19 to affected people. They drafted press releases for multiple media channels, developed and printed information, education and communication materials and installed 79 noticeboards in the severely affected communities to share information on the local humanitarian response efforts as well as COVID-19 safety (Project Narrative Report). The project team also delivered face-to-face key messages, alongside the distribution of relief supplies in Harold-affected communities in Ambrym, Pentecost and Santo, reaching over 20,000 people (Narrative Report).

Service used: Key response actors including the NDMO, World Vision and the Vanuatu Red Cross Society were able to coordinate communication efforts to ensure accuracy and consistency in the lifesaving and life sustaining information disseminated to affected communities (Narrative Report). ‘CDAC play a critical role, they help to coordinate the Sub-Cluster, bring the partners together well, step in when needed in the meetings but do well not to step on the NDMO’s toes’ said a representative from ActionAid Vanuatu.

Service used: The NDMO and other partners, such as Department of Water Resources and Department of Women’s Affairs, and the Australian High Commission were able to use the communication tools developed by CDAC to ensure that affected people had the information they needed to make informed decisions. A representative from CARE Vanuatu highlighted that the NDMO Facebook page received a lot of views and comments after posting their press releases. This helped provide a new level of visibility for the NDMO into the national response and improve its credibility with affected people.

Service delivered: The project team, working with the CCE Sub-Cluster, also led the development of a community feedback mechanism specifically for the TC Harold response to support responder effectiveness and accountability throughout the emergency response and recovery. The mechanism facilitates two-way communication between affected individuals and responders working on designing, coordinating and implementing response and recovery activities at the national level (Narrative Report). ‘As part of this work, CDAC/CARE was also providing provincial level training on the importance of communication and information on the CCE Sub Clusters work to several local organisations including Community Disaster and Climate Change Committees (CDCCCs)’ as highlighted by a CARE Vanuatu representative, to help strengthen community-level communications skills and knowledge.

Service used: The NDMO used the community feedback mechanism to facilitate two-way communication during the response. It used the information received from the mechanism for analysis and distribution among other responders so that it could inform the national response and recovery plan (Narrative Report). This mechanism enabled the NDMO to bridge the gap between



Source: CDAC Photo Essay

affected communities and local/national responders and ensure vital information was shared to and from both groups. As a result of this work, the NDMO endorsed the community feedback mechanism approach and would like it to be further developed for use in future disaster response.

Response contribution: By supporting the CCE Sub-Cluster’s work, the NDMO prioritised locally led, community focused communication and engagement and, by extension, the national response to TC Harold. The project played a crucial role in supporting the NDMO’s communication approach, enabling it to meet the needs information and communication needs of people in the worst affected areas. In collaboration with the NDMO, key safety and recovery messaging and information was provided to key response actors as well as local representatives of the government or CDCCCs. Training local volunteers from existing networks, like CDCCCs and Vanuatu Red Cross Society, proved an efficient and effective method of providing communities with information fast so that they could make informed decisions about their safety.

Response contribution: The project showed how relevant and timely information-sharing and two-way communication can ensure that the people affected by TC Harold were receiving the information they needed to make decisions about their safety. The project demonstrated the value of clear communication channels and clarity in message during a crisis which was enhanced through the preparatory tasks of the CCE Sub-Cluster” noted by Casey-Maslen. The NDMO increasingly recognised the need to prioritise communication and community engagement as a cross-cutting requirement alongside other essentials like food, water and health as part of an effective disaster response (Narrative report). This will support ongoing efforts to improve Vanuatu’s disaster responses in the future.

Learning point: The H2H Fund was able to leverage CDAC’s longer term project to implement a short-term emergency response. It enabled the project team to adapt their programme to address the TC Harold response but also provided practical evidence that their approach does work in supporting a locally led response in an emergency. This may help to strengthen the sustainability of the project’s long-term work to build effective systems for two-way communication. However, it is important to note that their presence already in the country was a necessary precondition for delivery of responder activities. As noted by a project team member ‘a three-month project is very short to implement effective communication channels’. CDAC were able to respond effectively through the Vanuatu activation as it was able to build on previous preparatory tasks. This case shows how H2H activations can leverage longer-terms projects to support responses and strengthen the sustainability of these projects.

4 Localised WASH supplies

Project design: The Field Ready project, ‘Essential WASH supplies with minimum supply chain’, aimed to activate their existing networks and capabilities as part of two ongoing disaster risk reduction projects in the affected areas. These projects are focused on building local manufacturing capabilities in WASH and producing WASH items locally and working in partnership with church networks to improve accessibility and protection in evacuation centres using local skills and materials. With £109,000 from the H2H Fund, Field Ready aimed to transition these preparedness activities into response activities to support immediate critical needs.

Product delivered: Field Ready supplied locally manufactured WASH supplies intended for distribution by local responders. ‘Local manufacturing was key as international freight and tight quarantine protocols due to COVID-19 required alternative procurement strategies’ said Andrew Lamb, Innovation Lead for Field Ready. While Field Ready had been operating in the South Pacific for around 3 years before TC Harold made landfall, it was for the first time in the region 5,000 Oxfam-designed humanitarian water buckets (a.k.a. jerry cans) were able to be manufactured and shipped directly to Vanuatu. The buckets were transported jointly with Sea Mercy who provided 1,500 Sawyer filters and treatment buckets and 260 WaterRoam filters.

Product used: By September 2020, 4,250 jerry buckets had been distributed to TC Harold affected areas in Malampa, Sanma and Penama (Narrative Report). Field Ready supplied the buckets to key

responders and local NGO(s), including ActionAid, World Vision and Plan. A representative from ActionAid Vanuatu explained that ‘the supply and distribution of the buckets made a real difference as it enabled us to add a practical element to our response’. Although the demand outweighed the supply, as noted by representatives from ActionAid Vanuatu and Vanuatu Young Women for Change, the buckets were of much higher quality than others and the training received on how to use the buckets and water filters was greatly appreciated by the NGOs as well as the affected people.

Product delivered: H2H funding also enabled the project to manufacture 90 portable handwashing stations in Luganville, Santo and distribute them health facilities, churches and schools in different areas in Santo and Malo with concentrations of displaced populations (Field Ready Narrative Report). By manufacturing the stations in Vanuatu also meant Field Ready were also able to build local making capability to provide appropriate robust WASH products. IEC materials on COVID-19 awareness and hygiene practices provided by CDAC through CARE in form of booklets in local language (Bislama) were also distributed with handwashing stations (Narrative Report).

Product used: Field Ready manufactured the handwashing stations for distribution by local responders to evacuation centres and temporary accommodation sites where handwashing facilities were non-existent or inadequate (i.e. tippy taps, open buckets) (Narrative Report). Additionally, 5,130 households received increased access to information on safe WASH practices and relevant post-disaster information (Narrative Report). Local government (Municipalities), church and community groups and NGOs have shown a strong interest in the handwashing stations which have helped them to meet the challenge of increasing handwashing rates. This has been even more important due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Response contribution: The Fund enabled the project to increase access to WASH facilities and information on safe WASH practices, including COVID-19 prevention. By manufacturing a range of WASH products in the region and supplying them to Vanuatu rather than shipping them internationally meant that the aid was delivered cheaper and faster than previously possible (Field Ready KII). The ability to manufacture locally was even more important as international borders were closed due to COVID-19 protocols and so presence in the region already was key to getting supplies to affected people in a timely manner. Luke Johnston, Field Ready’s Regional Lead Pacific, also noted that ‘the H2H funding enabled Field Ready to prove that their model of localised manufacturing could work in response to a crisis’.

Response contribution: The partnership with Sea Mercy meant that the combination of distributing the buckets with the filters filled an urgent and critical need in the constrained context where aid was insufficient overall and slow to reach people, providing an instant household level drinking water treatment and storage solution (Narrative Report). The Fund meant that Sea Mercy was also able to respond to TC Harold in the first place as before partnering with Field Ready they were scoping out funding sources to ship their water filters. As a representative from ActionAid Vanuatu said, ‘the coming together of Field Ready and Sea Mercy to provide the buckets and filters really helped the response’. The two organisations were able to pool resources to respond in a more coordinated and efficient manner.

Learning point: The H2H Fund enabled Field Ready to pivot from disaster preparedness to response, using products that had not been manufactured locally before. As Lamb stated, ‘prior to COVID-19, donors would tend to fund big INGOs to provide aid supplies and none of them wanted to promise to procure locally’. Because of the restrictions on international travel, new procurement methods were needed and Field Ready was able to switch from primarily capacity building to a frontline organisation in order to provide locally manufactured aid supplies. ‘After other donors and INGOs saw that local manufacturing can work, they now want to buy the products’ explained Lamb. This suggests an opportunity for H2H to fund in locations where other donors are more risk averse, helping to test innovative ideas and demonstrating what can work.

5 Key outcomes

The CDAC Network, in partnership with CARE and through their support to the CCE Sub-Cluster, provided timely and relevant information to TC Harold affected people to help them make informed decisions on their safety and next actions. The project led the development of a community feedback mechanism to promote two-way communication between affected people and responders and trained members from local organisations to strengthen communication channels. The NDMO, along with other key responders such as Vanuatu Red Cross Society and ActionAid, used the communication materials produced by CDAC to ensure affected people received accurate and consistent messaging. CDAC's efforts helped strengthen the local response as it worked with through CCE Sub Cluster, made up of mostly Vanuatu people and organisations, to support and guide the NDMO in leading the response. The local response was also reinforced through efforts to ensure that community focused communication and engagement were prioritised by the NDMO and, by extension, the national response to TC Harold. The NDMO used the feedback from the community engagement to inform and adapt their response to the most immediate needs.

Field Ready provided essential WASH items intended for distribution through local responders. The organisation manufactured the Oxfam jerry cans for the first time in the region in their factory in Fiji, along with latrines and handwashing stations that were produced in Vanuatu. Key responders, local NGO(s) and government ministries, including ActionAid, Vanuatu Young Women for Change and the Ministry of Health used the products to meet the immediate WASH needs of affected people. Although greater quantities were desired, the supply of buckets enabled responders to add a practical element to their response and respond more efficiently as they received water filters from Sea Merch at the same time. The ability to manufacture these products in the region was crucial as international freight was hindered due to COVID-19 restrictions and quarantine protocols. As such Field Ready strengthened the response by providing necessary supplies with reduced supply chains, ensuring the WASH items were able to reach affected people quicker.

The context into which TC Harold arrived was significantly different from previous disasters as the emergency response coincided with a global pandemic. The H2H Network recognised a different approach was needed and the activation enabled two H2H members, already present in Vanuatu, to make useful contributions to the humanitarian response. The Fund played a key role by activating quickly and providing rapid funding to Field Ready and CDAC. It meant that they were able to pivot their preparatory disaster activities into response actions for TC affected areas and help to strengthen the local response. Both members noted that without the funding from H2H they would not have been able to respond. In the words of Lamb 'for small NGOs like us it is nearly impossible to build up your cash reserves to respond but the H2H Fund meant that we could'. Without the H2H Network Fund activation these specific outcomes would have been very different or may not have occurred at all.