



Quick Impact Workshop – Outcomes Post Tropical Cyclone Pam Roundtable with Civil Society

The Australian Civil-Military Centre (ACMC) is an Australian government initiative to improve Australia's effectiveness in civil-military collaboration for conflict and disaster management overseas. The ACMC facilitates discussions and workshops to support civil-military-police capability and build understanding through multiagency engagement, case studies and shared information.

Overview – Australia's response to Tropical Cyclone Pam

Tropical Cyclone Pam hit Vanuatu and surrounds in March 2015. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) led the Australian response, which also involved significant Defence engagement and the substantial use of military assets. This model is increasingly the way Australia will respond to humanitarian crises in the Pacific. The response efforts entailed swift action from Australian international aid and development organisations, raising over \$17 million in public appeals which provided a range of humanitarian support including water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); emergency food and livelihoods; shelter; non-food items; gender; protection; and education in emergencies programs.

Post Tropical Cyclone Pam Roundtable with Civil Society

The roundtable was held in June 2015 to bring together government, non-government organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations who responded to Tropical Cyclone Pam to discuss best practice disaster and humanitarian response in the region. A summary of roundtable presentations and discussions are below. A list of the workshop participants is at Attachment A. The workshop program, PowerPoint presentations and relevant reports can also be found at www.acmc.gov.au

Joint NGO Reflections Report (the 'NGO Report')

Save the Children Australia and CARE Australia presented a Joint NGO Reflections Report: One Size Doesn't Fit All: Tailoring the International Response to the National Need Following Vanuatu's Cyclone Pam. The NGO Report is based on research undertaken during a two-week period in April 2015 and was developed for the World Humanitarian Summit Regional Consultation in Auckland in June 2015. The report is available at www.savethechildren.org.au/about-us/publications

Key observations

Disaster Risk in the Pacific

The Pacific is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world with high exposure to natural disasters and low capacity to manage risk. Super cyclones such as Pam and Haiyan (Philippines) are projected to become more likely and have greater impact with heavier rains and extensive flooding. The NGO Report found that there was a clear differentiation in the ability of communities to respond and to recover if they had previously undertaken Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) activities.

Pacific Island countries face a disproportionate amount of disaster-related economic loss. Of the 20 countries with the highest average annual disaster losses relative to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the world, eight are in the Pacific. In 2012, Cyclone Evan was estimated to have affected Samoa's GDP by 30%; the economic impacts as a result of Cyclone Pam are not yet known, but projections have been estimated up to 50% of GDP. As an example, Tanna Island reported a loss of over half of its building structures and the recovery of cash crops is projected to take up to five years.

Pacific Island countries can better prepare for disasters and crises through a number of risk management measures including establishing strong Community Disaster Committees and enhanced traditional practices. There is a role for the humanitarian sector to play in actively advocating and supporting Pacific Island countries to strengthen national disaster management structures and preparedness arrangements.

Contingency planning and preparation was discussed in depth. NGOs are often already on the ground in Pacific Island countries and it was noted that they play a vital role in the first few hours following a crisis. One critical (and potentially underutilised role) is that of advising DFAT of the damaged state of vital infrastructure such as ports and airfields. There is work currently underway with DFAT and the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) to improve contingency and post-crisis assessment support.

Gender issues

The response to Tropical Cyclone Pam reflected the lack of agreement amongst humanitarian practitioners on how to define, prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the aftermath of a crisis. It was agreed that first responders need training in SGBV response skills and pre-deployment training should include a level of SGBV awareness.

Community-based Disaster Risk Reduction

Prior to Tropical Cyclone Pam, Community Disaster Committees (CDCs) were established and functioning in some communities in Vanuatu. The CDCs work on disaster risk reduction and identifying what can be done to prepare for disasters, including traditional preparation practices. These include disaster simulations, evacuation practice, identifying safe houses, strengthening structures, removal of trees near buildings, and storing water and non-perishable food.

Due to such preparation, the response saw the safe evacuation of vulnerable people in the community including children, the elderly and the disabled. Communities that were not supported to prepare for disasters and did not have functioning CDCs were found not to have taken such an active role in preparing for or responding to the cyclone. The NGO Report found a strong correlation between groups that had community preparedness support and their ability to respond and recover from the cyclone.

Post disaster, the CDCs were able to access data from affected communities, which provided more detailed assessments to disaster management authorities and promoted community initiatives.

The NGO Report has made recommendations that communities must be further supported to reduce their vulnerability and mitigate the impact of disasters, and that stronger action is required to tackle climate change to curb the increase in large scale events such as Cyclone Pam.

Provincial Coordination

In 2014 a disaster simulation exercise was held in Tanna at provincial level with the Provincial Disaster Management Office, which helped the staff to be clear on their roles and responsibilities in coordinating emergency response after a disaster. Their performance was reviewed recently in a lessons learned workshop facilitated by CARE (report available at http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/VUT_TC_Pam_2015_Lessons_Learnt_Tafea_23062015.pdf). The report was shared with the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), which undertook a lessons learned workshop in late June (report forthcoming).

National Coordination

Vanuatu has a reasonably well established legal and regulatory disaster management framework in place. However, this did not always reflect current international tools and services employed during emergencies such as the Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP) and United Nations Disaster and Assessment Coordination (UNDAC) processes. Understanding roles and responsibilities of clusters and national, international and UN responders would have supported better collaboration between disaster response mechanisms.

The Vanuatu Humanitarian Team (VHT) was regarded by many local responders as a model for humanitarian coordination in the Pacific due to the VHT's established relationship with the government including co-leading cluster groups and formal recognition in national disaster management policies and plans. However, there was no prior agreement between the VHT/NDMO and the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) headed by OCHA at the regional level regarding roles and responsibilities in the event of a large-scale international response. Similarly the UN emergency assessment tool (UNDAC) for major emergencies was not referenced in NDMO/VHT documents. The national response mechanisms and government-led clusters in Vanuatu are well established but have not previously been tested in a large scale disaster. Tropical Cyclone Pam challenged issues such as lack of awareness, clarity around roles and responsibilities, and lack of preparedness for all of the complexities that often comes with large scale international responses.

The NGO Report has made recommendations that the international community must show much greater readiness to adapt and understand its core role as providing surge capacity, technical advice and expertise to national actors to enable them to lead and coordinate disaster response. This includes supporting national governments to develop robust systems and procedures for disaster response.

International Response

The international response saw a large number of NGOs responding; many of these (over 100 separate organisations) were new to the country and had limited understanding of national structures or cultural practices. This caused significant coordination challenges in terms of communication, logistics and community support. A good example of an appropriate (although difficult) response assessment came from Mercy Corps making an organisational decision to not respond as there was adequate NGO and multilateral support already available. This is not an easy decision for a humanitarian NGO but one that needs to be actively encouraged as an option when surge support is exacerbating an already difficult situation.

A key issue that came up in the NGO Report and research was cross-cultural issues and, in some cases, a lack of appreciation from international actors for the role of senior Vanuatu Government officials. NGO staff interviewed for the NGO Report indicated that many newcomers' failure to understand the Melanesian culture added a level of disharmony in the early weeks of the response.

From an Australian perspective, it was noted that pre-deployment training could be enhanced for all crisis responders from government and non-government to broaden awareness of disaster management frameworks (national and international), cultural sensitivities and the roles/responsibilities of stakeholders. This is an area for further exploration by the ACMC, DFAT, Defence, ACFID and other areas of civil society.

Military support

There was a large military response with Australia, France, New Zealand, the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Fiji providing land, air and maritime assets. The use of military assets was well received by the Vanuatu Government and essential in critical logistic support when there was no civilian asset alternative. This support included clearing roads and debris, and supporting initial assessments through boats and helicopters.

Some issues were identified regarding the types of assets deployed, communication and prioritisation of loads. As an example, lack of understanding about military asset capabilities was frustrating to NGOs and lack of standardised language (e.g. 'pallets') made it difficult for the ADF members arranging load requirements. The Vanuatu response also highlighted coordination and communication challenges around prioritisation, decision making and the appropriateness of the asset to the environment. While goodwill, professionalism and a 'can do' approach helped with most hurdles, there is work already underway within Defence and DFAT to enhance understanding of military assets, requirements and capabilities. Several ideas were discussed including product cards, asset descriptors and standardised information for passengers (sent to NGOs prior to a crises). These ideas will be further discussed with DFAT, ADF and the APMC through ACFID's Humanitarian Reference Group (HRG).

The role of liaison officers was seen as vital for communication and coordination within DFAT and Joint Operations Command. What might also be useful during humanitarian crises is the placement of an NGO representative in the DFAT Crisis Centre. This is a suggestion currently being discussed between DFAT and ACFID.

Coordination

It was agreed that the Civil Military Coordinator engaged by UNOCHA and deployed through RedR played a vital coordination role on the ground. The mix of the right personality, supported by the right skillset, training and experience proved invaluable in the important conduit role between civil and military responders. It was agreed that this individual and the CIMIC coordinator should be deployed on the first military plane with the initial NGO responders. In the case of Tropical Cyclone Pam, these coordinators arrived several days after the cyclone hit, which meant that there was little civil-military coordination in the first (vital) 48-72 hours.

The APMC will work with DFAT and Defence on the coordination and decision making components of the Special Response Team and the Joint Task Force (JTF). The timing and sequencing of civil-military coordination support personnel will factor into this work.

Conclusion

The international response to Tropical Cyclone Pam was considered highly successful. In the first phase alone, emergency food and water supplies were provided to over 21,000 people, and 55,000 homes were provided with repair kits and tarpaulins. The response benefitted from preparedness activities adopted by the Vanuatu people, particularly at a community level. National disaster management systems were in place; however, the scale of the response overwhelmed national absorptive capacities. Civilian and military assets were utilised in the response and there were some challenges in planning, communicating and coordinating military assets. Frustrations were seen from both the military and humanitarian sides, and work is currently underway within several organisations to address these challenges to continue to improve Australia's response efforts.

Key Recommendations

- » The humanitarian sector can play an active role in advocating and supporting Pacific Island countries to revise national disaster management structures and preparedness arrangements.
- » DFAT and ACFID should continue to collaborate in ways to improve contingency and post-crisis assessment support.
- » First responders need training in SGBV response skills.
- » Pre-deployment training should include a level of SGBV awareness.
- » Pre-deployment training could be enhanced for all crisis responders from government and non-government to broaden awareness of disaster management frameworks (national and international), cultural sensitivities and the roles/responsibilities of stakeholders.
- » Defence, DFAT and the ACFID HRG should continue to collaborate in ways to enhance understanding of military assets, requirements and capabilities.

- » DFAT and ACFID should consider the option to include a civil society representative in the DFAT Crisis Centre in large scale humanitarian responses.
- » The Civil-Military coordinator should be deployed on the first military plane with the initial NGO responders.
- » The timing and sequencing of civil-military coordination support personnel should be included in future ACMC, DFAT and Defence work on the JTF structure, roles and responsibilities.

What's next?

A number of organisations involved in the response to Tropical Cyclone Pam are currently undertaking lessons reporting. A Lessons report from the NDMO in Vanuatu is being finalised. A report from the Provincial DMO in Tafea is available, along with the joint NGO Report presented at the roundtable. Links to available reports are available on the ACMC website.

The ACMC will provide these observations to senior government representatives on the ACMC Strategic Advisory Panel to help inform future civil-military planning and preparedness. More information on the ACMC's role in identifying lessons from interagency international operations is available at www.acmc.gov.au

Attachment A

Workshop Attendees

ActionAid Australia

Australian Council for International Development

Australian Red Cross

CARE Australia

Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Australia

Department of Defence, HQ 1JMOVGP

Department of Defence, Headquarters Joint Operations Command

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Humanitarian Branch

DFAT, Stabilisation and Recovery Branch

Oxfam Australia

RedR Australia

Save the Children Australia

Uniting World Australia

World Vision Australia