



Vanuatu. Family from the village Ambrym.
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Vanuatu

Climate change and disaster-induced displacement policy

1. Context

Vanuatu is consistently ranked among the most risk-prone countries in the world due to its limited resilience to the frequent occurrence of natural hazards, such as tropical cyclones, floods, droughts, earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions.¹ The country also faces other significant climate change and development-related challenges that contribute to disaster displacement risk.²

In 2015, Vanuatu grappled with the devastating consequences of Tropical Cyclone Pam, the strongest Category 5 storm ever recorded to hit the country, which displaced 65,000 people,³ almost 25% of the entire population.⁴ A lessons learned workshop following the disaster response identified the need for institutional and operational normative frameworks to improve evacuation centre management and ensure the inclusion of displacement and relocation within the National Cluster System.⁵ Similarly, the Vanuatu Climate Change and

Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2016-2030 recommended including “special support” for displaced people in emergency response efforts⁶ and called for the development of a “national policy on resettlement and internal displacement” to assist with recovery activities.⁷

2. Description of the practice

Following through on these recommendations, in 2018, the Government of Vanuatu finalized the National Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement Policy (“Displacement Policy”) through a broad, consultative process that included contributions from displacement-affected communities.⁸ The Displacement Policy is notable for its comprehensive, inter-ministerial approach⁹ to addressing all stages of the response to climate change and disaster-induced displacement,¹⁰ from seeking to prevent the underlying causes of displacement to the final stage of ensuring displaced people and host communities’ long-term recovery needs are met through national development planning.¹¹ Thus, it mainstreams displacement and human mobility considerations into relevant government action at all levels.

The Displacement Policy sets out twelve strategic areas for addressing disaster displacement. Systems-level interventions include issues such as “institutions and governance” and “evidence, information and monitoring”. It also delineates a broad set of sector-specific interventions, including “land, housing, planning and environment,” “agriculture, food security and livelihoods,” and “traditional knowledge, culture and documentation.” Cross-cutting issues underpin these interventions, including: “partnerships, gender responsiveness, social inclusion, community participation, as well as disaster-risk reduction, climate change adaptation and safe, well-managed migration”.¹²

Implementation of the Displacement Policy is led by the Ministry of Climate Change Adaptation in close coordination with the Prime Minister’s Office and the Department of Local Authorities.

3. Why it is a good example to share

The Displacement Policy has raised the profile of displacement in Vanuatu by establishing a framework for a national plan of action on displacement that articulates the importance of coordinated operational and policy frameworks on internal displacement and identifies the potential contributions of different stakeholders. The Prime Minister’s Office has also assumed a stronger role in recovery planning and finding durable solutions, such as during the 2018 volcanic eruption disaster on Ambae island when heavy ash ultimately led to the mandatory evacuation of all 11,000 residents.¹³ In 2020, the Displacement Policy’s recommendations also led to the establishment of a new Cluster to coordinate the response to Category V Tropical Cyclone Harold. The Displacement and Evacuations Centre Management Cluster, led by the National Disaster Management Office and co-led by the IOM, aims to improve coordination amongst agencies assisting displaced people.

While many lessons have been learnt from more recent disasters, they are yet to be formally incorporated into the 2020 action plan given the financial resource constraints that hinder systematic revision and implementation of the Displacement Policy. That said, the Displacement Policy has led to new projects for 2021, such as developing standard operating procedures on planned relocation (Strategic Area 3) and strengthening the use of traditional knowledge in displacement management (Strategic Area 11).

Endnotes

- 1 Since 2012, Vanuatu has ranked first in the annual World Risk Report. Most recently, see 'World Risk Report 2019' (Bündnis Entwicklung HilftandRuhr University Bochum – Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict (IFHV) 2019) World Risk Report 61 <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WorldRiskReport-2019_Online_english.pdf> accessed 20 April 2020.
- 2 Republic of Vanuatu, 'National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement' 11.
- 3 Simone Esler, 'Vanuatu Post Disaster Needs Assessment: Tropical Cyclone Pam' (Government of Vanuatu 2015).
- 4 Vanuatu National Statistics Office, '2016 Post-TC Pam Mini-Census Report' (Government of Vanuatu 2017) Report Vol. 1 <<https://vnso.gov.vu/index.php/component/advlisting/?view=download&fileId=4542>> accessed 21 April 2020.
- 5 'Tropical Cyclone Pam Lessons Learned Workshop Report June 2015' (Pacific Community 2016) 18–21; 25 <https://bsrp.gsd.spc.int/wp-content/uploads/Publications/Vanuatu_Lessons-Learned-FINAL-19.05.2016.pdf> accessed 21 April 2020.
- 6 Government of Vanuatu, 'Vanuatu Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2016-2030' 22 <http://www.preventionweb.net/files/46449_vanuatuccdrpolicy2015.pdf> accessed 15 August 2017
- 7 *ibid* 25.
- 8 Republic of Vanuatu (n 2) 8.
- 9 Implementation of the policy is led by the Ministry of Climate Change Adaptation, Meteorology, Geo-Hazards, Energy, Environment and Disaster Management, with an inter-ministerial committee comprising the Department of Strategic Policy, Planning and Aid Coordination of the Prime Minister's Office; the National Disaster Management Office; the National Advisory Board on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction; and the Department of Local Authorities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Malvatu Mauri. *ibid* 6.
- 10 Notably, the policy uses the term "disaster" to include those caused by natural hazards, as well as other "crises", including land conflicts, evictions, and/or infrastructure and development projects. *ibid* 9.
- 11 *ibid* 7.
- 12 *ibid* 8.
- 13 Vanuatu Red Cross Society, 'Vanuatu: Ambae Volcanic Eruption 2018' (IFRC 2019) Emergency Plan of Action Final Report <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MDRVU006n2.pdf>> accessed 23 June 2020.