

Inter-Agency Contingency Planning Workshop for Humanitarian Assistance in Vanuatu

Brief Concept Note

Background:

Humanitarian assistance in the Pacific has proven complex. The region is characterized by a high degree of disaster risk, the vast ocean mass, small and scattered population numbers on vulnerable small islands and national and local response capacity that is obviously quickly overwhelmed by forces of nature. International humanitarian organizations (UN agencies, NGO's, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, regional and bilateral organizations) are each faced with the challenge to respond from a regional capacity to a localized humanitarian need. In addition, coordination is an additional challenge as these regional responders operate from different locations in the Pacific (e.g. Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa, Auckland, Wellington, Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney, Honolulu, New Caledonia) to support national counterparts in Pacific Island Countries.

The international humanitarian community, through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), in 2005 agreed on a process of Humanitarian Reform seeking to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response by ensuring greater predictability, accountability and partnership. It is an ambitious effort by the international humanitarian community to reach more beneficiaries, with more comprehensive needs-based relief and protection, in a more effective and timely manner. Improved inter-agency coordination and emergency preparedness are an important part of this effort. A triggering event in the Pacific was 2007's Solomon Islands Tsunami, which highlighted the challenges and importance in preparedness to launch an effective, and predictable, humanitarian relief operation in a Pacific Island Country following a significant disaster event.

As a result, in July 2008, with the leadership of UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-Pacific (OCHA), the UN Multi Country Teams based in Fiji and Samoa held a Regional Contingency Planning Workshop for Humanitarian Assistance in the Pacific region. The key outcome of the workshop were establishment of the Pacific Humanitarian Team and a Pacific cluster approach in which key regional humanitarian response partners participate (including UN agencies, NGO and donors). It is expected that this Pacific cluster approach will contribute to improve effectiveness, predictability and timeliness of international assistance in the region.

It was also agreed at the above mentioned workshop that in order for the Pacific Cluster Framework to effectively compliment each Pacific Island Country's national disaster management arrangements and adjust to specific country context, country level contingency planning workshops should be held in the most disaster prone countries.

Workshop Objectives:

The **overall objective** of the proposed Workshop is to bring together key disaster response actors from Government, Red Cross, Donor partners, UN organizations and NGOs to review jointly the existing disaster response mechanism both at national and regional level, test how effectively the regional cluster approach could support the national level disaster response structure through exercise and adjust/review regional cluster structure to the specific context in Vanuatu. It is also expected that this workshop will enhance the linkages and coordination between regional clusters and corresponding governmental ministries/agencies and identify action points for (minimum) levels of preparedness.

The **specific objectives** of the Exercise (Day 2) are:

- a) To demonstrate the ability to set priorities and identify major tasks, functions and operations in response to a disaster,
- b) To examine how some of the key emergency services would function during an emergency,
- c) To test how national and international actors can effectively coordinate in order to provide timely and appropriate response in each sector
- d) To feed back concrete suggestions to the third day de-briefing session in order to agree upon a disaster response framework and minimum preparedness activities in Vanuatu and plan for the next steps.

Exercise Scenario:

Tropical Cyclone affecting SANMA and MALAMPA Provinces

Expected Outcome:

- 1 Status of Readiness: Readiness for response is increased in the event of an actual impact on routine operations.
- 2 Gaps: Procedural and decision-making gaps as well as gaps in response actions are identified.
- 3 Conflicts: Conflicts - if any, within departments and Ministries, amongst key stakeholders along with interpretation of procedures and roles – are revealed.
- 4 Role Clarity: Roles and responsibilities between actors are confirmed.
- 5 Resource Requirements: Resource needs are identified.
- 6 Information management: Information and data needs for decision-making and action are identified
- 7 Emergency Services: Effectiveness of existing emergency services is tested.
- 8 Common understandings: All key stakeholders in disaster response will have common understandings on needs, gaps and steps forward to improve response mechanism.
- 9 Training: Additional training needs are identified.

- 10 Regional cluster approach revision: Inform on potential modifications of and improvements to the regional cluster approach as well as the contingency plan are identified following lessons learned from the Exercise, which could guide regional cluster lead agencies to further organize and plan their next (minimum) preparedness actions.
- 11 National Disaster Management Arrangement: Inform on potential improvement to the national disaster management arrangement following lessons learned from the Exercise, which could guide national agencies to further organize and plan their next (minimum) preparedness actions.

Workshop Time-Frame: Total 3 days:

Day-1: Pre-exercise workshop to ensure that all parties understand and are informed of current disaster trends in Vanuatu, key response actors both at national and regional level, the national disaster response structure as well as the regional cluster approach. Participants will discuss the disaster history of Vanuatu and its implications on humanitarian needs and required responses and subsequently on planning assumptions and the need for coordination and information management.

Day-2: Conduct of Exercise

Day-3: Exercise debrief, lessons learned, next steps, follow up actions