

After the storm, the deluge

by Terence Wood
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In the wake of Cyclone Pam, Vanuatu needs aid; however it does not need more aid organisations. Citing the Vanuatu government national disaster committee deputy chair, Benjamin Shing, Fairfax New Zealand **has reported that** there are now more than 100 NGOs and faith-based organisations working on cyclone reconstruction in Vanuatu (all this for a country with a population of just over 250,000 people). Mr Shing is quoted as stating that many of the organisations are working on their own, rather than trying to coordinate with the stretched government disaster response office. As paraphrased by the news report, Shing stated that this has meant “the government had lost valuable time dealing with the agencies and the initial damage assessment would have been completed earlier if this was not the case”.

This situation is not unusual in the wake of natural disasters and in a sense it is encouraging to see people wanting to help, but a highly fragmented aid response alongside a reluctance to work with the government or established local groups is liable to become a major impediment to reconstruction efforts. And the issue is all the more vexing for being another iteration of one of those endlessly recurring problems of international development.

Pointing this out is not the same as saying we should not be giving aid to Vanuatu — we should. But the country needs aid from governments and NGOs with existing long-term working relationships, not clutter caused by well meaning new arrivals. And there is a clear message here for people who want to help: donate to a major NGO that is established in Vanuatu (or join the **campaign to stop cuts** to the Australian government aid program).

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