

Cyclone Pam

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This cyclone is one of the biggest to have affected the Pacific island region and the biggest ever experienced in Vanuatu. It traversed the entire east coast of the chain with the edge of the eye touching the areas to the east of Port Vila. At its peak, Vanuatu experienced wind speeds of up to 300 km/hour. The damage extends the entire length of the country which means that the disaster response will be extremely challenging in terms of quantum and logistical complexity. In terms of fatalities there is little by way of official information - it would appear that there have been at least eight deaths in Port Vila. There are unconfirmed reports of 40+ deaths in the north of the country. Given the lack of communications capacity owing to severe damage to the relevant infrastructure, it is proving very difficult to get information from anywhere, particularly rural and remote areas. In particular there is as yet nothing from the southern part of the country which is where the system has been active during today.

Port Vila is without power but it seems that the water service has been restored to at least some parts of the town. The government estimates that approximately 80% of buildings in Port Vila have sustained significant damage.

Not only did this weather system affect Vanuatu, whilst forming as a cyclone it dropped a whole lot of rain in Kiribati, Tuvalu and Solomon Islands, particularly affecting the very remote Temotu province whose people are still recovering from the impacts of a tsunami a number of years ago.

The people of Vanuatu have always been and continue to be resilient and resourceful and are already working together to recover and rebuild. Their president has requested that the international community assist them in these efforts. Please support the online appeals being run by the likes of the Red Cross, CARE, Oxfam, and Save the Children. Simply visit their home pages to donate.

Tess Newton Cain is a Research Associate Of the Development Policy Centre, and a frequent contributor to our blog. She lives in Port Vila with her family: their house is damaged, but the family safe. Follow her on Facebook or Twitter (@CainTess) for updates.