

ALERT Volcanic Eruption



actalliance

Bangkok

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SITUATION

During the night of Friday on 22nd September 2017, the province of Penama in Vanuatu, was elevated to an Alert Level 4 'Moderate eruption state' due to elevated activity of Manaro volcano on the island of Ambae. On Thursday 28th September 2017, a State of Emergency was declared for the entire island and a full, compulsory evacuation of 11,000 residents of Ambae island to the nearby islands of Espiritu Santo, Pentecost and Maewo was ordered. The volcano subsided somewhat and residents that chose to return were sent back by 30th October 2017. On 7th December 2017, the Alert Level was downgraded to 2 'Major Unrest', **however, on 18th March 2018, the volcano erupted again and the Alert Level was increased from 2 to 3 'Minor Eruption State' due to emissions of gases, ash and volcanic bombs.** In particular, the impact from the continuous outpouring of ash and gas emissions created hazards including acid rain, flash flooding and landslides; it polluted and destroyed water sources, damaged traditional housing, crops and trees, and impacted human health through direct exposure to acid rain and inhalation of fine ash particles. Wind shifts resulted in almost the entire island being affected, with zones previously marked as 'safe' now experiencing hazards, and a significant proportion of the population on Ambae relocated to evacuation centres. With contaminated water sources, damaged crops and reduced food supplies in local stores, the population became reliant on food and water distributions from the Government. On 13th April 2018, the Government declared a State of Emergency and a mandatory, permanent relocation of the Ambae population to adjacent islands. By September 2018, Ambae had been completely evacuated and were the inhabitants were being hosted in temporary dwellings in and around host communities. The evacuation from Ambae to Espiritu Santo, Pentecost and Maewo will impact approximately 13% of Vanuatu's total population. As of 21 September 2018, Ambae volcano is in the major unrest state. The Volcanic Alert Level is lowered to Level 2. The Danger Zone for life safety is now limited at 2 km radius from the active vent and areas located in the Yellow Zone. Observations in September 2018 confirm that the eruptive activity that occurred from July until August has dropped. There are no explosions and volcanic cloud are white in colour, which means it only comprises of steam. A small scale eruption in Lake Voulihas has ceased¹

NEEDS

Many members from host and relocated communities opposed the mandatory evacuation as the government initially only supported evacuation to Maewo island, not elsewhere - despite all the provincial and educational facilities from Ambae being evacuated to other islands besides Maewo. The lengthy and centralised decision making process left many communities uncertain of their fate and feeling voiceless and powerless.

The displaced population have now experienced significant disruption since 2017 with two forced evacuations within seven months, resulting in catastrophic loss of livelihoods, cash and capital. Social structures, culture and education have also been disrupted; and issues around ongoing food security, protection and conflict are being identified. Humanitarian needs include: sufficient food, livelihood activities, and protection services.

The situation is further compounded for affected people with special needs including people living with disabilities who require additional support to access assistance. Women and children are known to be particularly vulnerable during times of crisis and relocation/repatriation. Students are currently facing disruption to studies which will continue to be unresolved until new permanent schooling is established.

¹ Government of Vanuatu

STAKEHOLDERS

The following national and international entities are present and doing their best to respond to the crisis:

- Government of Vanuatu via national and provincial disaster management structures.
- Vanuatu Humanitarian Team agencies
- Vanuatu Red Cross, French Red Cross, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
- Anglican Church of Melanesia, ADRA Vanuatu, Vanuatu Christian Council, Vanuatu Church of Christ
- Maewo and Espirito Santo Island Communities
- Communities on the islands of Ambae, Maewo and Espirito Santo.

The emergency response is currently being coordinated by the National Disaster Management Office with provincial delegations.

ACT Alliance

ACT Alliance has been working in Vanuatu on Ambae since October 2017, assisting local partners in responding to the initial September/October 2017 evacuation and repatriation of people affected by the volcanic eruption, particularly in the areas of gender and child protection as well as peacebuilding and community planning by community and faith leaders. ACT Alliance partners are working in areas affected by the volcanic eruption and are assessing the impact of the disaster to better understand the needs and vulnerabilities. In collaboration with relevant stakeholders, the ACT Pacific Sub- regional forum (PANZ) has identified a gap in food security, gender and protection responses and has resolved that if funded, it will have the capacity to properly bridge the identified gap. The ACT Forum is planning on submitting a funding proposal to provide adaptive food security, GBV, peacebuilding and CS training, and assistance to ensure that the volcanic eruption affected persons' basic needs are met with regards to Food Security, Gender and Protection, Child Safeguarding. ACT Alliance is ready to respond, providing G&P, peacebuilding and adaptive agricultural training and garden kits (seeds + tools) to over 540 affected households in the coming months. Furthermore, ACT Alliance will engage in advocacy on the national and international level to ensure that the voices of those affected by the volcanic eruption are amplified.

Any funding indication or pledge should be communicated to the Head of Finance and Administration, Line Hempel (Line.Hempel@actalliance.org)

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