

VANUATU: CYCLONE

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The Disaster

On 15 January 1999 a tropical depression alert was issued to all communities in the Northern Ports of the Vanuatu archipelago. By 18 January, the tropical depression had been upgraded to a tropical cyclone and named "Dani". By 19 January, Dani had started to affect Torres Islands and the Banks Group in the northernmost part of Vanuatu. When the winds and rain started, they lasted close to 24 hours making this one of the lengthiest cyclones experienced in Vanuatu. A record rainfall of over 500 ml in a 24 hour period caused widespread flooding and structural damage.

Of the total population of 165,000 in Vanuatu, 100,000 are estimated to be affected. Between 20% to 40% of houses were damaged, depending on the islands. On the island of Efate where the capital, Port Villa, is located, 3 out of 8 bridges sustained major damage. Every bridge on the island of Malkeula was damaged or washed away. The greatest dangers are health related. There is a serious risk of contamination of water supplies, plus fears of malaria, dengue fever and typhoid.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Vanuatu Red Cross is collaborating very closely with National Disaster Management Office of the Vanuatu Government. The government has conducted an aerial survey on Efate, distributed medical supplies to aid posts, dispensaries and medical centres and provided 150 plastic water containers. It is also mobilising health officers and raising public awareness about health issues through the media.

As a start, the Vanuatu Red Cross has supplied 30 water containers in response to a request from the government and is prepared to supply tarpaulins, mosquito netting and more water containers.

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