

Vanuatu Country Statement – Pacific Regional Consultation on Internal Displacement

Questions to address in country statements:

1. What are the best practices (in the form of mechanisms, structures etc.) in the Pacific region to avert, address and resolve internal displacement?
2. What support do governments in the region need to address internal displacement and what would this support look like?

Introduction:

- Good evening to all esteemed guests, and thank you for the invitation to participate in this panel. As introduced, my name is Leith Veremaito and I am the Director of the Department of Local Authorities in the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the Government of Vanuatu.

Context:

- I'll first briefly explain the context of internal displacement issues in Vanuatu. Like many others in the Pacific, Vanuatu experiences frequent disasters – cyclones, flood, storms, drought and volcanic eruptions, and slow-onset processes such as sea-level rise. The impacts of natural hazards can also be exacerbated by human factors, through land conflicts and urbanization. Vanuatu's geography of 83 inhabited islands spread across 650 kilometres presents a particular challenge in relation to disaster response and addressing displacement issues.
- Our most recent national disaster was the Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Harold which made landfall on 6 April 2020, and impacted three of our northern provinces. One month after the cyclone it was estimated that over 9,000 people were still displaced across 190 evacuation centres. Two months post-cyclone 6,000 were still displaced with unmet needs.
- The other recent event leading to significant internal displacement was the Ambae volcanic eruption in 2018, which displaced over 11,000 people from a single island.
- In light of these sudden-onset events, I'd now like to present specific lessons learned, best practices and support required in relation to internal displacement.

Lessons learned:

- Based on responding to these internal displacement issues, Vanuatu has learned some important lessons in this area, being that:
 1. **Displacement tracking needs to be invested in and scaled up** – Vanuatu was one of the first countries in the region to undertake displacement tracking after a disaster. Displacement tracking after Ambae and TC Harold provided critical accurate information that had been missing from the response in the early days, including demographics of those displaced, arising gender and child protection issues, and ongoing distribution needs. This process showed us what might be possible next time – especially if we are able to invest in the structures that support data collection.
 2. **Informed local actors are extremely important** – Community Disaster and Climate Change Committees (or CDCCCs) which are in the process of being set up throughout

Vanuatu – are critical to reporting on internal displacement. These community focal points need to be strengthened and supported to fully decentralise the information management network required in widespread sudden onset events, particularly in remote parts of the country.

3. **Improvements and consensus on basic information and mapping is required** – in Vanuatu for example, there is no one single, consolidated list of consistent village names and locations – this missing information makes it difficult to report quickly on displacement at the national and regional level and to therefore address needs or learn from scenarios.

Best practices:

- Best practices with regard to internal displacement that Vanuatu would like to share include:
 1. **Development of the *National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement*** in 2018 was an important step forward for the Government of Vanuatu, to specifically address internal displacement of varying kinds. It has helped to raise awareness of the significance of displacement-related challenges in the country and to show the cross-sectoral nature required to find solutions to displacement.
 2. **Establishment of the Displacement and Evacuation Centre Management Cluster** – following TC Harold in 2020 the cluster was established to reflect the magnitude of needs of displaced persons residing in communal settings. The Cluster is an important platform to take forward the priorities of our new policy.

Support required:

- Going forward, support that could be provided to assist Vanuatu to address internal displacement issues include the following:
 1. **Harmonisation of data collection methodologies and reporting** at a regional level across the Pacific - this would help Pacific Governments and communities to shine a light on the impacts of displacement and its flow-on impacts to society and the economy.
 2. **Funding support to carry out the activities of the Displacement Policy**
 3. **Developing a framework** around the identification and management of evacuation centres, to assist communities in understanding how to best manage such facilities for their benefit.
 4. **Raising the profile of internal displacement regionally** as a key issue to provide political and administrative impetus in-country for increased focus on this issue.

These are a selection of the key issues Vanuatu is currently facing in relation to internal displacement. Thank you very much for your time this evening, and I look forward to further collaboration on this important issue.