

VANUATU - CYCLONE PAM

Introduction

On Friday 13 March 2015, Tropical Cyclone Pam struck the small and highly vulnerable south Pacific archipelago of Vanuatu. Pam was a full-strength category 5 storm, with sustained wind speeds of up to 155mph and winds peaking at 168mph. It was the first category 5 storm to reach landfall since Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines in November 2013.

Vanuatu fact file¹

Population – 246,000 (2011)

Capital City – Port Vila (population, 44,040 – 2009)

Geography – an archipelago of 83 islands covering 4,707 sq miles in the south Pacific Ocean

GDP/capita - \$3,130 (2013)

Human Development Index – 0.616, 131st out of 187 countries (2014)

History – became independent from Britain and France in 1980

Exports - copra, timber, beef, cocoa



Vanuatu's capital city of Port Vila waits as Cyclone Pam approaches. Much of Vanuatu is low-lying and vulnerable to natural disasters. Photo: Ben Bohane/Oxfam

¹ <http://bbc.in/19vNSQK>

The impact of Cyclone Pam has been particularly severe. On Efate island, where the capital city of Port Vila is located, 90% of the buildings have been either damaged or destroyed. This includes schools, the hospital and the morgue. At the time of publication, there have only been 11 confirmed fatalities thanks to the provision of shelters and good early warning.² However, it is likely that more than 100,000 of Vanuatu's population have been made homeless. This is almost 50% of the population.³

Vanuatu is highly vulnerable to natural disasters and its government takes disaster risk management seriously. However, as was the case with Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, it is extremely difficult to provide adequate protection against such a severe storm. Indeed in 2015 the Natural Hazards Risk Atlas identified Vanuatu's capital city Port Vila as being the most exposed city to natural disasters in the world. The study compared the combined risk posed to 1,300 cities by cyclones, floods, tsunamis, earthquakes, landslides and fires. Of the nine next most exposed cities, eight are in the Philippines and one is in Taiwan.⁴ Vanuatu's complex vulnerability is highlighted by a Guardian report about the island of Ambrym suffering an earthquake, a volcanic eruption and Cyclone Pam, all within the space of two weeks⁵



Homes destroyed by Cyclone Pam. Photo: Isso Nihmei/350.org

Speaking at a UN Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction he was attending in Japan, the President of Vanuatu, Baldwin Lonsdale, spoke of a 'calamity' and directly linked the impact of Cyclone Pam to climate change. "It's a setback for the government and for the people of Vanuatu... After all the development that has taken place, all this development has been wiped out... We see the level of sea rise ... The cyclone seasons, the warm, the rain, all this

² <http://bit.ly/1bfcePd>

³ Oxfam Australia press release, 16.03.2015; Oxfam Emergency Update, 16.03.2015

⁴ <http://ab.co/1KYMxJ9>

⁵ <http://bit.ly/1FurHWP>

is affected. This year we have more than in any year ... Yes, climate change is contributing to this.”⁶

The best available climate science indicates that climate change is increasing the destructive power of storms. This is because warmer oceans and warmer air 'super charge' the storms - warmer air can hold more water, which acts as ammunition for the storm. Climate change also leads to rising sea levels that make island nations such as Vanuatu much more vulnerable to natural disasters, including making storm surges and flooding much more wide spread when there are cyclones. The least developed countries such as Vanuatu – who have contributed almost nothing to the problem of climate change – are suffering the most from the carbon emissions of wealthier countries. It is not yet possible to say whether climate change made Cyclone Pam in particular worse, but it is thought to be one of the most powerful cyclones ever to make landfall in the Pacific.

At the time of writing Oxfam are conducting initial assessments in Port Vila and the first emergency aid shipments have arrived in the country. There is an immediate risk of water borne diseases quickly spreading if the need for clean water, temporary toilets, water purification tablets and hygiene kits is not addressed rapidly. Food security is another main concern. The cyclone has brought down fruit and coconut trees, damaged seeds and livestock and destroyed vegetables, fishing boats and nets. Isolated communities face a struggle to feed themselves both now and in the longer term.



On board one of the first aid flights to Vanuatu. Photo: Angus Hohenboken/Oxfam Australia

⁶ <http://bit.ly/1MEtFpV>

About this resource

This resource is designed to be delivered as an assembly and consists of a PowerPoint presentation and an accompanying script. The script can be accessed on the 'notes' section of the PowerPoint. The assembly has been written for KS3 learners but it may be adapted as required for older or younger pupils.

The resource is divided into five sections:

Section 1: Slides 1 – 5. What is a disaster?

Section 2: Slides 6 – 12. Cyclone Pam.

Section 3: Slides 13 – 20. Why are some disasters worse than others?

Section 4: Slides 21 – 26. Responding to disasters.

Section 5: Slides 28 – 29. Get involved.

Sections 1, 2 and 5 provide an **assembly** about the impact of Cyclone Pam on Vanuatu and how young people in the UK may respond to this event. The resource suggests that organising a fundraising event and/or participating in the [Close-up on Climate](#) schools campaign will demonstrate solidarity and help create a fairer and more just world for everyone.

Sections 3 and 4 provide greater detail about why some disasters have a worse human impact than others and how the international community responds to disasters. They provide the basis for a classroom lesson.

After downloading the resource you may like to delete the sections you do not require.

Critical thinking

These questions are suggested to promote critical thinking and discussion.

Section 1. What is a disaster?

- To what extent do you think it is accurate to describe extreme weather events in the UK as 'disasters'?

Section 2. Cyclone Pam

- Which impacts of Cyclone Pam were unique to Vanuatu, with its distinctive geography? Which impacts would have been similar in any country struck by a storm of Cyclone Pam's strength?

Section 3. What makes some disasters worse than others?

- Which of these factors do you think were most important in influencing the impact of Cyclone Pam on Vanuatu? Why do you think this?

Section 4. Responding to disasters

- To what extent do you agree with the sequencing of the responses to a disaster? Would you change the order of the responses? Are there responses that you think are important that have been left out?

Section 5. Get involved

- Are fundraising and campaigning the best ways young people can get involved? Are there other ways for young people to demonstrate their support and solidarity with the people of Vanuatu?

Other resources

Dealing with Disasters online pack

The Dealing with Disasters online pack includes classroom activities about why disasters happen and what we can do to help. It is suitable for ages 11-14 and can be downloaded here: <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/dealing-with-disasters>

Close-up on Climate

Close-up on Climate is an exciting film challenge for young people. Make a short film about climate change, get it uploaded on the Close-up website, show the film to your MP, MSP or AM and stand by for an exciting event for young people in the autumn:

<http://fortheLoveof.org.uk/closeup/>

Oxfam's Visitor Centre – the Logistics Warehouse

A visit to Oxfam's Logistics Warehouse in Bicester brings Oxfam's emergency work to life. The Visitors Centre displays the equipment Oxfam sends to the scenes of humanitarian emergencies. To find out more and book a free visit for your school or youth group email stockteam@oxfam.org.uk



The Visitor Centre at Oxfam's Logistics Warehouse
Photo Amy Christian/Oxfam

Educational Support for Fundraising

Active global citizenship is about young people doing something about the issues they care about. Raising money can be a meaningful and important form of action. The following downloads should help you ensure your pupils reap the most benefits and learn new skills from their fundraising.

<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/teacher-support/educational-support-for-fundraising>

Oxfam Youth Ambassadors for young people aged 11-18 in England

<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/global-citizenship/youth-ambassadors>

Curriculum making

The limited scope of this resource prevents a full exploration of a complex disaster, for example by examining its impact on women and girls or how it affects law and order. Instead, it focuses on a small number of key themes. For a fuller exploration of the theme, see Dealing with Disasters (above). The following links provide background reading and further ideas for curriculum making.

- Oxfam International Vanuatu page: <http://bit.ly/1FAy9vl>
- BBC Vanuatu country profile: <http://bbc.in/19vNSQK>
- Guardian Vanuatu page: <http://bit.ly/1beLkHo>
- ABC News Australia – aerial photographs of Vanuatu before and after Cyclone Pam: <http://ab.co/1ADneMf>

Your resources

Please share any new resources you develop by emailing education@oxfam.org.uk