



# GIEWS Update

## The Republic of Vanuatu

### Tropical Cyclone Harold caused widespread damage to the agriculture sector

#### Highlights:

- The passing of Cyclone Harold on 6 April 2020 caused extensive damage to the agriculture sector, including losses of main staples and export crops.
- About half of the total population is estimated to be in need of assistance due to the impact of the cyclone.
- International food and agriculture assistance is urgently needed to avoid the deterioration of the local food security situation.
- COVID-19 prevention measures may hamper the timely delivery of humanitarian aid. Necessary measures need to be taken to avoid this.
- FAO is working with the Vanuatu authorities to restore agricultural production and rebuild livelihoods.

Tropical Cyclone Harold hit Vanuatu on 6 April 2020, affecting the livelihoods of a large proportion of the population. With wind speeds reaching 250 km/hour, it was the second category-5 storm to strike the country in the last five years, after Cyclone Pam in 2015 displacing about 65 000 people and resulting in USD 600 million in economic losses, the equivalent of about 65 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product. According to latest reports, about 160 000 people, more than half of the total population, is in need of assistance. The most affected population is located in the northern provinces of Sanma, Malampa and Penama (in particular the islands of Espiritu Santo, Maewo, Pentecost and Ambae), where the strong winds and heavy rains have caused extensive damage to standing and harvested

crops. Initial assessments show that, in the province of Sanma, about 80 to 90 percent of the population is displaced and 60 percent of the schools and almost 70 percent of the health centres are damaged.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the cyclone severely damaged about 70 percent of the buildings in Luganville, the second-largest city in the country.

According to early estimates by FAO and based on remote sensing data, almost 70 percent of the urban areas, about 90 percent of areas covered with trees or sparse vegetation, nearly all grasslands and 60 percent of croplands have been severely damaged by the cyclone. Based on the Rapid Technical Assessment report of the Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), food crops such as banana trees and

<sup>1</sup> Vanuatu National Health Situation Report on Tropical Cyclone Harold #4 - 27 April 2020, Ministry of Health, Vanuatu.

vegetables as well as export crops, including the main agricultural commodity, coconut, have been uprooted and snapped at the trunk by the strong winds. At household level, severe losses of stored crops and seeds as well as small livestock, such as poultry, are reported.

### **COVID-19 prevention measures may hamper the humanitarian response to the cyclone**

On 26 March 2020, the President of Vanuatu declared a two-week State of Emergency, with the aim to implement prevention measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. After Cyclone Harold struck the country on 6 April 2020, the President appealed for international assistance and extended the State of Emergency until 10 May 2020. To facilitate the movement of aid supplies, the Government has eased in-country travel limitations and lifted restrictions on domestic air and sea operations. However, epidemic-related restrictions are still in place and may hamper the access of humanitarian personnel from abroad as well as the import of goods, which are subject to a seven-day quarantine. As of 4 May 2020, no confirmed cases of COVID-19 were reported in the country.<sup>2</sup>

### **Food security of rural communities at risk**

The country, composed of 83 small islands, is vulnerable to a wide range of natural hazards (cyclones, earthquakes, floods, tsunamis and

volcanoes) with the potential to impact the food security of rural populations. Imported rice and wheat are the main staples for urban households, while root crops, coconut and bananas, grown throughout the year, are the most consumed foods in rural areas. According to FAOSTAT, in 2018 (most recent data available) about 75 percent of the population was living in rural areas and it was mostly engaged in subsistence agriculture and production of beef, pork, poultry and ovine meat. Livestock breeding for domestic consumption makes a significant contribution to the rural households' food security and to the national economy, with beef exported mainly to Japan and other Pacific Island countries.

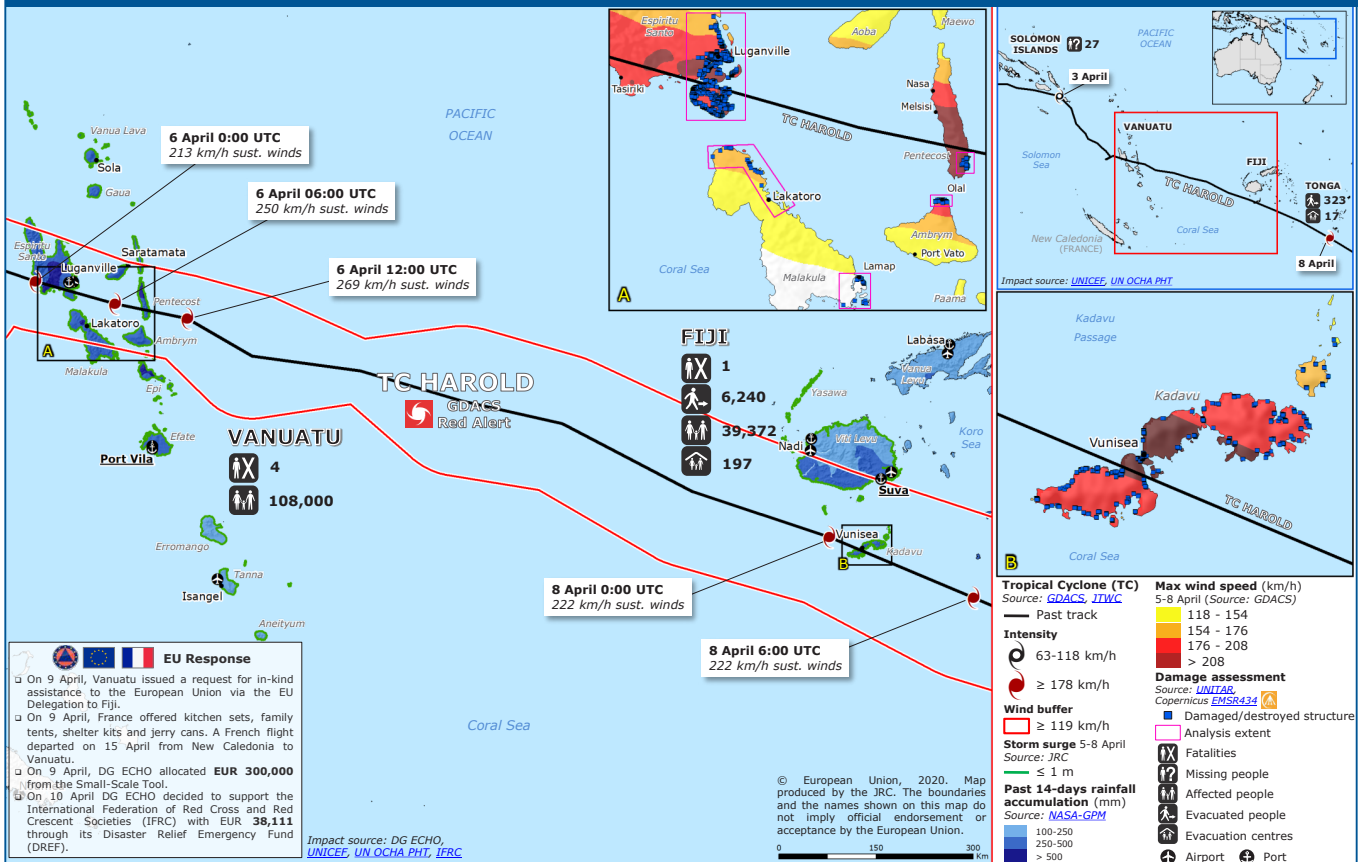
International food aid and agricultural assistance, in the form of vegetable seeds, planting material and farming equipment, are urgently needed to facilitate crop replanting and to prevent the deterioration of the food security situation. Several farmers lost their food stocks and have to rely on markets or food aid, as they risk remaining without own-produced food until at least mid-July, when replanted crops will be ready to be harvested. It is, therefore, crucial that replanting operations start immediately. FAO is working with the Vanuatu Food Security and Agriculture Cluster and the NDMO, which is leading an integrated response by the Government and the international community to restore agricultural production and rebuild people's livelihoods.

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<sup>2</sup> Vanuatu Ministry of Health – [COVID-19 Updates](#).

# Vanuatu and Fiji - Tropical Cyclone Harold

(DG ECHO Daily Map, 15 April 2020)



Source: European Commission (EC)/Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC).

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