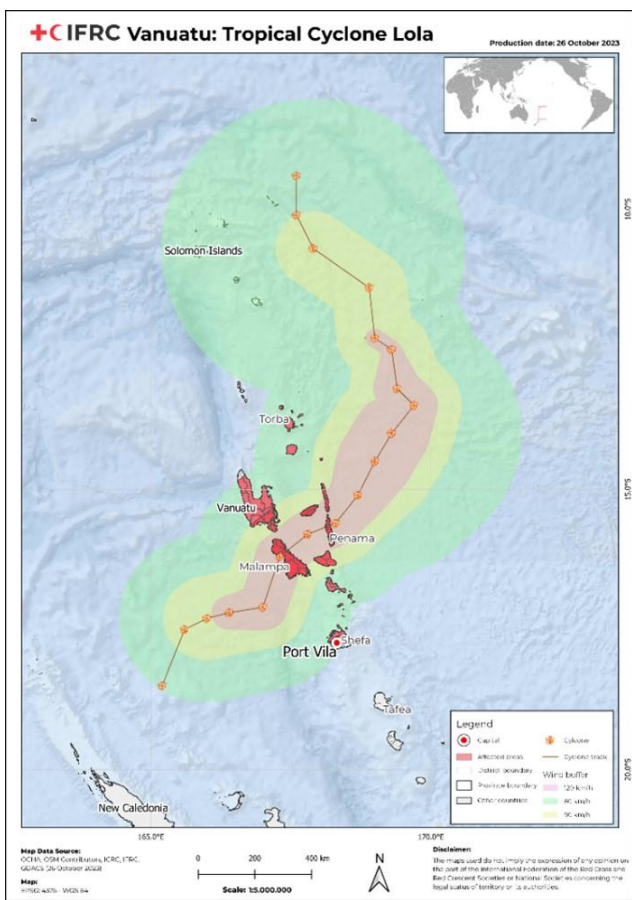




*Image from Central Pentecost on the destruction brought by Tropical Cyclone Lola (Photo: IFRC)*

Appeal No: <b>MDRVU010</b>	IFRC Secretariat Funding requirements: <b>CHF 2.5 million</b> Federation-wide Funding requirements: <b>TBD</b>	
Glide No: <a href="#">TC-2023-000207-VUT</a>	People affected: <b>150,000</b>	People to be assisted: <b>30,000 people</b>
DREF allocation: <b>CHF 750,000</b>	Appeal launched: <b>29/10/2023</b>	Appeal ends: <b>31/12/2024</b>

# SITUATION OVERVIEW



Tropical Cyclone (TC) Lola formed over the South Pacific Ocean on 21 October 2023 and started moving towards Vanuatu. On 24 October, the Vanuatu Meteorology Department upgraded the cyclone to category 5. The winds brought by Lola were estimated up to 230 kph at the centre of the storm, with "destructive hurricane force" hitting multiple provinces in the country's north and central provinces, specifically Torba, Sanma, Penama, Malampa, and Shefa.

The cyclone made landfall on the eastern shores of Maewo and Pentecost islands on the night of 25 October as a Category 4 storm with 205 kph winds. Heavy rainfalls and flash flooding were experienced in low-lying areas and near riverbanks, causing coastal flooding. It is estimated that approximately 200,000 people

were exposed to the effect of the cyclone, with an estimate of **150,000 people (30,000 households)** being more directly affected, which is close to half of the country's population. These estimates follow the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) damage assessment criteria.

The Government of Vanuatu declared a **State of Emergency** as of midday 27 October for Torba, Penama, Malamapa, Shefa and Sanma, lasting for the next six months. This time period also covers the upcoming cyclone season, which, according to the Fiji Meteorological Service, has an elevated risk of tropical cyclone activities this season across the region<sup>1</sup>.

Initial assessments indicate widespread damage primarily in Pentecost, Maewo, Ambrym and Malekula islands, impacted when TC Lola was Category 4 level. This corresponds with secondary data sources and reports from the Vanuatu Red Cross Society (VRCS) branch volunteers and people within the affected areas. Currently, primary data sources are being collected and collated from initial rapid assessment teams travelling to impacted areas, and aerial photographs will provide additional information as they are released by the government. Preliminary data on wind speed and rainfall suggest that 75 per cent of housing across Pentecost and Maewo islands have been damaged. Reports of landslides, fallen trees, destroyed homes, damaged schools and health facilities have also been shared, indicating that access to affected populations will be a significant challenge.

VRCS early anecdotal evidence indicates that the damage can be clearly seen where TC Lola made landfall as a Category 5 cyclone in Northern Pentecost, the most densely populated part of the island. Further south of

<sup>1</sup> Fiji Meteorological Service TC Area of Responsibility Forecast Update, September 2023

the island, where it downgraded to a Category 4, there is evidence of damage to structures, vegetation, and coastal areas. Reports from NDMO on 28 October have highlighted that Malekula and Ambrym are also two areas in dire need, particularly of shelter assistance.

NDMO further states that due to the urgency of the situation and the critical needs in these areas, support from VRCS is invaluable. Communities are still recovering, particularly from two Category 4 cyclones earlier this year, and have limited capacity to respond. If damage to gardens, fruits trees and vegetation is as predicted, food security will become an issue. Assessments are being made based on the best information available and are being triangulated, such as reports of total damage to EU quality-built facilities<sup>2</sup> constructed after TC Harold in 2020.

The situation in Vanuatu therefore is characterized by ongoing and pre-existing recovery needs, access challenges due to the remoteness of islands, and overall hazard vulnerabilities faced by the country. TC Lola was one of only seven 'out of season' tropical cyclones to have occurred since 1970, heightening concerns about a strong cyclone season and the critical need for the VRCS to be prepared, given that this is the fourth Category 4 or above cyclone to impact Vanuatu in three years (TC Harold in 2020, TC Kevin and TC Judy in 2023, and TC Lola in 2023).

## TARGETING

The targeting strategy will take Vanuatu's particular situation into account. Information triangulation will continue to be carried out to verify the information, particularly using existing government and UN coordination mechanisms, as well as ongoing rapid and future technical assessments.

The estimated total population in the areas affected is 254,307, 150,000 people are estimated to be affected. VRCS is planning to assist 6,000 households (30,000 people<sup>3</sup>), covering all affected provinces, while prioritizing Penama and Malampa. The combined population of Penama and Malampa provinces is 78,104, 50 per cent of whom are estimated to be directly affected according to NDMO's

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<sup>2</sup> Buildings or infrastructure projects that were built to a certain quality standard with the support or funding from the European Union (EU) after the occurrence of TC Harold in 2020

The current global climate models suggest that this cyclone season in the Pacific is likely to be driven by a strong El Niño event. With El Niño conditions now underway, Pacific Island countries, including Vanuatu, are likely to experience dry to extremely dry conditions, in addition to the increased occurrence of cyclonic activity. Two out of the last three El Niño's have resulted in official droughts being declared in the country.

An analysis by the Fiji Meteorological Society concluded that eight to 14 tropical cyclones are likely to occur in the Regional Specialized Meteorological Centre Nadi Tropical Cyclone Centre (RSMC Nadi - TCC) Area of Responsibility (AoR), which includes Vanuatu, during the 2023-24 tropical cyclone season. Out of the predicted total number of tropical cyclones, five to seven are expected to become severe tropical cyclones, that is, Category 3 to 5 intensity. The new predictions for this season are well above previously recorded averages.

The Government of Vanuatu has already requested international assistance and is discussing emergency operation planning, with VRCS directly involved and supported by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). VRCS is working together with the authorities to prepare for post-landfall assessments and response coordination.

<sup>3</sup> An average of 5 persons per household

standard assessment criteria.

Disasters pose particular risks for women, girls, persons with disabilities and members of LGBTQIO<sup>4</sup> community as well increasing their vulnerability and for women, and for women and girls, exposure to gender-based violence. Vanuatu has one of the highest rates of violence against women and girls globally<sup>5</sup> studies have shown that 60 per cent of Vanuatu women aged 15 to 49 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. Thus, VRCS will focus on the most vulnerable populations in coordination with partners and the government. VRCS is very experienced in using local referral pathways as required for those experiencing or at risk of experiencing violence or those who are experiencing marginalization.

## PLANNED OPERATIONS

Through this Emergency Appeal, the IFRC aims to support the VRCS in the response to TC Lola, and will take the wider country context into account, especially considering the existing underlying vulnerabilities from Category 4 and above cyclone impacts in the past four years, COVID-19 lasting impacts, the current El Nino, as well as the predicted heightened cyclone season. The IFRC response will be to contribute to Relief, Early Recovery, Recovery, and ongoing Preparedness and resilience building and will focus on the following areas:

### **Integrated assistance (Shelter, Livelihoods and Multi-purpose Cash)**

Shelter is one of the priority needs already identified by the NDMO, and considering the prevalence of using traditional natural materials, with many of them lacking bracing, footings and strapping to strengthen the houses, it can be anticipated that shelter damages will be enormous. A typical traditional household in Vanuatu dwelling usually encompasses different buildings, including at least one for sleeping and a separate one for the kitchen, which is at the centre of Ni-Van culture<sup>6</sup>. When addressing the emergency shelter needs of a household, it's therefore important to consider not only the sleeping place, but also the kitchen area, which is crucial as it often serves as the social space for women. The definition of a household in Vanuatu does not refer to one nuclear family living under one roof. A household in Vanuatu generally refers to an extended family, consisting of a number of family members (parents and children) and relatives, such as grandparents, aunts or uncles living in a number of buildings in a communal setting.



The strategy will therefore support a self-recovery process and community resilience of the affected population, ensuring that the most at-risk people affected by the cyclone have access to safe, adequate and dignified emergency shelter and essential household items. This includes people whose houses and/or household items have been partially damaged or destroyed by TC Lola, as well as host families. The use of traditional materials and 'Building Back Better approach' will be promoted throughout the response by providing appropriate technical guidance and awareness messages to all the target families from the start of the operation. This includes, but is not limited to, the distribution of contextualized Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials and practical trainings, both among VRCS staff and at the community level.

<sup>4</sup> LGBTQIO: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Other

<sup>5</sup> UN-Women, 2020, 'Spotlight Initiative launches in Vanuatu', <https://pacific.un.org/en/107647-spotlight-initiative-launches>.

<sup>6</sup> Ni-Van culture refers to the culture of the indigenous people of Vanuatu, who are collectively known as Ni-Vanuatu



It is anticipated that livelihoods in the most affected areas will have been significantly impacted. A large number of households' short-term economic and social vulnerability will be increased, and their ability to cope with future shocks may also be eroded. A household and community-centred livelihoods programme can support community strength and resilience, food security, and help ensure access to health and education. After assessment and analysis, a relevant livelihoods programme will be designed and implemented, aiming to result in sustainable livelihoods.

Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) will be considered as a delivery modality to address the various needs of the affected people. Multipurpose cash, which should enable affected people to get their immediate needs for food and other basic needs, will be assessed to identify where it can be best and safely implemented. This is to reduce negative coping strategies, where affected people sell their assets (e.g. land and livelihood assets) and reduce their expenses on diets, family education, and personal hygiene, as well as to boost the local economy while maintaining beneficiaries' dignity.

CVA could also adopt the Cash Plus (Cash+)<sup>7</sup> strategy, if after assessment, it may apply in Vanuatu. This strategy combines household cash transfers with complementary, context-relevant interventions to address multiple issues related to Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) and other challenges. This approach can generate more powerful impacts in both development and humanitarian contexts.



### **Health & Care including Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) (Mental Health and psychosocial support / Community Health)**

The key objective is to reduce and prevent further harm or injury and support the ongoing health and wellbeing of affected communities.

The cyclone has impacted the health of the affected communities, reducing access to healthcare due to damaged infrastructure, limiting access to safe water and food due to contaminated water supplies and destroyed crops, an increasing the likelihood of disease outbreaks. Those with chronic diseases may see their condition worsen due to a lack of access to medicines and/or necessary care. Considering that this is the third cyclone to impact Vanuatu this year, many people may be feeling distressed and acopic/overwhelmed. It is expected that the impact on the mental health and wellbeing of the population is significant.



VRCS has a good community reach, with volunteers trained in first aid, psychological first aid, health and hygiene promotion, disease outbreak prevention and response. VRCS volunteers will support affected communities with health promotion messaging and education, with the aim to promote physical and mental health and prevent outbreaks of disease. They will distribute vital household items to support the health of those affected, including hygiene kits to support good hygiene practices, jerry cans for collection of water and safe storage, and mosquito nets for the prevention of vector borne diseases. Water and sanitation hardware repair or replacement will ensure households and communities have access to safe water and sanitation facilities ongoing.

Ongoing Health and WASH programme strengthening is required at VRCS to support the overall population health and well-being and for improved resilience to further disasters.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.calpnetwork.org/resources/glossary-of-terms/?letter=C>

While some work has begun after the twin cyclones earlier this year to improve National Society capacity, further efforts are required, along with extending reach to all branches.

Further work to enhance health and WASH programming will include the prioritization and progression of community-based health and first aid, psychological first aid and the blood donation programme. Work to support sustainable and durable community safe water and sanitation options is needed. The National Society requires further training and resources to respond to WASH needs in emergencies.

Vanuatu is already facing a double burden of malnutrition – there is currently the presence of under nutrition and people who are overweight and obese. Additionally, there is evidence of the increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Current food insecurity will exacerbate issues of malnutrition and chronic disease in affected communities. Livelihoods programmes that will be considered as part of the recovery effort can contribute to addressing nutritional needs and food security.

### Protection and Prevention

(PGI, Community Engagement and Accountability, Migration, Environmental Sustainability, Risk Reduction, Climate adaptation and recovery, Education)

VRCS will be supported to ensure the integration of IFRC minimum standard commitments to gender and diversity in emergencies within their response and the Movement-wide commitments and minimum actions. VRCS will aim to collect Sex, Age and Disability Disaggregated Data to identify key indicators for emergency assistance and ensure gender and diversity amongst its teams. Throughout the response, VRCS staff and volunteers will be supported with information and training on ethical and compliance behaviours, as highlighted in the VRCS PGI Policy, Child Protection Policy, Code of Conduct and the Movement commitments to Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. These initiatives will be reinforced by VRCS PGI Officers.



Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) will support the Protection and Prevention initiatives through transparent engagement with communities, information dissemination on programming and RCRC movement's values, communities' rights, and feedback mechanism for community to channel, including responses to community raised concerns and questions for all sectors and interventions with this response.

Furthermore, VRCS will use two main approaches throughout the response. The first is the 'Survivor Centered Approach', which places survivors of exploitation, violence or abuse at the center and ensuring a holistic and proper protection and care. The second is the "Do No Harm" approach to ensure that all interventions and assistance throughout the operations DO NOT cause further intentional or unintentional direct/indirect harm to affected communities. PGI trainings and referral pathways to essential Sexual & Gender Based Violence service providers will be available for VRCS staff and volunteers to ensure that information is available to all affected communities.

## Enabling approaches

The sectors outlined above will be supported and enhanced by the following enabling approaches:

### Coordination and Partnerships



VRCS will coordinate with relevant government bodies to ensure sustainability, reliability, and compliance including the Ministry of Transportation and Logistics; Ministry of Water; Ministry of Public Utilities; Ministry of Health; Department of Women's Affairs and others.

CVA programming will continue to be coordinated with government relevant bodies, Financial Institutions, and Telecom/Communications as well as Pacific and in-country CVA working groups to introduce, develop and strengthen CVA framework for future disaster response and social protection.

### Shelter Cluster Coordination



The humanitarian response in Vanuatu is strongly led by the Government, where the national Shelter Cluster is led by the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO). VRCS is recognized as co-lead of the Shelter Cluster, as referred in the National Cyclone Response Plan.

VRCS, with the support from IFRC, works closely and coordinates with NDMO during preparedness and response. IFRC will support VRCS for this response in-country and remotely, and additional coordination team members may be recruited to support coordination/information management/technical areas according to the needs of the response and request from Government. The main coordination structures are currently in Port Vila (Shefa Province), although provincial sub-hubs for coordination purposes will be considered if necessary.

### IFRC Secretariat Services



IFRC and VRCS will work together to coordinate international and regional support for operations and an enhanced regional response capacity. IFRC will ensure that available personnel are in place to provide efficient and effective appeal and pledge management (Operations Manager) as required and in collaboration with the National Society.

### National Society Strengthening




Logistics management capacity, HQ and Branch level strengthening, enhancement of governance, Volunteering and Youth management, Human Resources, Resource Mobilization and financial sustainability and procurement will be given focus. Cash and Voucher Preparedness initiatives will, where there is ability to implement, contribute to the increase of overall capacity of VRCS to delivery appropriate, scalable, accountable and timely assistance for people in need. Furthermore, Preparedness for Effective Response components to enhance the National Society capacities for the current El Nino phenomenon will be used. In addition, resilience building of the National Society and communities will form a key component of National Society Development (NSD) to ensure the National Society is best positioned to 'prepare to respond', respond and recover with efficiency and dignity.

The planned response reflects the current situation and is based on the information available at the time of this Emergency Appeal launch. Details of the operation will be updated through the Operational Strategy to be released in the upcoming days. The Operational Strategy will also provide further details on the Federation-Wide approach, which includes response activities of all contributing Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies, and the Federation-wide funding requirement.

## RED CROSS RED CRESCENT FOOTPRINT IN COUNTRY

### Vanuatu Red Cross Society



Core areas of operation	
 <p><i>Shelter Cluster Co-Lead with National Disaster Management Office; First Aid; Health Promotion</i></p>	
Number of staff:	<b>35</b>
Number of volunteers:	<b>361</b>
Number of branches	<b>6</b>

The Vanuatu Red Cross Act of 1982 recognizes VRCS as an independent, autonomous, non-governmental organization, auxiliary to the authorities of the Republic of Vanuatu in the humanitarian field. As an auxiliary to the public authorities, VRCS maintains a strong relationship and collaboration with the NDMO and is a member of the National Disaster Council. VRCS also works closely with provincial and village disaster and Community Disaster Climate Change Committees (CDCCCs) and the Vanuatu Humanitarian Team (VHT), through its support to the shelter, WASH cluster, and Health Cluster.

VRCS has a long history of building community resilience to disaster risks, working with communities, the Government, and partner actors to enhance preparedness and resilience to key hazards as one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. VRCS is currently implementing a USAID funded Resilience programme and an EU DevCO funded Resilience programme and is a member of the Climate Action Committee at the national level.

VRCS has six branches and four (4) sub-branches – following the decentralized structure of government authorities in country - with 361 active volunteers available for response, as well as staff in National HQ and Branches. VRCS has 120 Emergency Response Team (ERT) members, 15 National Emergency Response Team (NERT) members, 5 Pacific Disaster Response Team (PDRT) members, and 100 first aid-trained personnel. Volunteers are trained in DRR, shelter, first aid (FA), health, and hygiene promotion. Warehouses and preparedness containers are available now and more are being constructed at both national HQ and branch levels.



## **IFRC Membership coordination**

VRCS is coordinating and receiving ongoing support from the IFRC Country Cluster Delegation (CCD) and Asia Pacific Regional Office (APRO). There are no Participating National Societies (PNS) present physically in Vanuatu, however bilateral relationships are ongoing through long term programming. The IFRC is supporting VRCS in coordinating a Federation-wide response together with PNS like Australia Red Cross and New Zealand Red Cross, as well as other key movement partners, leveraging both multilateral and bilateral engagements. The IFRC will ensure Federation-wide reporting for the emergency response, demonstrating the collective support of the IFRC membership in providing humanitarian assistance to the affected populations.

In ensuring visibility and support for the pressing humanitarian needs and highlighting Red Cross Red Crescent's response, communication materials will be produced. Written and audio-visual content will be produced with the `do no harm` approach, along with relevant social media and digital products. Communications content will be promoted on regional and global IFRC channels, including social media, and shared with National Societies in the IFRC network.

## **International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement coordination**

ICRC have offered support on Restoring Family Links (RFL) services if needed. Movement Coordination meetings will be setup based on need.

## **External coordination**

The NDMO is leading the response and is looking into releasing a Disaster Response Strategy, which will include the activation of sector clusters in the Humanitarian/Development community. As co-lead for the Shelter sector VRCS, with IFRC's and Global Shelter Cluster support, is actively supporting the strategy and facilitating coordination among the government and other organizations active in the cluster.

At the Regional level, the IFRC CCD team engages regularly in the Pacific Humanitarian Taskforce to communicate on activities and required and available support.

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*After 31 December 2024, response activities to this disaster will continue under [the IFRC Network Vanuatu Country Plan for 2025](#). The IFRC Network Country Plans show an integrated view of ongoing emergency responses and longer-term programming tailored to the needs VRCS are prioritising addressing in country, as well as a Federation-wide view of the country's action. This aims to streamline activities under one plan, while still ensuring that the needs of those affected by the disaster are met in an accountable and transparent way. Information will be shared in due time, should there be a need for an extension of the crisis-specific response beyond the above-mentioned timeframe.*

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## Contact information

**For further information, specifically related to this operation please contact:**

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#### **Reference**



Click here for:

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