



NO TURNING BACK

LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN VANUATU'S RESPONSE TO TROPICAL CYCLONE HAROLD

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VANGO
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Cover photo: Damage caused by Tropical Cyclone Harold to Melsisi Catholic Church and settlement on the western coast of Pentecost Island, Vanuatu. Ginny Stein, RedR, National Disaster Management Office (NDMO)

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About us

Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) was founded in 2012 to elevate the profile of humanitarian action in Asia and the Pacific. Set up as a social enterprise, HAG provides a unique space for thinking, research, technical advice and training that can positively contribute to excellence in humanitarian practice.

Vanuatu Association of Non-Government Organisations (VANGO) is the non-government organisation (NGO) and civil society organisation (CSO) umbrella body for Vanuatu.

About the research program

This research is part of Humanitarian Advisory Group's three-year [Humanitarian Horizons Research Programme](#), aiming to inform and elevate the profile of humanitarian action in Asia and the Pacific. With funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of the Australian Government, Humanitarian Horizons supports excellence in humanitarian action by influencing policy and practice in the region and globally.

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Humanitarian Advisory Group is BCorp certified. This little logo means we work hard to ensure that our business is a force for good. We have chosen to hold ourselves accountable to the highest social, environmental and ethical standards, setting ourselves apart from business as usual.

INTRODUCTION

Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold, a category 5 cyclone, hit Vanuatu on Monday 06 April 2020. The scale and impact of TC Harold, affecting over 160,000 people, was reminiscent of Cyclone Pam some five years ago. The response, however, has charted a very different course. In the context of a global pandemic and an increasingly strong Vanuatu humanitarian community, national and local actors stepped up to demonstrate that humanitarian local leadership is more than an aspiration in the Pacific.

The Vanuatu government and humanitarian community recognised early on that the response would be different by necessity. No international surge deployments were available, and technical expertise needed to be sought from within. National and local organisations carried the load of response implementation and community-led initiatives were and remain key to effective recovery.

This practice paper is a rapid analysis of the TC Harold response, 50 days after the disaster. Primarily based on qualitative data, it explores the extent and implications of the locally led response at the time of assessment. It asks critical questions about the impact of increased local leadership on the quality of the response and the flow of funding; whether international organisations stepped back whilst national organisations stepped up; and whether the TC Harold response represents a point of no return for local humanitarian leadership in the Pacific.

About this paper

This practice paper is intended to stimulate discussion and inform practice. It forms a part of Humanitarian Advisory Group's research stream dedicated to examining what happens when localisation moves from theory to practice.

The paper is structured in five sections.

SECTION 1 outlines the **context for change**

SECTION 2 describes and documents the **step up in local leadership**

SECTION 3 outlines the impact of the step up on the **effectiveness of the response**. It considers four main areas of impact:

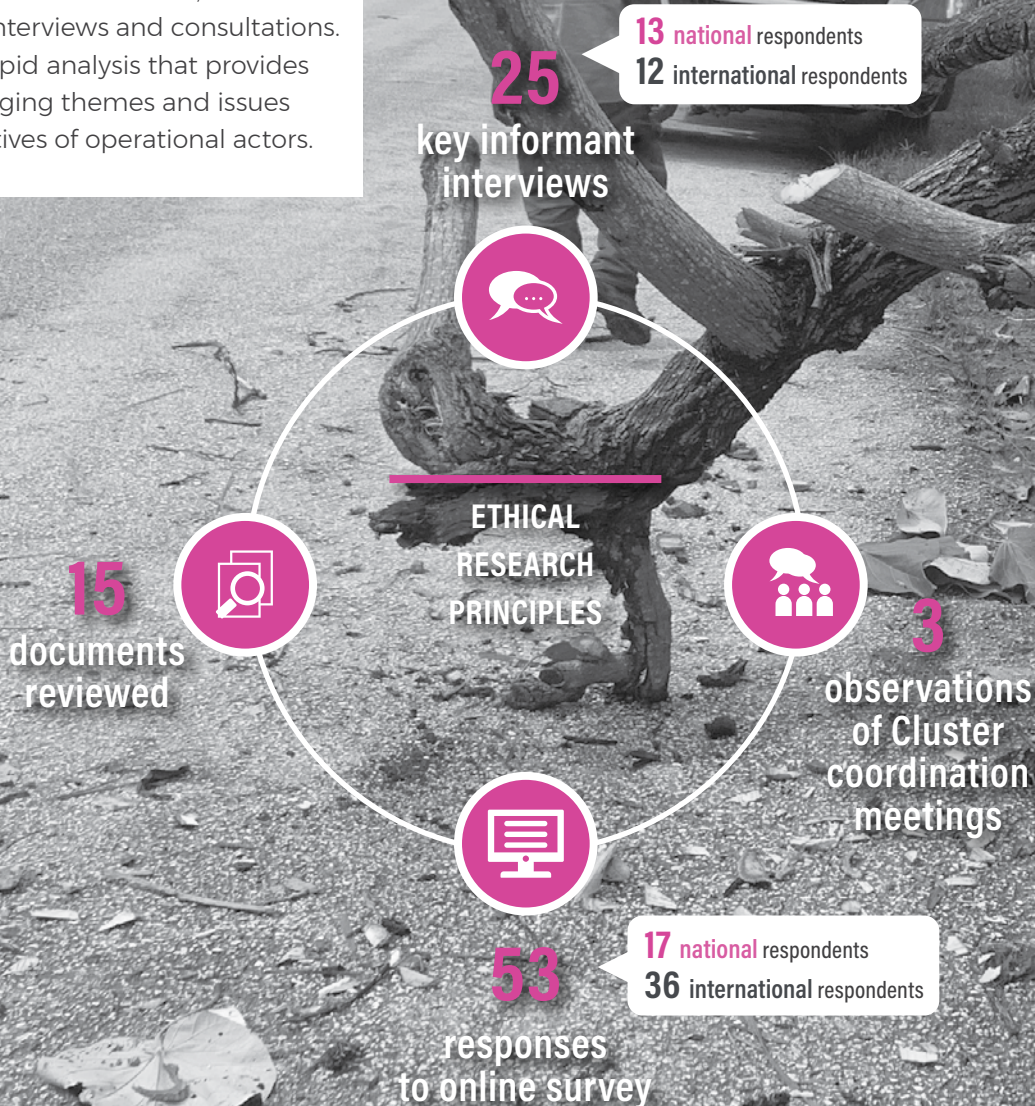
- ▶ More appropriate and relevant assistance
- ▶ Less timely assistance
- ▶ Swings and roundabouts for coordination
- ▶ Demonstrated in-country capacity

SECTION 4 outlines the impact of the step up on **funding allocations**

SECTION 5 asks **what the future looks like**.

METHODOLOGY

This practice paper is based on interviews and consultations with national and international actors involved in the TC Harold response. They included representatives of national and local government, national, local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), regional bodies, United Nations (UN) agencies, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, and donors. The research was undertaken in cooperation with the Vanuatu Association of NGOs (VANGO), Humanitarian Advisory Group's Pacific Regional consultant Linda Kenni, and national consultant William Nasak, who led on all in-country interviews and consultations. It is a high-level rapid analysis that provides insights into emerging themes and issues from the perspectives of operational actors.



CONTEXT FOR CHANGE

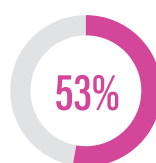
"Since 1980 to 2019 we have been depending on assistance from our partners to respond. COVID 19 is a test of Vanuatu's capabilities – to see if we can stand on our own and take care of our own issues."¹

The humanitarian and disaster response sector in Vanuatu was required to respond to TC Harold in unique circumstances. A global pandemic, at a scale not experienced since 1918, continues to test the capacity of the humanitarian community, forcing repatriation of international staff and exacerbating existing humanitarian needs worldwide. Within Vanuatu, the government was planning for a COVID-19 outbreak, responding to ash fall in Tanna, and had recently emerged from national elections. The arrival of TC Harold exacerbated this existing complexity. Heavy rainfall brought on by TC Harold also resulted in severe flooding in Teouma. Practical considerations for the response included barriers to international surge staff, internal travel restrictions, quarantine requirements on supplies and additional program requirements on stretched staff and teams.

FUNDING ENVIRONMENT

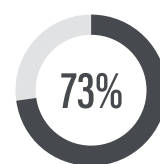
Cyclone Harold caused greater and more widespread damage in some parts of the country than TC Pam.² Both cyclones impacted over 150,000 people.³ However, the total aid provided in the response to TC Harold to date is significantly lower.⁴ Donors struggled to resource the TC Harold response in addition to the substantial allocations already made for COVID-19. Furthermore, the media focus in traditional donor countries such as Australia and New Zealand was primarily on COVID-19, making it difficult to raise the profile of the disaster, mobilise aid and raise funds locally.⁵ On the plus side, donors have allowed flexibility for implementing organisations to use funding interchangeably, and have drawn funding from existing aid programs to provide immediate financial support to ease the economic impacts of COVID-19.⁶

Has there been a reduction of available funding from international donors for the TC Harold response?



National

STRONGLY AGREE /
AGREE



International

¹ National/ local respondent

² Interview 11; <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-10/adf-plane-to-deliver-relief-to-vanuatu-after-cyclone-harold/12140456>

³ TC Pam – 166,000 people (OCHA Situation Report #17); TC Harold – 160,000 (OCHA Flash Update #1)

⁴ Interviews 13, 17 and 19

⁵ Interview 15

⁶ Interviews 1, 13 and 15; https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-20/australia-financial-support-pacific-governments-cyclone-pandemic/12262328?mc_cid=6b42d9b68d&mc_eid=34f819c0cc

Context of Vanuatu's response to Tropical Cyclone Harold



Tanna Ash Fall



Over **28,000** people and **5,650** households affected



Crops destroyed and livelihoods threatened



KEY DATES

- ✓ **March 13** – Warning of increased volcanic activity
- ✓ **April 11** – Government response activation to severe impact of ash fall



Teouma Flooding



Rainfall induced flooding impacting livelihoods



COVID-19



Zero cases reported so far



Travel restrictions (international and between islands), including border closures



Quarantine requirements for international personnel and relief items

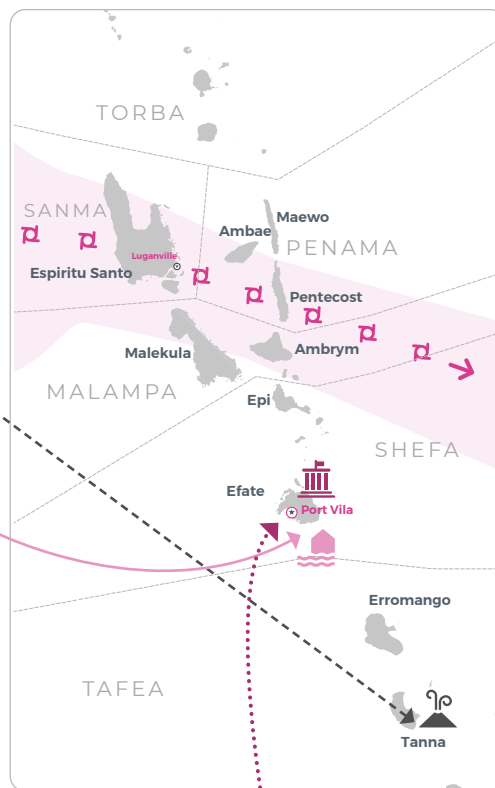


Diminished capacity of the international organisations with repatriation of staff



KEY DATES

- ✓ **March 26** – COVID-19 State of Emergency declared
- ✓ **April 14** – Government appoints COVID-19 Advisory Team to assist NDMO to implement prevention and containment measures



Political Transition



Political negotiations to form a government adds complexity for decision making in TC Harold response.



KEY DATES

- ✓ **March 19-20** – Vanuatu general election
- ✓ **March 20** – Caretaker government implemented
- ✓ **April 20** – New government formed



Tropical Cyclone Harold



Severely impacted the northern provinces of Sanma, Malampa and Penama, including Santo, which is home to the country's second largest city, Luganville.



70% of the structures in Luganville damaged



160,000 individuals affected



3 people died and over **56** injured



17,347 houses severely damaged or destroyed



87,000 people without homes



36,985 people's shelter needs not met



81 damaged health facilities



Most stocks and food crops damaged or destroyed

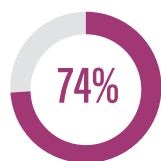


KEY DATES

- ✓ **April 3** – Yellow alert issued for Torba and Sanma
- ✓ **April 4** – Alert upgraded to red for Malampa, Penama, Sanma, and Torba. COVID-19 travel and social distancing restrictions lifted to support evacuations
- ✓ **April 6 and 7** – TC Harold strikes Vanuatu
- ✓ **April 9** – COM⁷ approves all ministries to prioritise response. NDMO announces locally managed response.
- ✓ **April 10** – NDMO assessment teams travel to affected areas
- ✓ **April 11** – Royal New Zealand Air force flight delivers first round of relief items
- ✓ **April 13** – First round of Australia humanitarian supplies delivered by Australian Defence Force flight

Cyclone path sourced from [OCHA, VANUATU Tropical Cyclone Harold Humanitarian Snapshot As of 8 April 2020](#).

A STEP UP IN LOCAL LEADERSHIP



of survey respondents felt the response was nationally led.

The Vanuatu Government, led by the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) – the focal point for emergency response – showed clear leadership and ownership in the TC Harold response. The forced geographic isolation due to COVID-19 restrictions allowed the government to better coordinate the response, which was more manageable with fewer new actors.⁸

The step up in leadership extended to all levels of government. At the national level, the National Disaster Committee sets policy direction, while the NDMO was intended as the primary body for implementation and coordination of the response.⁹ International and national organisations were expected to coordinate with government at central and provincial level to ensure their responses were aligned with needs and government priorities. The Provincial Emergency Operations Centres (PEOC) – set up as part of the process to decentralise disaster management capacity based on learnings from TC Pam¹⁰ – coordinated the response on the ground. The NDMO deployed staff to reinforce the PEOCs and to improve coordination. This allowed PEOC members, who understand the local context best, to lead the response in line with need.¹¹

“A lot of the local respondents have stepped up and done a good job. It’s a good thing in a way that our hands have been tied. This has pushed local authorities and leaders take on a more leading role.”¹²

National staff, civil society representatives and organisations also took on greater leadership roles. Within international organisations, national staff became focal points for response coordination, filling the gap created by repatriated international leaders.¹³ National and local organisations also stepped up to fill an implementation gap left by international organisations that had been more severely affected by COVID-19.

“COVID-19 has affected international NGOs, because they cannot access their additional resources like specialist staff and additional supplies. Now they have to rely on their in-country resources, which might mean junior officers take on responsibilities instead of their overseas specialists.”¹⁴

8 Interview 21

9 Pacific Humanitarian Team – TC Harold Situation Report #3

10 <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/view/59178>

11 Interviews 4, 6 and 17

12 International respondent

13 Interviews 5 and 7

14 National/local respondent

IMPACT ON THE RESPONSE

It is important to understand the impact of strengthened local and national leadership on the quality of the response. The scrutiny applied to date¹⁵ reflects a desire to understand whether local leadership improved or undermined humanitarian effectiveness.

“Was this an ideal humanitarian response – meeting needs of all the vulnerable people? No. But was it better than previous cyclones? Definitely.”¹⁶

This section unpacks some of the implications of increased local leadership as perceived by stakeholders directly involved in the response.

MORE APPROPRIATE AND RELEVANT ASSISTANCE

In contrast to previous responses, local communities, local leaders and civil society organisations (CSOs) were better prepared and more involved in the response to TC Harold.¹⁷ Their reduced expectation for external support resulted in communities drawing on traditional structures and existing resilience mechanisms that had been sidelined in the past. Community Disaster and Climate Change Committees (CDCCCs), applying learning from TC Pam, were critical to improved community participation and ownership.¹⁸ Their greater ownership, voice and participation drove a more appropriate response.

The Malvatumauri (National Council of Chiefs) mobilised communities to raise funds and collect relief items. Youth and women’s groups from unaffected villages and islands identified ways to help by donating root crops and organising delivery logistics. Sourcing food rations locally – promoted by the government – meant that the food relief provided to affected communities was more diverse and nutritious than the standard relief food items distributed in previous responses.¹⁹

“The chiefs from Tanna organised a boat full of yams and bananas to be transported to Santo, which are being distributed among people. That came from our traditional structures. That’s what we normally do.”²⁰

Local organisations, embedded within their communities and with strong existing social networks and structures, mobilised relevant technical support and skilled personnel to support affected groups. The result has been stronger alignment of needs and response assistance. For example, local organisations drew on traditional weavers from Tanna – well known for their skills in coconut roof thatching – to train affected communities in Espiritu Santo as they rebuilt their houses.²¹

15 <https://devpolicy.org/suffering-in-vanuatu-covid-19-cyclone-harold-and-a-distracted-political-leadership-20200505-3/>; <https://devpolicy.org/uninvited-guests-the-evolving-practice-of-international-humanitarian-response-to-cyclones-in-the-pacific-20200515-1/>; <https://www.policyforum.net/the-perfect-storm/>

16 International respondent; Similar sentiments shared across multiple interviews, including interviews 1, 4, 12, 17

17 Interview 21

18 Interview 9

19 Interview 5

20 National/local respondent

21 Interview 18; <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/2020/05/25/1197711/coconut-resurgence-in-cyclone-devastated-vanuatu>

The government of Vanuatu and the international community largely welcomed and supported the active engagement of local communities and organisations. The new government members (including the Prime Minister) and senior government staff were visibly engaged with the communities in the affected areas – a notable difference from previous responses. This has been a positive change, because local organisations, leaders and the community have more opportunity to talk with decision-makers and contribute to the decision-making process.²²

“You need to go and talk to the people, talk to the chiefs and see things on the ground. What happens if you go by your books and checklists is that you are making assumptions of what the needs are and what you are providing will not be a priority need.”²³

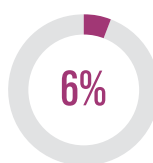
Despite the very positive steps to improve community engagement in this response, especially via the active role of civil society, remote and isolated communities were not adequately engaged before or during the response. Interventions in these communities were based on standard processes that ignore specifics of their needs and capacities.²⁴ To further strengthen nationally led responses, local NGOs and CSOs across remote and isolated communities need to be supported and involved in coordination platforms prior to, during and after a response.²⁵

A more inclusive response?

COVID-19 restrictions and TC Harold’s impact have increased the vulnerability of women, young girls and boys, and people with disabilities.²⁶ Local and international organisations have been advocating for a more inclusive response working through mechanisms such as the Gender and Protection cluster, to integrate the needs of diverse groups.

The Gender and Protection cluster, supported by both international and local organisations, has worked to increase the protection focus of the response.²⁷ The cluster and its members have also promoted the participation of women and young people in the response process. This includes increasing women’s participation in CDCCCs, as well as supporting the police to improve monitoring and support to at-risk groups.²⁸ While challenges remain, this is a positive sign for future responses.

LESS TIMELY ASSISTANCE



Only 6% of interviewees across international and national stakeholders thought the response was completely timely

There were substantial delays in the operationalisation of the response, which caused frustrations for affected communities in need of immediate assistance.²⁹ For example, some communities on the west coast of Espiritu Santo with damaged homes had received no permanent or temporary shelter support from government after two months.³⁰ While government responses were delayed,

²² Interviews 6, 16, 17 and 19

²³ National/ local respondent

²⁴ Interview 18

²⁵ Interviews 6, 10 and 16

²⁶ CARE Vanuatu–Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-19; Interview 10

²⁷ Interviews 8, 9 and 10

²⁸ Interview 8

²⁹ Interviews 1, 3, 6 and 11

³⁰ <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/2020/05/25/1197711/coconut-resurgence-in-cyclone-devastated-vanuatu>

local communities and traditional structures mobilised to support affected communities to the best of their ability.³¹

A range of reasons explains the delay in formal support, including delays in completing needs assessments, quarantine requirements for supplies, inadequate existing logistical capacities, inadequate levels of locally available stock, the remoteness of some affected areas, and the complexity of the TC Harold environment.

The remoteness of some of the locations made it difficult to quickly obtain data on those affected and the needs on the ground. With road access reduced, assessment and response teams had to rely on helicopters to reach some areas.³² Once needs were identified, it took time for humanitarian supplies to be sourced and distributed. A small supply of non-food items (NFI) was available locally, mainly through the Vanuatu Red Cross Society (VRCS), and was used up quickly. Donors and international organisations (primarily Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) agencies, the Australian Red Cross (ARC) and UN agencies) coordinated the supply of additional stocks through FRANZ network humanitarian supply flights.³³

Once supplies were available there were delays in their release and distribution. COVID-19 restrictions exacerbated local logistical capacity and resource gaps. Locally based logistical support was embedded with NDMO by the Australian Government and CARE Vanuatu (using their own staff) to help expedite planning and processing.³⁴

The Vanuatu government and donors had to formulate and implement new quarantine protocols at short notice. These protocols allowed the clearance of items within three days, but in practice it took longer, and the government insisted that all supplies had to be

processed through Port Vila, rather than being flown directly into the airport in Luganville on Espiritu Santo. While this delayed the distribution of supplies to communities, it was seen by the government as their best option to minimise the risk of a COVID-19 outbreak.

It is likely that the reduction in international response capacity contributed to a slower response; however, the unprecedented restrictions imposed on supplies and travel as a result of COVID-19 are likely to have had a much more significant impact on timeliness.

SWINGS AND ROUNDABOUTS FOR COORDINATION

COVID-19 restrictions, halting the influx of international staff and new international organisations, made coordination easier for both the government and resident international and national organisations.³⁵ Similarly, strict regulations on arrival and distribution of humanitarian supplies – in place to minimise risk of COVID-19 outbreak – provided the government greater visibility and control over response activities than in previous responses, supporting its efforts to improve coordination, tracking and accountability.³⁶

Clusters were tangibly more ni-van³⁷ than ever before. Meetings were led by national directors and most participants were locals (including national staff of international organisations). The reduced number of international advisors and specialists bolstered the confidence of local participants and gave them more space to share their input. This increased the level of engagement of local staff and local organisations' representatives.³⁸

31 Interviews 18 and 23

32 Interview 3

33 Interview 4

34 Interviews 4 and 11

35 Interview 9 and 21

36 Interview 16

37 Comprised of people indigenous to Vanuatu

38 Interviews 6 and 18 and cluster observations

“Some cluster meetings were conducted in Bislama. There were still a few international staff around, but the participants were mostly locals who felt a lot more comfortable to share ideas.”³⁹

Under the leadership of the government cluster chairs, the cluster members worked with a network of government staff and stakeholders on the ground to conduct needs assessments with the intention to formulate appropriate response plans – for short (3-6 months) and long term (3 years).⁴⁰ Based on these needs assessments and taking stock of locally available resources, the government was able to determine resources that needed to be sourced from the international community.⁴¹ However, as of the publication date of this report, a national response plan has not yet been publicly made available.

“At the national level we only have ourselves. NDMO took the lead and there was a lot of demands coming to clusters to provide data and feedback from rapid assessments.”⁴²

Coordination via PEOCs allowed local organisations to better engage with government and other partners and elevate community perspectives through daily briefings. If the response had been managed centrally from Port Vila, they would have been too removed from the on-ground context to integrate local community feedback.⁴³

Despite tangible successes in the coordination landscape, some international organisations

continued to engage directly with the NDMO, bypassing the cluster leads. Organisations not sharing updates on response activities, supply arrivals and distribution hampered government assessment and planning.⁴⁴

To what extent are international actors respecting and working with national leadership structures in this response?



DEMONSTRATED IN-COUNTRY CAPACITY

Vanuatu, with no cases of COVID-19 reported, implemented strict border and traveller restrictions. Immediately after TC Harold, the Vanuatu NDMO stated that “no foreign personnel are being brought to Vanuatu for response efforts at the present time, this will be an internally run operation”.⁴⁵



“COVID-19 has restricted a lot of international experts to step in and help, forcing us to do things within the country capacity. As much of a struggle as it is, this is a step forward for our country.”⁴⁶

39 National/ local respondent

40 Interviews 8 and 9

41 Interview 3

42 National/ local respondent

43 Interview 18

44 Interview 3

45 <https://www.facebook.com/605044193217937/posts/1312412105814472/?d=n>

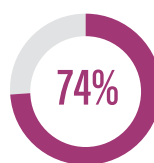
46 National/ local respondent

As traditional international surge support was not possible, local staff members in resident international organisations had the opportunity to take on more responsibility. International organisations whose national staff had already received training and held positions of responsibility prior to COVID-19 were better placed to respond, especially compared to organisations with primarily international leadership that was repatriated at the outset of COVID-19 restrictions.⁴⁷ There was also an rise in local recruitment of staff, as 72% of survey respondents from international organisations noted. For example, an increase in the number of local staff proposed by AHP organisations was observed, compared to previous activations.⁴⁸

“What the international actors are doing now is sourcing from the country what additional capacity they need.”⁴⁹

Government staff who were actively involved in the responses to, and lessons learned events for TC Pam and Ambae volcano eruption are now part of the Penama and Sanma PEOCs. Along with these government representatives, local organisations and CDCCCs that applied previous learning and experience played an important role in the response on the ground.⁵⁰

“The country has a lot of experienced specialists in different sectors and COVID-19 has pushed the government to turn to their human resources to step up and utilise available specialists within the country, instead of relying on international response as was done during previous disasters.”⁵¹



of international organisation survey respondents reported an increase in remote support to national counterparts

Remote capacity strengthening and support to national counterparts increased,⁵² although this was largely confined to support within international organisations. Only 47% of national organisations reported receiving remote technical support during the response, exposing a fundamental flaw in the existing approach to remote support. Remote support is also constrained by the quality of internet service, subject matter (such as shelter and logistics) and users' familiarity with technologies.⁵³ Established partnerships contribute to easing the process of remote support. For example, ARC technical specialists have been remotely supporting their VRCS counterparts with positive engagement.⁵⁴

47 Interviews 12 and 17

48 Interview 13

49 National/local respondent

50 Interview 13

51 National/local respondent

52 Interviews 5, 7, 15 and 21

53 Interviews 15 and 17

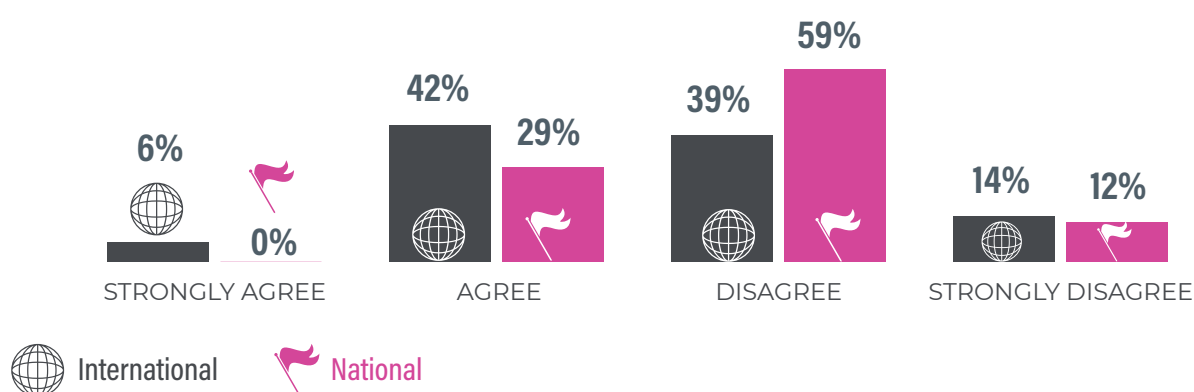
54 Interview 15

IMPACT ON FUNDING ALLOCATIONS

The step up in national and local leadership does not appear to have been met with a step up in direct resource allocation. Frustration at the lack of equal access to funding has continued to emerge as local organisations have been overlooked for direct funding. While COVID-19 provided an opportunity to increase funding to

local organisations, donor mindset and processes (including ability to absorb more risk) have not changed sufficiently to facilitate this.⁵⁵ In fact, national organisations noted they received less funding for TC Harold than on previous TC responses.

There is increased funding available to national actors for the TC Harold response



"It seems the rhetoric by donors of supporting locally led action was exactly that – rhetoric. They decided to go with the INGOs to ensure compliance."⁵⁶

Donor partnerships with local organisations are usually developed and managed through locally maintained contracts. Reduced capacity of donors at resident missions due to repatriation of staff and increased consular work for repatriation of own nationals meant engaging local organisations was more challenging for donors. Therefore, international organisations that had presence in donor countries, or with contracts

that were centrally managed, benefitted from this situation as they were given preference when allocating funding.⁵⁷

International organisations continued to hold the money and retain the upper hand in their partnerships with local organisations.⁵⁸ While many international organisations rely on local NGOs to implement programs (even more so within the COVID-19 context) inequitable partnership models continue to be used.⁵⁹ While donor contracts with international organisations encourage partnering with local organisations, they do not require financial allocations, expect reporting on partnerships or monitor equitable partnership principles.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ International respondent; Similar sentiments shared across multiple interviews, including interviews 12, 13, 17, 18

⁵⁶ International respondent

⁵⁷ Interviews 1 and 13

⁵⁸ Interview 6

⁵⁹ Interviews 6, 10 and 19

⁶⁰ Interviews 12 and 13

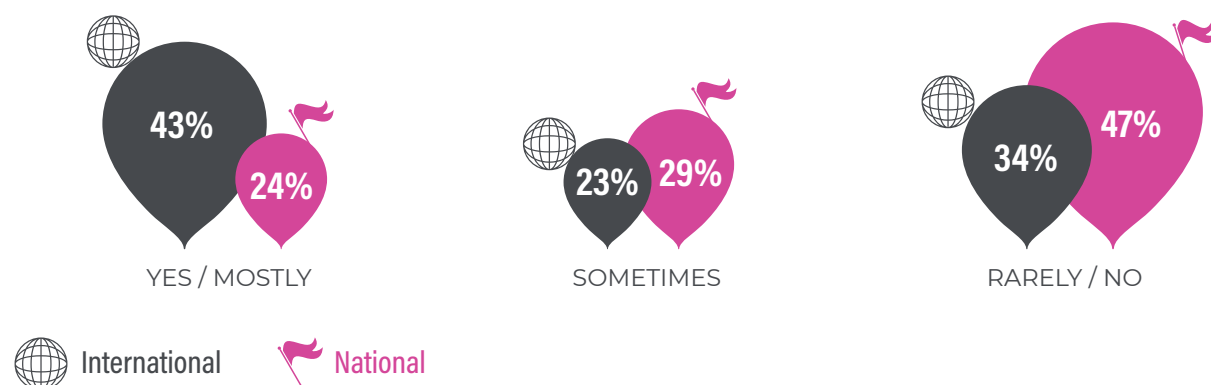


Fumigation of humanitarian supplies. Ginny Stein, RedR, NDMO

Donor expectations of proposals and project reporting in their preferred formats and formal language continue to be a barrier for local organisations, and even government, in accessing direct funding. However, some international organisations have begun to work with and support the government in preparing proposals to access more funding.⁶¹

The Vanuatu government's regulations that any aid donations by donors need to be matched with a similar size contribution to government is an interesting development that may set a precedent for other aid recipient countries. The decision meant that donors such as the Australian Government matched the AUD1.5 million they allocated for the AHP response with another AUD1.5 million contribution to the government.⁶²

Are national organisations receiving a fair proportion of funding in this response compared to international actors?



⁶¹ Interview 16

⁶² Interviews 12 and 13

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE FUTURE?

COVID-19 will continue to affect the way the humanitarian sector operates in Vanuatu into the future. Even once restrictions are lifted, more empowered national and local humanitarian communities are likely to demand a continued shift of power and resources. This will require continued stepping up of national actors willing to address weaknesses in response capacity and to prioritise the effectiveness of response. It will also require international actors to continue to step back and identify areas of value add in equitable partnerships.

"There is no going back from here. It will be a new world for international NGOs. For those who choose to continue in Vanuatu, the question will be about how we survive and support locally-led responses."⁶³

A highlight in the TC Harold response is that the government and national actors used the lessons from the TC Pam response to improve their planning and coordination. Similarly, the experience from TC Harold can be used to scale up response capacity and structures. This will include filling gaps that were highlighted in the TC Harold response, including:

- ▶ Improving aid distribution monitoring mechanisms
- ▶ Building up local stocks of NFIs and other humanitarian supplies
- ▶ Setting up decentralised warehousing capacity for NFIs
- ▶ Supporting local NGO and CSO networks to improve their coordination and response planning, as well as to proactively support local organisations with capacity strengthening
- ▶ Further strengthening decentralised response structures
- ▶ Improving coordinating mechanisms with international partners.

Despite challenges and shortfalls, the TC Harold response in Vanuatu showcased the ability of national and local organisations and staff to lead response activations. It also modelled some promising remote practices for technical support, albeit requiring broader reach to include local partner organisations. Ultimately, the response may have rebalanced the delicate equilibrium between national and international actors that was disrupted in the TC Pam response. It could provide an opportunity for national and international actors to jointly articulate their roles and responsibilities and recognise each other's valuable contribution to effective humanitarian response.

⁶³ International respondent

No turning back: local leadership in Vanuatu's response to Tropical Cyclone Harold





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