

Key recommendations for gender and protection in volcano response

Mount Manaro Volcano Emergency, Ambae 2017

On 12th April 2018, the Government of Vanuatu has announced another State of Emergency on the island of Ambae due to the eruption of Mount Monaro. This document provides an overview of lessons learned from gender and protection monitoring and response activities carried out during the first state of emergency from September to December 2017. The summary document aims to help ensure lessons learned can be applied in any new response and recovery efforts.

On 24th September 2017, Manaro Voui volcano on Vanuatu's Ambae Island began to erupt. Two days later, the Government of Vanuatu declared a State of Emergency and began evacuating people living in communities nearby to safer parts of the island. Within a week, the entire population of Ambae – more than 11,000 men, women and children – were evacuated to neighboring islands. On 21st October 2017, the evacuees were repatriated to Ambae, where they have had to adjust to living with an active volcano.

Throughout this process and after the repatriation, the Gender & Protection Cluster provided coordination on gender and protection issues and monitored the situation for vulnerable populations, including women, children and people living with disability. Monitoring reports by the Gender & Protection Cluster provided important information on emerging gender and protection issues in Ambae Island following repatriation. A lessons learned exercise was also conducted to capture the key lessons from the response. The lessons learned and the monitoring reports aimed to inform the government, organisations and actors across different clusters of specific issues affecting women and men after the eruption and provided recommendations on how early recovery programs could be more responsive to their different needs. The process of data gathering also gave women and men a forum to express their concerns through focus groups or stories.

Lessons learned from the initial Ambae evacuation and repatriation

INFORMATION Give people as much clear information as possible about what is going on. Make sure there are enough informed disaster responders and volunteers on the ground to share the information.

SAFE LOGISTICS Put people's safety first when moving them. Ensure boats are safe and have life jackets. Don't move people at night. Ensure there are shelters, toilets, water and food at the departure and landing sites. Ensure vulnerable people with mobility issues including elderly and people with disabilities are assisted and retain their mobility devices.

KEEP COMMUNITIES TOGETHER AND SUPPORT THEIR LEADERS Make sure communities are relocated together and not separated, especially children and people with disabilities. Support their leaders, both men and women, to continue to lead the community and to be involved in the response coordination, which will help keep communities safe and reduce tension.

PROVIDE THE RIGHT SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS. Make sure there are experts and services on the ground who can assist people with disabilities. Ensure child friendly spaces are available. Ensure referral and counselling services for people experience violence and trauma. Make sure health services are available especially for pregnant women.

ENSURE GOOD COORDINATION AND REGISTRATION ON THE GROUND. Make sure there are enough NDMO and provincial disaster authorities on the ground to coordinate and communicate, including ensuring timely registration of people, rapid assessments and equitable distribution of assistance.

PRIORITISE GENDER AND PROTECTION IN ALL CLUSTERS. Have enough gender and protection experts on the ground and in all clusters to ensure the needs of women and men and vulnerable people are met in all sectors.

KEY RECOVERY CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF PEOPLE OF AMBAE EXPRESSED DURING GENDER AND PROTECTION STORIES

CONCERNS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>SUPPORT TO ADAPT TO A NEW LIFE – LIVING WITH THE VOLCANO Women and men expressed a need for urgent information about how to cope with the effects of the volcano, particularly water quality and treatment, agriculture adaptation, and safety alerts and preparedness. This information was considered key to psychological and physical wellbeing, as well as rebuilding livelihoods. Where people felt they could no longer live on their land, they expressed an urgent need for support to find a long term solution to start new.</p> <p>INFORMATION ON GOVERNMENT SUPPORT People were eager to know what ongoing support the Vanuatu Government would provide to help with their recovery. This included information about whether school fees could be waived or reduced, if there would be compensation for lost livestock, if additional or subsidized health or transport services could be provided. This information was important to enable people to make informed decisions and reduce uncertainty about the future.</p> <p>TARGETED SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS People highlighted a need for emergency support provided to be equitably distributed and responsive to the different needs of vulnerable groups. In particular, a need for additional nutritional support and health care for pregnant and lactating women was identified. This support was needed to address the additional needs of vulnerable groups.</p> <p>REFERRALS AND SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCE VIOLENCE The stress and vulnerability created by the emergency was reported to have led to increases in violence. Providing information about referral processes in the case of violence against women and ensuring people's access to violence survivor service providers is an essential to ensure people's physical safety.</p> <p>COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT After their return to Ambae, people reported feeling very afraid, frustrated and uncertain about the future. Debriefing and counselling, with adapted processes for men, women, people with disability, children and the elderly, were identified as important needs to enable people to process their experience and adapt to their new situation. This support was key to protecting people's mental health and physical safety.</p> <p>MECHANISM FOR COMMUNITY VOICE Women and men wanted to dialogue with the government to express their concerns and needs. Having this opportunity to be heard was important to people's psychological wellbeing, as well as to provide decision-makers with relevant and timely information.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provide information and advice to men and women about how to adapt to a new environment, especially how to manage food, water and gardens in a changed volcanic environment.2. Give people as much information as possible about what support they can expect, or not, and what is going on.3. Make sure emergency assistance is distributed equitably with targeted support to vulnerable groups, especially people living with disabilities and pregnant and lactating women.4. Ensure referral processes are in place and well known by community leaders and emergency responders to enable survivors of violence to receive support. Provide additional resources to service providers like Vanuatu Women's Centre and health providers to help them provide support to an increased caseload.5. Provide early debriefing, counselling and psychosocial support to men, women, children, the elderly and people with a disability to help them process their experience and ensure their mental wellbeing.6. Create spaces for storian and dialogue between community members and the government at all levels and as much as possible.