

Initiating a Localised Response to Emergencies

Bringing Local Community Together through Leadership Summits
CAN DO Ambae Volcano Response

Background

On 23rd September 2017, the activity level for Monaro volcano on Ambae Island (Penama Province) in Vanuatu was raised to Level 4¹, which reflected a moderate state of eruption state. Communities began to experience volcanic hazards including flying rocks and volcanic gas, as well as ash-fall and acid-rain, which caused significant damage to garden crops. From 24th September, evacuations began for people living in high risk areas on Ambae and a state of emergency was declared until 24 October 2018.

CAN DO Response

The Church Agency Network for Disaster Operations (CAN DO)² received funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to respond to humanitarian needs of the population. The CAN DO program is managed by two CAN DO members Anglican Overseas Aid (AOA) and Adventist Development Relief Agency Australia (ADRA), and implemented by two local churches, the Adventist Development and Relief Association (ADRA) and the Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACOM). The project works with local community and church leadership to assist in conflict prevention and protection of women and children during crisis resettlement and relocation as a result of volcanic activity on the island of Ambae in Vanuatu.

Following the resettlement of communities CAN DO held two Leadership summits reaching approximately 3,850 members of the Ambae population.

The objective of the Leadership Summits was to support community and church leaders in their role in supporting communities to plan and respond to resettlement issues – including (but not limited to) protection of women and children. The summits gathered together leadership representatives from different churches, chiefs from different communities, members of the Community Disaster Climate Change Committee, and included women and youth leaders. The summit was facilitated by ACOM Vanuatu and ADRA Vanuatu, and in partnership with World Vision Vanuatu, Penama Provincial NDMO, and the local Police. It provided an opportunity for leaders to share their experiences and concerns regarding the Ambae Volcano disaster, and to receive information from government officials to equip their support to communities during

Leader Summit Outcome

...local community and church leaders have enhanced skills to support their community through the repatriation and recovery process, with a focus on community consultation and planning.

¹ The level was released by the Vanuatu Meteorology & Geo Hazards Department (VMGD).

² CAN DO comprises Act for Peace, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency Australia, Anglican Board of Mission, Anglican Overseas Aid, the Australian Lutheran World Service, Transform Aid International (Baptist World Aid Australia), UnitingWorld, and Caritas Australia.

repatriation and adaptation. The outcomes of the summit have been significant as they have engaged the community to lead and design their own response and as such it is a great example of localisation in practice.

Key Achievements

There were numerous achievements from the Leadership Summits, including:

- **Completely locally led** by local project team who organised, coordinated and led Summits with affected community members on Ambae island
- **Community members decided on content**
- The forum initiated **two way information sharing between the Government and communities**
- **Action plans were developed** by community members for future disaster response
- **Community Disaster Committees (CDCs) became operational** following the Summits
- **CDC disaster action plans** were created as well as steps for following up on next stages of response

Impact of the leadership summit

Churches Extensive Reach

74% of the population of Ambae identify as Anglican, Church of Christ, or Seventh Day Adventist. The remainder identifying with other churches. As per the 2009 census only 2 individuals, out of the entire population on Ambae, identified as having no religion¹.

Churches coming together: The major impact of the Leadership Summits was the ability to gather church and community leaders from different denominations together under one roof to discuss the major community identified issues following the initial repatriations. This was considered a very significant accomplishment as it is not easy to gather all denominational leaders together to discuss social issues, especially around gender. All have different beliefs and ways of dealing with issues and this summit has now paved a way forward for future collaborations within communities and churches, especially for the younger generation to advocate for attitudinal change. Chiefs and government representatives commented how significant it was.

Information sharing: Prior to the Summits, community members did not know what a *state of emergency* was or what it meant for communities. Sharing this information has prepared them going forward for any future *state of emergency* and what it means for them in terms of their rights and responsibilities.

Activation of emergency response structures: The Summits also significantly enhanced the work of the Area Council Administrator of West Ambae in the establishment of Ward Councils, paving a smooth path for more assistance to fall into the right hands and enhance information flow along the church, community, and Penama governance structure. It was the direct result of this summit that CDCs on Ambae were reactivated and Ward Councils formed to work with their Area Council Administrator in all aspects of disaster preparedness and response.

Confidence building: Additionally, focus groups on West Ambae identified that participants reported significant levels of increased confidence, information and skills to support their communities in the repatriation.

Participants' Stories

#1: Mr Ridley Tari – Area Council Administrator



“If I was a dog, you would have seen my tail wagging”...

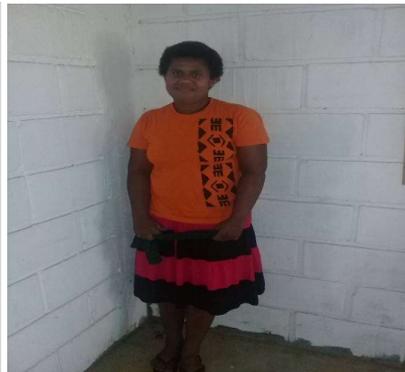
These were the first words of Mr Ridley Tari who is the Area Council Administrator for the West Ambae Tokatara Area Council, in his speech during the official closing of the West Ambae summit.

“I came into the office of the Area Council Administrator very recently and quite honestly, I did not know exactly where to start as there was neither clear handing-over nor instructions yet from the Provincial Headquarters on visions and strategies. I must say that this summit was very timely and I cannot express how happy I am and the gratitude I personally have for having this summit eventuated. It is not easy to get people together to consult and make decisions, therefore, this summit has provided an avenue where consultation with respected leaders has been done and plans being drawn for resurrecting the CDCs towards a smooth facilitation of Ward Councils formations. Through this summit, I was able to identify some key young people to assist me in overseeing the mentioned activities. We will be going from ward to ward to provide support in forming up their Ward Councils in preparation for another training to further assist us with Disaster Planning as being planned. I am very confident that with the knowledge and skills learned from this summit, we will be able to achieve our goals through the implementation of the action plans. Thank you very much indeed to CAN DO, ADRA, ACOM and World Vision for making this summit possible”.

2: Mrs Analyn Tari – former Area Council Administrator

“Now I have better understanding of my responsibilities as a leader, to oversee the care, safety and protection of my people/community...”

Mrs Analyn Tari was one of the very few Ambae women who was fortunate to be considered for a political position within the Penama Provincial Government and shared her story on how the summit has helped her. She was appointed as Area Council Administrator for the Southern Ambae Area Council as well as CDC Chairperson in her ward.



“Though I have been replaced by another person as Area Administrator, this summit has greatly enhanced my capacity in dealing with family issues as well as providing care, safety and protection to my people. I have been through workshops and given necessary tools but have not been able to use the tools, hence, this summit has greatly refreshed my mind and understanding on how to use the tools. I am now confident in advocating for non-violence, gender equity and equality and child protection. After this summit, I will be calling my communities together and share the information

gained and at the same time start using the resources/tools that are already with me. Thank you very much to you all for organizing this summit.” We hope to follow up with Analyn to hear how she has progressed with her plans to bring her community together.

Challenges

There were two main challenges identified during the Leadership Summits:

- **Communication** amongst implementing agencies during the planning phase was challenging at times and partnering agencies are exploring ways to improve this.
- Reports that some participants did not engage well on the topic of **gender based violence** and **protection of women**. Some participants were concerned messages could cause disrespect in the household and was not consistent with culture, custom or Christian teachings. It will be important to follow up to ensure good participation through the REACH program which provides the opportunity for people to have longer to process information that can be confronting.

Lessons Learned

- Schedule more trainings with just **women** to try and understand the **barriers** to women’s participation.
- Implementing partners need to **work together** with other churches to **encourage greater participation** and to highlight the goals and reasons of uniting together.
- In the future, **conduct smaller summits** in wards rather than the whole area, which will potentially enable more women to attend as it is closer to home

Looking Ahead

In April 2018, the humanitarian context for the project significantly worsened as the Monaro volcano on Ambae continued to be active. The surrounding environment deteriorated so significantly that the Government of Vanuatu again declared a national State of Emergency and began preparing for the permanent relocation of affected residents on Ambae to Maewo Island.

Accordingly, the humanitarian response program has been extended. Due to the success of the first summits an additional two summits will be conducted. A third summit will take place to directly respond to information from the NDMO and the Vanuatu Council of Churches. This engagement with local church leadership is the missing link to relocation planning and without this, relocation efforts are likely to continue to stall and the threat of conflict to increase. The primary focus of this Summit therefore is to create a forum for church leaders to assist NDMO in planning relocation based on community preference, and to resolve and to prevent land disputes.

An additional, Community Leadership Summit will be held on Maewo island in Vanuatu to assist host communities prepare for the relocation with a particular emphasis on sharing relocation plans, peacebuilding and safeguarding of women and children. The final summits will draw from the lessons learned from the previous summits and the outcomes of these summits will be documented for further sharing.