

MONTH AFTER CYCLONE, HALF OF VANUATU STILL HAS NO CLEAN WATER

Two-thirds of island nation's water and sanitation infrastructure has been damaged, wrecked, or contaminated, according to UNICEF



Vanuatu residents survey the damage done by Cyclone Pam the morning after it hit the island nation. (Photo: European Commission DG ECHO/flickr/cc)

More than 100,000 people in Vanuatu—half the country's population—still lack access to clean water, a month after Cyclone Pam devastated the Pacific island nation, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said Wednesday.

Two-thirds of Vanuatu's water and sanitation infrastructure has been damaged, wrecked, or contaminated, UNICEF said in a statement.

"There is water but quality is not that good because of the contamination," UNICEF's Vanuatu chief Ketsamay Rajphangthong told *Reuters* in a phone interview on Wednesday. "When the water is contaminated there's lots of risks coming after that, especially diarrhea and also other forms of disease."

Cyclone Pam hit Vanuatu on March 13 and tore apart the tiny island nation with winds that reached 210 miles per hour—killing 11 people, uprooting trees, destroying houses, and cutting off almost all electrical power, leaving behind a "looming threat of hunger and thirst."

With nearly 70 percent of wells contaminated, UNICEF is providing water purification tablets and plastic sheets for rainwater harvesting, but acknowledged that the measure is only a temporary solution, *Reuters* reports.

Rajphangthong noted that the lack of sanitation increases danger for women and children, who are forced to walk to shower and toilet facilities further from home, or defecate in the open, which makes them vulnerable to abuse.

Aid groups have warned of impending food and water shortages since the cyclone hit. On March 20, Vanuatu's humanitarian coordinator for the UN, Osnat Lubrani, told the *Associated Press*, "The relief has to start coming now, because if it doesn't come in the next two days or so, then we will have problems with food and with water."

With resources in Vanuatu already strained under the effects of climate change, Pacific Island leaders recently renewed the call for global leaders to act on climate finance.

"We see the level of sea rise... The cyclone seasons, the warm, the rain, all this is affected," Vanuatu's President Baldwin Lonsdale told the UN's World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan in March. "This year we have more than in any year... Yes, climate change is contributing to this."

Source: <http://www.commondreams.org/news/2015/04/23/month-after-cyclone-half-vanuatu-still-has-no-clean-water>