

‘Yumi stap redi long *climate* change’

Integrating climate with Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment in Vanuatu

Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre



(Photos here and other pages all show a Red Cross community workshop on Motalava, the fourth largest of the Banks Islands, Vanuatu. © Claude Cruells/claudecruells.com)

THE NAME means “Together we’re prepared for climate change”. *Yumi stap redi long climate change* is a participatory project funded by the Australian Government Overseas Aid Program (AusAID), supporting increased community resilience in the face of climate variability and change in Vanuatu in a coordinated and creative way.

As well as the Red Cross – the Vanuatu Red Cross Society (VRCS), the Australian and French Red Cross, and the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre – consortium members include Oxfam, Save the Children Australia and CARE International.



Australian Government
AusAID



Australian Red Cross
THE POWER OF HUMANITY



croix-rouge française





(See cover photo. © Claude Cruells)

The VRCS is working in the remotest parts of northern Vanuatu, building on existing EU-funded programming for disaster risk reduction (DRR) in 13 communities in the northern Torres and Banks Islands, Torba province, reaching nearly 2,000 people.

What's been done?

Vanuatu Red Cross staff and volunteers use Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) methodology to gather and analyse information, and create action plans with communities. The VCA is a participatory investigative process to assess the risks people face, their vulnerability to them, and their capacity to cope and recover. VCAs are also used also to identify structural and non-structural measures to reduce vulnerability.

Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies work with vulnerable communities to identify the risks and take steps to reduce them by drawing on their own skills, knowledge and initiative. This project has involved working out how VCA assessments and community action plans can reflect the growing threat of *climate change*.

But rather than creating a separate VCA focused on climate change, the approach has been to incorporate questions and information into existing VCA tools like historical profiles, seasonal calendars and risk maps. Lessons learned so far include:

- Focus group discussions about sectors such as agriculture, health, water (including hygiene and sanitation) provide good platforms for weaving in questions about whether changes have been occurring in the community and

VCA classical roots...

Vulnerable – (adjective) ‘exposed to being attacked or harmed’

ORIGIN: Latin *vulnerare* ‘to wound’

Capacity – (noun) ‘the ability or power to do something’

ORIGIN: Latin *capere* ‘to take or hold’

Assess – (verb) ‘evaluate or estimate the nature, value, or quality of’

ORIGIN: Latin *assidere* ‘to sit beside’ (a judge)

Source: Concise Oxford Dictionary.

how weather and climate affect people’s livelihoods, health and safety.

- Community members may not feel confident talking about climate change, so it may be best first to discuss topics that people know about and are familiar with (such as the sectors listed above), and then introduce discussion of climate change later.



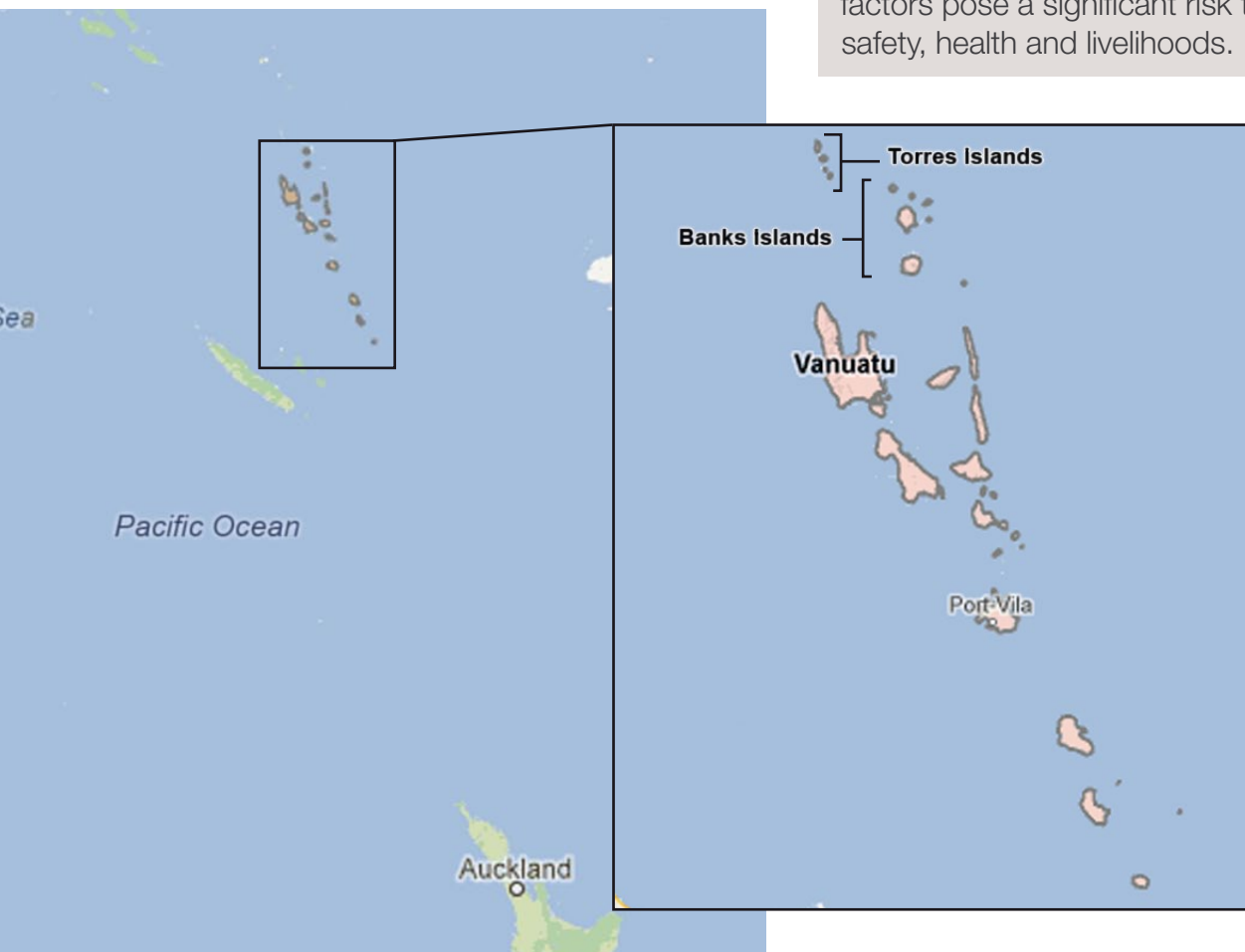
- Discussions specifically using the term climate change can be left to the end of the session to avoid the risk of the community blaming all their problems on climate change.
- In baseline surveys, the Vanuatu Red Cross asked communities whether they have heard of climate change, or El Niño and La Niña. They are also asked whether they have access to weather and seasonal forecasts, and whether they understand them and use them. VCA teams ask about the use of traditional knowledge for forecasting, and whether it is still being applied.
- Baseline surveys have revealed that, perhaps surprisingly, despite being in the remotest parts of the country with little access to outside information, most people have heard about climate change. But there is a great deal of confusion about the impacts it might have in the future.

Vanuatu:

a Pacific hot spot for hazards

VANUATU IS a Y-shaped archipelago inside the Pacific's seismic Ring of Fire that includes more than 80 volcanic islands. Along with cyclones and El Niño/La Niña events, the country is subject to a wide range of geological and hydrometeorological hazards. In addition, climate assessments have already recorded higher temperatures, increased ocean acidification and rising sea levels.

Climate forecasting predicts that dry seasons may become drier and wet seasons wetter, and days of extreme rainfall events are likely to come much more often. We expect to see temperatures climbing, more intense cyclones, an increase in ocean acidification, and rising sea levels. In a country where 80 per cent of the population depend on subsistence agriculture, these factors pose a significant risk to people's safety, health and livelihoods.



- As a first step, VRCS field officers were briefed on climate change and variability during training. Facilitators have asked for help in creating key messages that they can deliver on the topics so they are consistent and accurate. To ensure consistency of messaging, it will also be important that the government endorses these messages.

Where next?

Teams were going back into the field later to present the analysis of VCA discussions back to communities. The teams will also clarify some of the causes of local changes, including environmental degradation, natural resource management and natural climate variability. Climate change will be discussed as an additional layer that can exacerbate these other factors.

The Vanuatu Red Cross Society now plans to coordinate with other stakeholders such as GIZ and SPC,¹ the forestry department and the climate services section of the country's Meteorological Office, to access technical advice.

For example, the Red Cross will work with meteorologists to help clarify key terminology for communities; the National Society plans to use picture cards and animations currently under

The Red Cross will work with meteorologists to clarify terminology for communities

development, and they hope to facilitate access to forecast information through display boards in communities in collaboration with local disaster-preparedness committees.

Other risk reduction activities that will be implemented include:

- Agricultural adaptation, such as assisting vegetable gardeners to adapt to climate-related hazards. This will be done alongside the already impressive traditional techniques used to grow and maintain vegetable gardens in Vanuatu.
- Natural resource management, including mangrove plantation and replanting of local species for erosion control, awareness of the impact of the mining of local sand, coral and reefs.
- Water supply and hygiene promotion, including diversification of water sources. For example, some communities rely solely on shallow groundwater which may become affected by saline intrusion. Activities will link hygiene promotion with the impacts of climate variability such as La Niña events (high rainfall).



(See cover photo. © Claude Cruells)

¹ Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, Secretariat of the Pacific Community.