

DISASTER
RELIEF

CASE REPORT
Fiji-Hurricane
January 1975

Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523

FIJI

Hurricane—January 1975

From January 30 through February 2, 1975, Hurricane "Val", with winds up to 130 knots, passed over southern Fiji leaving behind a wake of destruction. At least 250 houses were destroyed and many others damaged. Losses to food crops and copra, a major source of income, were severe.

VALUE OF U.S. GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE	\$ 50,000
VALUE OF ASSISTANCE BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY	286,415

Fiji, composed of over 800 islands and islets of varying sizes with about 150 islands inhabited, is centrally located among the island groups of the South Pacific. The country is subject to regular hurricanes and cyclones with hurricanes by far the most common of all natural disasters.

Hurricane "Bebe", which struck in October 1972, was the last major hurricane to hit Fiji affecting almost the entire country. Over 11,000 houses, 200 schools, and more than 50 percent of Fiji's food crops were destroyed. The number of victims requiring assistance was a staggering 120,000, or nearly 25 percent of the population. For the

next three consecutive years, Fiji felt the effects of lesser cyclones or hurricanes; Cyclone "Juliet" in March of 1973, Cyclone "Lottie" in December 1973, Hurricane "Tina" in April 1974, and then Hurricane "Val" in January 1975.

Hurricane "Val" was destructive because of its slow movement which spanned a four-day period. Fortunately, "Val" passed over eastern and southern Fiji in the Lau Group missing the largest island of Viti Levu where more than 400,000 people reside. No deaths were attributed directly to the hurricane, but damage to food crops was extensive. An estimated 23,000 islanders were dependent

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on relief food stocks for a period of six months until replanted crops could be harvested. The production of copra, a major cash crop, was reduced 50 percent; it was estimated that it would take several years before the copra crop would return to normal production levels. The Government of Fiji's assessment of damage and needs and costs for relief and rehabilitation was estimated at \$1,000,000.

**ACTION TAKEN BY
THE GOVERNMENT OF FIJI (GOF)**

When there is a natural disaster of major proportions, the Government of Fiji Emergency Services Committee is activated to provide relief assistance during the disaster and its immediate aftermath. Since hurricanes are so common in Fiji, the Prime Minister's Hurricane Relief Committee was formed in 1972 with primary responsibilities of determining policies and coordinating the reconstruction phase following the completion of relief work by the Emergency Services Committee.

Initial reports of damage were sketchy after Hurricane "Val" passed through the Lau Group because of the remoteness of many islands and the breakdown of the communications system. It was not until February 2 that the Acting Prime Minister could depart on a reconnaissance flight over the affected areas to personally get an assessment of the damage and destruction and determine where emergency relief supplies should be sent. Getting supplies to the actual scene of the disaster was one of the most difficult aspects of the operation because of limited air transport capability. Boats loaded with relief supplies began preparing to leave Suva as soon as the seas had calmed. The supplies were from GOF stocks of various hurricane relief supplies including food, clothing, and blankets.

By March 27, an in-depth assessment of damage and needs was completed. The GOF had been caring for 23,000 victims since the hurricane and food stockpiles sufficient to

feed 10,000 people for one month were almost exhausted. The GOF reported an estimated 20,000 victims would have to be cared for by mass feeding for an additional six months which was beyond their resources then available to the GOF. An international appeal for assistance was launched to enable the Government to deal with the situation.

**ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY
THE U.S. GOVERNMENT**

The Chargé d'affaires in Suva, Walter V. Hall, having experienced Cyclone "Lottie" and Hurricane "Tina", anticipated that the GOF would request international assistance to replace emergency food stocks being used to feed the victims. Staple food such as rice and flour cannot be stored for long periods in Fiji and wholesale and retail outlets normally have only a two week supply on hand.

The Chargé proposed that the U.S. Government give a cash donation to the Prime Minister's Hurricane Relief Fund or send 250 short tons of rice from the United States, preferably by air freight. Because of the high costs of shipping rice from the United States to Fiji and since rice could be procured from regional sources more rapidly and economically, a cash grant of \$50,000 was provided by the U.S. Government for the GOF to purchase rice and other foodstuffs. On April 14, U.S. Ambassador to Fiji Armistead I. Selden (resident in Wellington, New Zealand) presented a check for the Fijian dollar equivalent of U.S. \$50,000 to the Prime Minister.

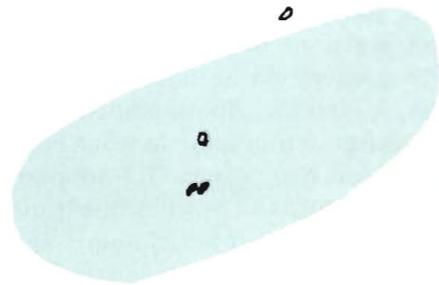
INTERNATIONAL DONORS

Contributions of cash and in-kind were received from the following:

New Zealand Government	\$271,002
India Red Cross	5,413
United Nations Disaster Relief Office	10,000
Total	<u>\$286,415</u>



FIJI



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