



Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance

DISASTER CASE REPORT

Agency for
International
Development

Washington D.C.
20523

FIJI - Cyclones

Date: Cyclone Eric - January 17-18, 1985
Cyclone Nigel - January 19-20, 1985
Cyclone Hina - March 17, 1985

Location: Western and Central divisions, especially western and southern Viti Levu

No. Dead: Cyclones Eric and Nigel - 28
Cyclone Hina - 1

No. Affected: Cyclones Eric and Nigel - over 100,000 people affected; an estimated 30,000 homeless. Cyclone Hina - 20,000 evacuated

Damage: Cyclones Eric and Nigel - Widespread damage to housing (21,846 homes totally or partially destroyed), schools, and other public and commercial buildings; power, transport, and communications systems; and crops. Building insurance claims reached \$73 million. Cyclone Hina - extensive damage to subsistence and commercial crops in Sigatoka Valley. Property damage estimated at \$3 million.

The Disaster

Cyclone Eric slammed into the main island of Viti Levu on the evening of January 17, the first of several cyclones to hit Fiji in an exceptionally severe season. The storm followed a southeasterly course, passing over the capital city of Suva before moving on to the country's eastern Lau Group. Described as one of the worst storms ever to hit Fiji, the storm's fury was at its peak as it crossed western Viti Levu. The Nadi and Lautoka areas were hardest hit, but damage was extensive throughout the southern half of the main island.

Before Fiji could begin to recover from Eric's onslaught, a second cyclone named Nigel struck the country on January 19 and January 20, with nearly the same force as Eric and following a similar path. As with Eric, the Lautoka area took the brunt of the storm.

FIJI - Cyclones

The death toll mounted to 28 in the wake of the twin storms (17 in the Western Division, six in the Central Division, and five in the Eastern Division). With entire villages virtually demolished in some parts of Viti Levu, the number of homeless reached an estimated 30,000. Approximately 80% of the more than 21,000 homes damaged or destroyed were in the Western Division. Extensive damage to the electrical system, estimated at \$1.5 million, left most of Viti Levu without electrical power for several days. Communications between Suva and western Viti Levu were also disrupted, and the international airport at Nadi was forced to close briefly. Crop damage was substantial in both the Western and Central divisions. The year's production of sugar, Fiji's principal export crop, was expected to be down by 10% as a result of storm damage to stored and standing cane.

Just as the cyclone season was nearing its end, two more storms inflicted renewed but less severe damage on the Fiji Island group. On March 5 and 6, Cyclone Gavin passed close to Fiji, affecting many parts of the country with gale force winds and flooding. This storm was followed by Cyclone Hina on March 17. A powerful storm with sustained winds of up to 140 knots in the center and gusts of up to 160 knots, Cyclone Hina fortunately veered in a southerly direction away from Viti Levu as it approached Fiji. Most of the country experienced heavy squalls and gale force winds of up to 50 knots as Hina passed by.

One death was attributed to Cyclone Hina, and crop losses were substantial in the Sigatoka Valley. Damage to buildings and infrastructure, however, was generally slight. Again, the Western and Central divisions were the most seriously affected, mainly by flooding. Sensitized by the three earlier cyclones, the threatened population responded quickly when the alert was given. Personal and property damage was thus kept to a minimum. Some 20,000 persons sought refuge in evacuation centers until the storm had passed.

Action Taken by the Government of Fiji (GOF)

The GOF began aerial and ground surveys of the cyclone devastated areas in Viti Levu on January 18. The arrival of Cyclone Nigel the following day postponed completion of the damage assessment and added to the task. Ships were also dispatched to the outer islands to make an assessment and deliver relief supplies.

The GOF's Emergency Services Committee (EMSEC) met regularly during the initial phase of the disaster to coordinate relief efforts. Relief centers were set up throughout the affected area to accommodate the homeless and serve as feeding stations. When the evacuation sites were closed toward the end of January, cyclone victims returning to their homes were provided with shelter materials and food supplies as needed.

FIJI - Cyclones

On January 22, GOF officials outlined to prospective international donors the longer-term rehabilitation needs which the government had identified. These included a six-month food-rationing project for 10,000 households to be supplied, in part, by a faster-yielding vegetable production program mounted by the Directorate of Agriculture; a rehabilitation program for approximately 10,000 shelter units; and improved internal communications, particularly between the national center for weather monitoring and forecasting in Nadi and the capital city of Suva. Administration of the relief and rehabilitation program was transferred from EMSEC to the Prime Minister's Relief and Rehabilitation Committee on January 31.

At the request of the GOF Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, a research fellow with the Disaster Preparedness Project of the Pacific Islands Development Program arrived in Fiji on January 28 to review EMSEC's procedures manual and to assist the GOF in assessing the impact of the cyclones on Fiji's agriculture.

With the arrival of Cyclone Hina on March 17, the evacuation sites designated by EMSEC were again used as a precautionary measure. The GOF officially requested external assistance in coping with the renewed damage.

The Fiji Red Cross (FRC) dispatched teams to the Lautoka and Nadi areas after Cyclones Eric and Nigel to distribute relief items (clothing, blankets, and soap) in the evacuation centers. The FRC also launched a local appeal for cash and clothing.

Other local organizations providing disaster assistance included the following:

Association of Banks of Fiji - \$14,000 in cash.

Fiji Muslim League - \$2,300 in cash.

Fiji Sixes Charity Fund - cash donations totaling \$92,000.

The Fiji Times - \$9,200 in cash.

Hare Krishna Movement - contributed to a feeding program.

Rotary International - unspecified donation.

Shell Oil Company - \$9,200 in cash.

FIJI - Cyclones

Assistance Provided by the United States Government

Based on reports of the severe damage inflicted by Cyclone Eric, U.S. Ambassador C. Edward Dillery determined on January 18 that a state of disaster existed in Fiji. He authorized the release of \$25,000 from the Disaster Assistance Account to be donated to the Prime Minister's Hurricane Relief Fund.

In view of the urgent need for temporary shelter, and in response to the Mission's request, OFDA arranged with the DOD to airlift 2,000 tents and flies, 20 tent repair kits, and 240 rolls of plastic sheeting from AID's disaster stockpile in Guam. The items arrived in Fiji on January 21 and January 22. In addition, OFDA provided 2,000 five-gallon plastic water containers purchased in Australia and delivered to Fiji over the period of January 24 to January 31. When aerial inspections revealed more severe damage to housing than originally estimated, OFDA released another 460 tents from the Singapore stockpile, along with an additional 200 rolls of plastic sheeting to assist the GOF's school rehabilitation program.

OFDA also supplied equipment requested by the GOF Ministry of Health to help prevent an outbreak of dengue fever and Ross River fever (both endemic in Fiji) and to reduce the public health hazard posed by the increased presence of rats in the cyclone-damaged areas. Two vehicle-mounted sprayers and a supply of rat poison were purchased in the U.S. and airlifted to Fiji on February 2.

U.S. Embassy and USAID personnel closely monitored the disaster situation and the USG-assisted relief effort. Ambassador Dillery and the Mission Disaster Relief Officer (MDRO) made an aerial inspection of Viti Levu by an EMSEC-chartered helicopter on January 21. On the same day, an OFDA disaster officer arrived in Fiji to supervise the receipt of USG-donated relief items and work with EMSEC in their distribution. The MDRO joined GOF officials on January 30 in making an extensive aerial surveillance to assess distribution and utilization of USG-donated shelter supplies.

Following Cyclone Hina, Ambassador Dillery made a second disaster determination on March 18. He did not exercise his disaster assistance authority; however, in response to the GOF request for additional rolls of plastic to replace that supplied earlier and damaged during Cyclone Hina, OFDA authorized the release of 200 rolls of sheeting from the Guam stockpile. The plastic, which arrived in Fiji on March 25, was required mainly to keep classrooms in the western division serviceable while undergoing rehabilitation.

FIJI - Cyclones

Governments

Australia - airlift of shelter material (1,000 tarpaulins and heavy duty plastic sheeting); army engineering reconnaissance team; transport services; airlift of water containers and other relief supplies donated by Australian non-government organizations; and a cash grant to the PMRRF. As of February 19, total assistance valued at \$1.8 million also included three airlifts containing 50 refrigerators (to store vaccines and drugs), 30 outboard motors (to enable nurses to reach isolated areas), 5,000 bedsheets, 2,000 towels, 1,450 liters of malathion, and medical and pharmaceutical supplies.

France - airlifted relief commodities including 2.2 MT of plastic sheeting, four military tents, 60 beds with linens, 4.8 MT of food, three tarpaulins, and 60 meters of rope, value not reported.

India - \$45,500 worth of medical supplies.

Japan - \$105,000 in cash to the PMRRF.

Malaysia - \$10,100 in cash to the PMRRF.

New Zealand - provided Orion aircraft (with an 18-man detachment of the Royal New Zealand Air Force) for aerial surveys; helicopter services for relief work; Wellington weather reporting; donated clothing; gave cash grants to the PMRRF totaling \$131,450, electrical equipment (24.5 km of power lines and 25 generators), valued at \$29,744, for the Fiji Electricity Authority, and the pledge of additional electrical repair assistance, valued at \$26,607.

Papua New Guinea - \$27,000 in cash to the PMRRF

Sri Lanka - one MT of tea, value not reported

Tahiti - \$30,000 in cash to the PMRRF

Tonga - \$21,100 in cash to the PMRRF

United Kingdom - donated \$55,000 in cash to the PMRRF and lent military tents and four large tents marquees currently stored in Fiji.

Voluntary Agencies and Other Private Groups

Bushell's Tea (Australia) - \$12,000 worth of tea.

East Trade Center (China, Rep. of) - \$30,000 in cash to the PMRRF.

Fiji Community in Melbourne - \$9,000 in cash.

FIJI - Cyclones

Fiji Community in North America - collected clothing and other supplies which were shipped to Fiji via donated cargo space on Canadian Air Pacific, value not reported.

Qantas Airlines - donated \$9,000 in cash to the PMRRF and cargo space for the transport of relief supplies.

Watties Food Processors of New Zealand - delivered \$4,500 worth of canned food via cargo space donated by the Reef Shipping Company.

TOTAL \$3,488,501