

Cyclone DORIAN – The Bahamas

Situation Report #1

Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF) is the leading international NGO specialized in telecommunications and new technologies in response to humanitarian crises. TSF deploys in less than 24 hours on all crisis sites (natural disasters, conflicts, population displacements) to provide means of communication to affected people and to ensure coordination, facilitating communication and access to information humanitarian organizations. The NGO is also involved in development projects using ICT solutions to respond to long-term crises.

Mission objectives

- Support The Bahamas' government's response under the leadership of National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).
- Provide means of communication for the affected populations to help them to connect to their families, and also on their way to recovery from this situation.

TSF's deployment overview

TSF teams arrived in Nassau on 4th September, and in collaboration with NEMA and Pacific Disaster Centre (PDC), reached Abaco on 5th of September, where communications were a critical need for relief coordination.

TSF installed a broadband emergency satellite connection at NEMA's Coordination Centre on the Ground, managed by the Royal Bahamas Defence Force, cut out from the capital since the beginning of the emergency.

Context

Between Sunday 1st and Monday 2nd September, Hurricane Dorian, category 5 with winds of up to 296 km/h and a 7 m storm surge made landfall on the Abaco Islands, in the Bahamas. Dorian is not only the strongest hurricane ever hitting the country, but it has also been second strongest in the whole Atlantic since 1950. After ravaging the Abaco Island, Dorian moved west and caused severe damages to the Great Bahama island.

KEY FACTS

**Connectivity for 2
coordination hubs**

50 daily users

**70 GB of Internet
data**

**4 Humanitarian
Calling Operations**

**94% first calls since
disaster**



TSF technicians have installed a Global Xpress at the EOC for all humanitarian actors



VSAT installation at first EOC at Maxwell supermarket

TSF's mission

Deployment date – 04/09/2019

While Cyclone Dorian made landfall on Sunday 1st September, TSF deployed to support relief efforts and assist the affected population. They arrived to Nassau on 4th September and were able to reach one of the most affected areas, Abaco island, the following day.

Our team brings mobile or fixed satellite equipment to reconnect relief actors to the Internet and provides communication means for the affected populations to help them alleviate psychological trauma by connecting to their loved ones and telling them that they are alive.

As a first response, through PDC coordination, TSF was the first NGO to have been granted with access to Abaco Island with the goal of setting up satellite connectivity to hook up the NEMA at Nassau with its operational branch on the field, and giving access to communication means to coordinate the response assistance to the affected populations.

As 10th September, a Humanitarian Hub for the coordination of humanitarian actors was established in Abaco, where TSF is supporting OCHA and other humanitarian actors with satellite connectivity to conduct coordination efforts from day 1.

Furthermore, on 7th September, the team also started Telecommunications Assessments and Humanitarian Calling Operations for the population in different locations of Abaco, where people have been relocated from the different affected areas of the city and surroundings. TSF's ambulant teams are providing free telephony services in these locations.

Cluster Coordination

As a member of the Emergency Telecommunication Cluster (ETC), TSF has been coordinating its activities with the teams of the Emergency Telecommunication Sector (ETS) present on the ground: WFP, Ericsson Response, NetHope, and Vodafone Foundation.

Assessments

As they carry out their operations, our teams are assessing the status of telecommunication services.

Local network

- As 5th September, only SMS went through from time to time. But little improvements were seen on the Local Mobile Network Operators services. Communications are being re-established in some parts of the island of Abaco. 4g got back to Abaco on the 7th by the end of the day. As 10 September, connectivity issues are still present in the north of the island with cities still lacking out of any communication service.

Electricity

- Grid is out in Marsh Harbour, as well as in Treasure Cay and Coopers Town. Responders have to rely on generators.

Transportation

- Cars and fuel are scarce in all Abaco's Island.
- The road to the north of the Island is accessible until Coopers Town, but it has been cut right after this town, due to a collapsed bridge. This event left isolated the cities of Foxtown and Crown Heaven and surrounding areas in Little Abaco.
- Access to airports and seaports was progressively improving during the first days after the Hurricane, allowing the evacuation of thousands of people and also the entrance of the humanitarian aid.

Support to relief operations

In addition to the satellite connection installed at the authorities coordination centre, a second satellite connection has been installed on 10th September on the International Humanitarian Hub the very day of its installation, supporting OCHA coordination activities and other humanitarian organizations efforts. The coordination hub is Located at the Government Building in Abaco. Both of connections together have supported the coordination of more than 20 organisations.

Telecoms Centers (10/09/2019)	
No of organizations	25
No of users	85
No of devices	156
Total GB	70

Assistance to affected populations

Humanitarian Calling Operations (HCO)

In the aftermath of hurricane Dorian, the telecommunication network on the Abaco island have been off for several days and in the north of the island it is still not operational or very unstable. Without network and electricity, the population that decided not to evacuate the island had no possibility to contact their families or loved ones to make sure they survived and to tell them they were safe.

Our teams have covered four locations so far, based on the needs identified in collaboration with the local administrators:

- Central Abaco School in Marsh Harbour city (~200 displaced persons)
- City Center in Coopers Town (~1000 affected persons)
- Coopers Town Church (~200 displaced persons)
- Treasure Cay Airport (more than 150 affected persons)
- Little Abaco (more than 600 affected persons)

In each location, TSF provided 5-minute free calls for people to call anywhere in the world. The majority of the calls were made to other islands of the Bahamas, to Haiti and the USA and lasted more than 900 minutes altogether. 94% of the calls were the first contact people had with their loved ones since the disaster.



Humanitarian Calling Operation in Central Abaco School

The beneficiaries were able to know the situation of their relatives in other affected areas, to arrange next steps in the recovery phase, to provide information on their situation and in general to improve their situation thanks to the possibility to hear a familiar voice. The authorities met during the operations and the beneficiaries particularly appreciated TSF's service since it allowed people to receive information after having been completely cut off for nearly a week.



Abaco Island - Map of operations

Next steps

HCO

While the humanitarian assistance keeps arriving to Abaco island, the area in the north of Coopers Town, remains only accessible by boat, due to a collapsed bridge. First assessments are being carried out in the area. TSF has reached this zone in order to evaluate the needs of communication of this population and has determined that, due to the re-establishment of the communications and the evacuation of thousands of people from the island, the urgent needs of reaching means of communication are decreasing. For this reason, TSF will reduce the number of humanitarian calling operations only to those places in which needs are confirmed, and will start with its setting down.

Coordination Centres

As 4G network is partially restored, our support will reduce progressively. TSF will ensure that longer term solutions are found to guarantee connectivity continuity in the sensitive sites for relief coordination.

The VSAT terminal installed at the authorities' coordination centre at Maxwell supermarket will be donated to NEMA, in order to guarantee the availability of internet connection.

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