

1. INTRODUCTION

UNICEF has provided life-saving assistance and protection to children in emergencies since its inception. This is guided by the principle that children in emergencies have the same needs and are entitled to the same rights as children in normal situations.³ In the late 1990s, in a concerted attempt to learn from the mistakes made by humanitarian actors in Rwanda and Burundi, the Balkans and elsewhere, a range of initiatives were taken by leading humanitarian response agencies to improve the effectiveness and accountability of humanitarian assistance. UNICEF has been closely engaged in the international effort to develop common minimum standards to ensure that those affected by conflict and disaster, receive timely, effective and appropriate life-saving assistance in emergencies.

UNICEF has also developed and adopted its own set of Core Commitments for Children (CCCs) in Emergencies. These commitments provide a structured logic to the provision of assistance to children and women in emergencies. First, focus on those interventions proven to be essential for immediate survival and protection.⁴

While UNICEF as a whole has a wealth of emergency experience worldwide, the earthquake and tsunami in Western Province and Solomon Islands was the first large scale humanitarian disaster that UNICEF has responded to in the Pacific. Given this limited experience, UNICEF Pacific staff can be justly proud of the numerous achievements and strong role that UNICEF has played in the initial response and early recovery efforts in Western and Choiseul Provinces. Inevitably, the crisis has highlighted numerous areas where UNICEF can and must improve. Natural disasters are unfortunately common occurrences in the Pacific.

This evaluation represents the first systematic and external assessment of UNICEF's response to a large scale emergency and among the first detailed participatory evaluations of a humanitarian agency's response in emergency and initial recovery phases of the Solomon Islands disaster.⁵ The evaluation aims to identify lessons from this emergency response which, if learned, should assist UNICEF to prepare and respond more effectively to provide lifesaving assistance and protection to children and women in future disasters.

1.1. Evaluation background and purpose

The overall purpose of evaluating UNICEF recent and ongoing emergency response to the recent earthquake and tsunami in Solomon Islands is to:

- identify major achievements during the emergency response and recovery phase (from 2 April 2007 to 1 June 2007) and during the initial reconstruction and rehabilitation phase (June 2 to September 30) including impact on beneficiaries;
- note constraints and gaps in that response; and
- make recommendations (as necessary) for a better response to similar situations in the future and identify potential policy implications for the future.

1.2. Scope, Methodology and Constraints


Scope

The scope of the evaluation as defined in the TOR (Annex 1) was quite broad, allowing the team to engage with a wide range of stakeholders and issues to develop an overall perspective of UNICEF's response. Successful humanitarian emergency response requires high performance across all aspects of an emergency response organization, from effective leadership, to sound assessment, to efficient supply and logistics, to coherent and well-targeted programming, to reliable monitoring and accountable financial management. The evaluation team has thus taken a holistic approach to the evaluation and attempted to reflect a variety of perspectives on UNICEF's key achievements, lessons learned and recommendations.

³ UNICEF, 2004a. Emergency Field Handbook. A guide for UNICEF staff.

⁴ UNICEF, 2004b. Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies. http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/CCC_EMERG_E_revised7.pdf

⁵ However there have been at least three real-time evaluations including a NDMO led Lessons-learned workshop in Honiara from 11-15 June, an expanded Disaster Management Team meeting comprised of UN stakeholders in Suva with a phone hook-up to Honiara, and a lessons-learned evaluation of World Vision's response held in Brisbane in August 2007.



The key issues and questions for the evaluation included:

1. Examining UNICEF's success in meeting core commitments for children in emergencies.
2. Identifying lessons pertinent to emergency response from the perspective of the OECD/DAC criteria for evaluating humanitarian action: e.g. relevance, appropriateness (including timeliness), efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and connectedness, coverage, and coherence.
3. Assessing UNICEF's overall responsiveness and achievements across all sectors; in terms of geographic coverage within the affected area; amongst key categories of the beneficiary population; in terms of overall coherence and according to the results and targets identified in the Results Matrix of the Emergency Management Plan (Annex 6). The evaluation team was asked to identify strengths and weaknesses of UNICEF's response.
4. Monitoring UNICEF's adherence to international principles and standards in terms of participation, capacity building, and alignment with national and provincial government priorities.
5. Examining UNICEF allocation and use of funds, and assess the extent to which they were in line with the needs of those most affected and were cost effective
6. Finally, examining the evidence to suggest that UNICEF has learned from the response and promoted sharing of lessons from this and other disasters, applied lessons from previous disasters including the Indian Ocean Tsunami and put in place systems to monitor, evaluate, learn and adapt from its ongoing work.

Focus of Evaluation

The team has focused its efforts in identifying lessons learned and developing action-oriented recommendations for the primary client of the report, namely staff and management of UNICEF Pacific based in Fiji, Solomon Islands and other Pacific Island countries. However many of the team's findings and recommendations are of immediate relevance to other stakeholders in the Pacific region, and particularly those engaged in current recovery efforts in the Solomon Islands following the April 2 earthquake and tsunami.

Methodology

The methodology for this evaluation has been developed in accordance with terms of reference developed by UNICEF Pacific's Policy, Advocacy, Planning and Evaluation Programme (PAPE), UNICEF Evaluation Report Standards, and other key documents specifying international standards for humanitarian evaluation design.⁶

The evaluation team adopted a participatory approach throughout aiming to create space for frank feedback by affected communities, UNICEF staff, and government and non-government partners; to this end, a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used. The team has tried to ensure that the purpose of the evaluation was well understood by all stakeholders and has sought to involve UNICEF Pacific staff from all levels of the organization. It is hoped and intended that recommendations are accessible and relevant to staff at all levels of the organization, thus promoting ownership and ultimately sustainability of any future emergency preparedness and response interventions by UNICEF. **The evaluation's focus is on the performance of UNICEF Pacific as an organization, not on the performance of individuals.**

Key data sources included:

- Damage assessments, situation and other reports, meeting minutes, monitoring data, and policy documents, warehouse, procurement and other administrative records.
- Interview and focus-group discussion responses by key informants among primary stakeholders (both beneficiaries and non beneficiaries within the affected population)
- Interview and focus-group responses by affected populations, UNICEF staff, NGOs and government partners).
- Written email responses to an informal questionnaire survey by UNICEF staff in Suva, Honiara and Gizo.
- Direct observation of work processes, activities, commodities, sites and facilities.

A **desk review** of key documents was carried out, namely:

⁶ OECD DAC (1999) 'Guidance for Evaluating Humanitarian Assistance in Complex Emergencies' Working party on Aid Evaluation, Paris; ALNAP (2002) ALNAP Quality Proforma: The Evaluation of Humanitarian Action (EHA) Process As Revealed By Evaluation Reports (see ALNAP Annual Review series).

- Recent international experience and best-practice standards in the evaluation of humanitarian action including tsunami and earthquake responses by UNICEF.⁷
- Reporting and other documentation by UNICEF regional and Suva office (assessments, emergency management plans, project documentation, situation and monitoring reports, staffing and security policies and other key records and documents).⁸
- Reporting and other documentation, including on lessons-learned, provided by other implementing and coordination agencies.

Semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted with a range of informants drawn from primary stakeholders, Solomon Islands Government, and Provincial government in Western and Choiseul Provinces, UNICEF management, operational and programme staff in Suva and Solomon Islands and representatives of other implementing agencies. Key informant interviews can provide useful detail, suggest future lines of enquiry and can give an indication of views of overall impact and effectiveness. Any individual views expressed need to be considered in context and, inevitably, are subject to individual bias. Informants were encouraged to be frank and were given an assurance of confidentiality.

Focus group discussions were held with UNICEF staff, representatives of NGO partners and primary stakeholders (as identified above). While such discussion may elicit a wider range of views than interviews they are subject to manipulation or self-censorship and may be dominated by stronger personalities. They need to be carefully facilitated to avoid gender or other bias. Community meetings were held in some communities and where possible were followed with peer group meetings with women, youth, men and teachers.

A **written questionnaire** was developed to seek the views of UNICEF staff in UNICEF's multi-country office (Suva), field office (Honiara) and sub-field office (Gizo). Former UNICEF consultants were emailed to invite comment. The evaluation has benefited substantially from the considered contributions of these staff and consultants.


A **verbal questionnaire** was developed specifically for use with primary stakeholder populations in Western and Choiseul Provinces. The questionnaire was partially developed during a workshop with staff from UNICEF which included staff from Western and Choiseul Provinces. Further questions were included by the evaluators based on UNICEF's Solomon Islands Emergency Management Plan (Version 5 04/06/07). One evaluator (a female Solomon Islander) and the field assistant (male Solomon Islander), who both had prior experience conducting verbal questionnaires in Western and Choiseul Provinces, conducted the survey with target groups. This has been a very useful tool, considering that a range of beneficiary perspectives (up to 10 in some cases) were collectively presented. However, the quality of answers is very much subjected to interviewer-bias, gender-bias and interpretations of the question. The use of "pidjin-englis" as the language of enquiry rather than local vernacular may have increased potential for misunderstanding. Analysis of this data-set reveals many similarities as well as differences in the type and detail of response from meetings with just women compared to just men, or compared to communities as a whole. Predictably, women were generally able to be more specific regarding details related to health and children.

Direct observation during field visits of work processes, facilities, written records, programme deliverables and utilization by beneficiaries, also provided an important means of verification. In some cases the team was able to utilize detailed field reporting by current and former UNICEF consultants as a baseline for their observations. Participant observation of attitudes and behavior of all stakeholders was also important, although allows room for bias or misinterpretation.

Story-telling/Most significant change (MSC): Staff and primary stakeholders were often invited to tell stories about their experience – both regarding the tsunami and the international response, including by UNICEF. This was an effective tool for acquiring data on the impact and effectiveness of UNICEF activities and advocacy. Two case studies developed from this data have been used to place UNICEF's achievements, constraints and lesson-learned into context.

⁷ E.g. UNICEF (2006) 'The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami Disaster: Evaluation of UNICEF's Response (Emergency and Initial Recovery Phase) Indonesia.

⁸ UNICEF Pacific's Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan was updated in 2006 and again in March 2007, a month before the Solomon Islands Disaster. This evaluation has found, however, that in the event of a real emergency, the plan was insufficiently detailed to provide useful guidance.



A **review workshop** was held in Honiara, led by the Evaluation team, to discuss substantive issues emerging from the first draft with the Evaluation's Steering Committee and other stakeholders.

Impartiality, Confidentiality and Ethics

Every effort was made to ensure that the evaluation was as ethical and its results as objective and impartial as possible. With the exception of protocol meetings and staff consultations, UNICEF staff were not present during meetings with key informants, implementing partners or beneficiaries. The confidentiality of the evaluation was stressed throughout and except where informants have expressed a willingness to be identified, confidentiality of responses and data has been maintained. This includes consultations with UNICEF staff at regional, country and field office where staff were provided with the opportunity to submit response directly to the independent evaluators via email. All photographs taken by the evaluation team were with the informed consent of the subjects. Other photos used in the report have been used with the permission of the photographer.

Children under the age of eleven were not formally included in data collection except by non-invasive methods such as drawing and discreet observation while engaged in discussion with older representatives of their communities.

Data Analysis

The majority of data collected were qualitative in nature. Where appropriate, quantitative data such as supply distribution, population coverage, and finances are presented. Key findings were verified by triangulation, that is, by comparing a significant response (eg. 'UNICEF coordinated very well' or 'Our village did not receive a UNICEF school-in-a-box kit' or 'Our household did not receive a UNICEF family kit') with data or responses provided by other independent sources (interviews, focus group or observation). The team met to review site reports to examine the findings and investigate those that were unusual (eg. a men's discussion group demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of the role of a Community Welfare Volunteer while a women's group did not) for possible sources of error. Community responses summarised in section 4 under 'beneficiary perspectives' have been used to represent the range of responses from primary stakeholders and represent the understanding of all three evaluation team members (i.e. not just the interviewer).


Methodological Constraints

The small size of the evaluation team (two external evaluators and one field assistant) and the limited time available were the most significant constraints. The team had 25 working days including literature review, revision of methodology (including the design and testing of a questionnaire), field visits, data analysis, report finalisation, review meeting. The team notes with regret that time or circumstance did not permit views to be gathered from all relevant stakeholders. Particular gaps include the absence of interviews or focus group discussions with the following important categories of stakeholder.

- Community Welfare Volunteers
- Former Play Safe Area staff
- Other major CBO partners in relief assistance (eg. Luru Peoples Association)
- Church leaders and organisations in Western or Choiseul Provinces.

The logistical complexity of travelling to very remote field sites by small open boat was also a major constraint. Several hours of travel each way were required to reach most field sites. Selection of sites was somewhat constrained by logistics and the time available. Air travel also posed problems. Due to an airline strike the team was unable to travel to Taro from Gizo by plane as scheduled and undertook a five hour journey by boat to maintain their field schedule. Poor weather conditions then delayed the team's return flight from Taro to Honiara by two days, limiting the time available for data analysis and report writing. While the team received invaluable support from UNICEF staff in Suva, Honiara, Gizo and Taro, the team arranged most of the logistics for the mission themselves which also consumed a substantial amount of time.

The small size of the team necessarily limited how many sites it was feasible to visit and how many interviews it was possible to carry out. The team had relevant expertise in participatory evaluation design and implementation experience, tsunami and earthquake emergency response and early recovery programme management, disaster assessment expertise and substantial country experience in Solomon Islands. Notably, however the team did not include members with expertise in reproductive health and nutrition, Water and Sanitation (WATSAN) or child protection. The team has worked within these constraints by making the most of available expertise within UNICEF. It is recommended that health and/or WATSAN expertise be included in the composition of future evaluation teams.



We would like make two further points when considering the findings and recommendations of this evaluation.

Firstly, with regard to the evaluation's findings, it is important to acknowledge that we, the evaluation team, were not there during the initial response. If you are not 'in the emergency' it is very difficult to have a clear picture of what was done and why. Or what the competing priorities and essential trade-offs that had to be made on a day-to-day basis. And just how difficult it is to do 'everything at once' including meeting the urgent needs of the beneficiary population while ensuring adequate consultation with government and keeping the paper work on track.

Secondly, to the extent that there were any gaps or limitations to UNICEF's response to the Solomon Islands disaster, whether in Suva, Honiara or Gizo offices, should in no way be taken to imply criticism of the individuals who were there at the time. In the view of this evaluation team they have not only done their level best, they have gained a great deal of respect and esteem from the communities they have worked to assist and from government and non-government partners they have worked alongside.

1.3. Structure to the Report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows. Section 2 begins with a general background to Solomon Islands, including an outline of the UN's presence in country. This is followed by an overview of the developmental context of the two Provinces – Western and Choiseul – affected by the April 2nd 2007 disaster. The disaster itself is briefly described.

Section 3 introduces UNICEF's guiding principles and frameworks for emergency response and describes how UNICEF and UNICEF Pacific responded to the disaster. Each sub-section examines various Core Commitments: to Education; to Health and Nutrition; to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene; to Child Protection; and to HIV and AIDS. The sub-sections follow the same structure: the context for the Core Commitment response; the nature of UNICEF's response; a summary of key achievements; an analysis of constraints and gaps in the response; and lessons and recommendations.

Section 4 looks at several Programme issues including UNICEF Pacific's Emergency Preparedness and Response capacity in general, together with partnerships, inter-agency coordination, and funding during the Solomon Islands emergency response.

Section 5 considers general Operations and Management issues. Amongst the topics covered here are: supplies; logistics; information technology, security and safety; office management and leadership; human resources; reporting and internal communications.

Section 6 assesses UNICEF Pacific's emergency response against OECD/DAC criteria: relevance and appropriateness; efficiency; effectiveness; impact; coverage; sustainability/connectedness; coherence; and includes important perspectives from beneficiaries interviewed as part of the evaluation.

Section 7 concludes the evaluation with a listing of 76 recommendations. These recommendations are intended to be constructive suggestions to provoke internal dialogue within UNICEF to identify ways to fine tune programmes and operations to produce a more effective emergency and initial recovery response from 2008 onwards, and in the case of a future emergency. They are uncoded and require further discussion within UNICEF.

2. BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

2.1. Country context

The small Pacific nation of Solomon Islands consists of an archipelago of volcanic islands and coral atolls adjacent to Papua New Guinea in the west and stretching over 1700 km towards Vanuatu in the east. The country encompasses a total area of 1.34 million km². The population is estimated at 478 (2005 est.)⁹ and is ethnically composed of Melanesian 94.5%, Polynesian 3%, Micronesian 1.2%, other 1.1%, unspecified 0.2% (1999 census).¹⁰ There is a small but economically significant population of Chinese and other resident expatriates.



The Solomon Islands has one of the lowest Gross National Income (GNI) per capita in the Pacific at US\$590.¹¹ Reliable statistics for literacy, numeracy and many other basic indicators for human development are not available but are considered to be among the lowest in the Pacific. Access to schooling beyond primary is limited by cost and transport. Access to health services for many communities is limited and the quality of service provision is constrained by the availability of trained medical professionals, essential drugs and effective cold-chain storage for vaccinations.

Strong island-based cultural identities and rivalries, uneven development, weak governance and inequitable access to power, resources and opportunities, contributed to a small but debilitating conflict between 1999 and 2003. Despite a substantial Australian-led police and military intervention in 2003 to stabilize law and order and rebuild the economy – the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) – the political and economic situation is precarious. Most development is centred on the capital Honiara and the eight provinces of Solomon Islands have received little investment in infrastructure or services since Solomon Islands was granted independence from Britain in 1978.

⁹ <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/solomonislands.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bp.html#People>

¹¹ Government of Solomon Islands and UNICEF (2005) Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Solomon Islands. Suva: UNICEF Pacific.



2.2. United Nations in Solomon Islands

Solomon Islands is one of three priority countries for UN engagement in the Pacific and has benefited from an increased UN presence in the last five years. Three key UN agencies, UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA have been engaged in an extensive consultation process with the Solomon Islands Government to develop a comprehensive UN Country Programme Action Plan for 2008-2012 in Solomon Islands. Through this plan and in partnership with relevant Government ministries, the three UN agencies will seek to address activities within the following four focus areas:

1. Equitable economic growth;
2. Democratic governance and human rights;
3. Equitable social and protection services;
4. Environment and natural resources management (including disaster preparedness).

The plan provides for USD11 million in development assistance through Regular Resources (core UN funding) and provides for a funding gap of USD21 million enabling agencies and the Solomon Islands Government to approach donors for additional funding.

UNICEF presence in the Pacific

UNICEF Pacific is based out of Suva, Fiji, where a multi-country office with responsibility for 14 countries throughout the Pacific is located. The multi-country office reports to headquarters in New York through the East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO) in Bangkok. EAPRO has oversight of quality and performance monitoring of UNICEF Pacific programmes.

UNICEF presence in Solomon Islands


UNICEF Pacific established a permanent UNICEF Solomon Islands field office in Honiara in Solomon Islands in 2003. Prior to the earthquake and tsunami the office was staffed by three UNICEF staff and one volunteer. The Officer-in-Charge of the Honiara office has been acting in the position since September 2006. A small sub-office staffed by one national officer was established in 2005 in Buala, Isabel Province, to manage the pilot Child Friendly schools programme. Prior to the earthquake and tsunami, UNICEF relations with government were almost exclusively focused at the central government. There was no substantive interaction with provincial government in Choiseul or Western Provinces.

2.3. Development context in Western and Choiseul Provinces

Village-based communities in Western and Choiseul Provinces of Solomon Islands, as in most areas of the country, are highly resilient and resourceful and in many cases better equipped to handle natural disasters than most urbanized populations. A strong sense of community and reciprocity is characteristic of most villages (though not immune from village politics) while skilled utilization of natural resources including fish, garden and forest foods and fibers, mean that most communities have effective subsistence coping mechanisms in the initial period after a disaster.

While the strengths of communities in both provinces are numerous, they are faced with substantial development challenges which pre-date the disaster and are common throughout Solomon Islands and the wider Pacific. Geographic remoteness and scattered settlement patterns mean the population is highly dispersed and for most practical purposes only accessible by sea, imposing severe constraints on effective delivery of basic services such as health and education. Communication in most communities is limited to HF radio.

Linguistic and cultural diversity, rapid population growth, limited opportunities for post-primary education and few employment opportunities increase the vulnerabilities of children and women. Both Western and Choiseul Provincial governments faced severe staffing shortages prior to the disaster. Health and educational services have been poorly resourced and maintained. Substantial health concerns include chronic under-nutrition of children under the age of five, high rates of malaria, and high incidence of preventable childhood diseases including anemia. Sanitation is poor in most communities and was substantially below SPHERE standards of 1 latrine per head of population even before the disaster. While most communities have good access to good quality drinking water supplies, some communities do not, providing vectors for disease and poor hygiene. Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) prevalence is high in both provinces and HIV is a significant and growing risk. Child protection issues are also of considerable concern.



While both provinces are home to productive marine and forest ecosystems, utilization of these resources has not been well managed or equitably distributed. Economic opportunities are limited – particularly for more remote communities while the cost of living is high.

Western Province

Western Province is one of the largest provinces in Solomon Islands and is a popular destination for tourists. Its population of 62,000 (1999) is one of the highest in Solomon Islands. As a popular tourist destination the small capital Gizo was relatively developed prior to the disaster but most other islands had very limited infrastructure or access to services. The Shortland Islands, which border Bougainville, are particularly remote and poorly serviced but there is great variability in access to services even for communities relatively close to Gizo.

Gizo became the centre of the local emergency response and coordination efforts with most agencies choosing to base themselves in the town due to the availability of accommodation, its central location to much of the disaster area and availability of basic services.

Choiseul Province

Choiseul Province is one of the more remote provinces in Solomon Islands and is located in the far Western part of the Solomon Islands with close proximity to Bougainville of Papua New Guinea and Shortland Islands of Western Province. The population is estimated at more than 24,000 (2005). The majority of the population live along the coast, accessing schools, clinics and markets by walking, traditional canoes or open boats with outboard motors.

Provincial government is centred at Taro, on a small island located northwest of Choiseul Island. As one of the most recently created provinces in Solomon Islands (until 1992 it was administered by Western Province), Choiseul has not had the same level of investment and infrastructure development as some older provinces. The provincial capital Taro has no mains electricity, limited communications ability, and the provincial administration has had difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff due to the limited and inadequate housing conditions as well as financial constraints.

2.4. Overview of the nature, scale and impact of the Solomon Islands 2007 Disaster


On Monday, 2nd April 2007, (7.40 am local time) Solomon Islands experienced a major earthquake measuring 8.1 on the Richter scale with an epicenter located under the sea bed, 45 km SSE of Gizo Island in Western Province.¹² The earthquake caused a tsunami, or in some areas a sea-surge, that within minutes devastated coastal villages in its path in Western Province and along the central southern coast of Choiseul Province. Measuring up to 3 meters in height and varying in intensity and behavior, the tsunami destroyed or severely damaged houses and other vital infrastructure such as schools and health clinics. According to official estimates by the Solomon Islands National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), a total of 52 people including 23 children were killed by the disaster while an estimated 36,500 people in 304 communities in Western and Choiseul Provinces were directly affected.

Tsunami – a new word for an old event

The Japanese word, 'tsunami' meaning literally 'harbour wave' is a new word for most rural Solomon Islanders but oral history in some communities has preserved memories of similar events. Although no earthquake or tsunami of similar magnitude has occurred in living memory in the western Solomons, most communities knew to run to higher ground when the sea rushes out after a violent earthquake. A taxi driver from Iriqila on the island of Vella la Vella, now living in Gizo, explained that in his community the word 'Oja' had been used to described tsunami-like events. "There is a big stone from the sea which the old people say was brought by Oja a long time ago now. You can go and ask people there to show you 'Oja vegae lado' [Tsunami brought rock]. They say it was maybe more than 100 years ago..."

Many communities responded to the disaster by evacuating to higher ground and established temporary, or in some cases permanent shelters. Frequent aftershocks caused fear of another tsunami in many communities, preventing households from rebuilding at the site

¹² UNESCO 2007. Geologic Survey of the 2 April 2007 Solomon Islands Earthquake and Tsunami.



of the previous village and stalling recovery efforts. Most communities did not receive or were not convinced by information on the cause and likelihood of future tsunamis. The National Disaster Council (NDC), provincial governments, the UN, scientific organizations and NGOs have tried to convince communities to resettle on their original land where it is easier to fish, find water, build shelter and provide services such as education and medical services but fear, politics and the lack of clear and consistent information has prevented success in most cases.

An international geological survey expedition, sponsored by the US National Science Foundation, UNESCO and the Solomon Islands National Disaster Council, examined the effects of the tsunami and advised communities that a further tsunami is very unlikely. In some communities such as Puzavai Community High School this advice had a major and positive impact on the decision to reopen the school within two weeks of the tsunami. Prior to meeting with scientists from the survey team the school principal had planned to close the school permanently. Given information from a reliable source as opposed to rumour gave him the confidence to reopen the school. A key lesson in this story is that getting the credible information to the right people at the right time can enable them to make an informed choice about their options. Many communities have chosen to rebuild inland but land disputes and disruption to livelihoods make this a sub-optimal outcome.

On the island of Ranongga in Western Province, geological uplift associated with the earthquake caused large areas of the island to rise over 3 meters. Several massive landslides occurred simultaneously claiming 2 lives in the village of Mondo and burying water sources. One witness described that the quake was so strong, and resulting dust cloud so thick, that no man could stand or even see the person on the ground next to him. Geological studies have revealed that the original village at Mondo was located on the debris of an ancient and active landslide. The Mondo community has acted on advice of scientists from the Solomon Islands Department of Mines and Energy and the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) that the site of their former village is no longer safe and has moved further inland to a safer site but one which is a considerable distance from the sea and source of livelihoods based on fishing.¹³

¹³ ibid

3. UNICEF'S RESPONSE

3.1. Guiding Principles and Frameworks for UNICEF's Response

UNICEF's mandate for responding to emergencies is guided by the principles of Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. UNICEF's response in emergencies is driven by:

- UNICEF Core Commitments for Children (CCCs) in Emergencies
- SPHERE Minimum standards for Humanitarian Response
- The Red Cross and NGO Code of Conduct.

This evaluation has been guided by the following frameworks:

- OECD/DAC Criteria for Evaluation of Humanitarian Assistance
- Action Learning Network and Accountability Project (ALNAP) Quality Proforma for the Evaluation of Humanitarian Action.
- UNICEF Guidelines for Evaluation.

3.2. Overview of UNICEF's Response

UNICEF Pacific's Senior Managers in Suva became aware of reports that a large earthquake followed by a tsunami had occurred in Western Province of Solomon Islands shortly after the event on Monday, April 2nd 2007. While initial information was scarce and it was reportedly 'very difficult to get a sense of the scale of the disaster', a decision was made immediately to deploy the Suva-based Emergency Focal Point (EFP) to Honiara to get first hand information to inform initial planning and decision-making. As it became increasingly clear that dozens of people had been killed and that several thousand people must have been affected, UNICEF Pacific put measures in place to enable a full-scale response.

Meeting the Core Commitments and Learning from Previous Disasters

UNICEF Pacific was closely guided in the design of its response by the CCCs. As further information on the scale of the disaster was gathered UNICEF Pacific prepared and released an immediate needs document seeking an initial US\$500,000 funding for a response (see section 4). UNICEF's response to this emergency was also informed by the lessons of recent evaluations of UNICEF's response to previous disasters – notably the December 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. A 'lessons-learned' evaluation of UNICEF's response in the Maldives – a context and scale considered broadly similar to the disaster in Solomon Islands – was examined closely by PAPE in Suva and the implications for UNICEF's response in Solomon Islands were drawn to the attention of UNICEF Pacific management and staff involved in the response.

By end of week 3 post-disaster, version 1 of the Solomon Islands Emergency Management Plan (EMP) was completed. The plan was results-based, attaching clear targets to UNICEF Pacific's emergency response strategies, and rights-based, ensuring that activities were closely aligned with the CCCs. Immediate priorities and needs were identified in health and nutrition water and sanitation, child protection, education, and HIV and AIDS.

Establishing a UNICEF presence in the field

"One of the best things has been setting up an office right here where the problem is"
- Provincial government, Western Province

A temporary field office was established in Western Province in week 2 of the emergency. UNICEF currently operates from two rooms in Gizo Hotel – one for administrative and operational staff and the other for programme staff. UNICEF also maintains a small warehouse with approximate storage capacity of 700 m³. As at late November 2007, the sub-field office currently had a total of 11 staff including 4 expatriates and 7 National staff. This number fluctuated considerably during the emergency and will reduce in the coming 6 weeks as the 4 expatriate staff complete their contracts.

UNICEF did not establish a permanent presence in Choiseul Province. Emergency response activities in Choiseul have been managed from the Gizo field office. A number of UNICEF staff and consultants have undertaken assessments and monitoring visits in Choiseul and in October 2007, a national staff person was assigned temporarily to work for four weeks co-located with the Provincial Education Office. In general UNICEF's commitment to 'being where the problem is' (the only UN agency to make such a commitment) has been appreciated and effective but been centered on Gizo, limiting the agency's capacity to work as effectively in Choiseul as it has in Western Province.