Highlights

- A 7.8-magnitude earthquake that occurred on 9 December near Solomon Islands claimed the life of one person and injured another, damaged or destroyed 439 homes and damaged 21 schools and four health clinics, according to initial damage assessments.
- The Weather Coast area of Makira Province, southern Malaita Province and eastern Guadalcanal Province were the most severely impacted; Provincial Emergency Response Teams are verifying the severity and scale of the impact.
- Distribution of humanitarian assistance has commenced to impacted communities in the Provinces of Makira and Malaita.
- To date, UNICEF has provided the following material support: a 1,500-litre collapsible water tank; 3,000 pieces of handwashing soap; 5,000 containers for carrying; 80 water buckets; and, two cartons of purification tablets. UNICEF is supporting the development of key health messages to raise community awareness about earthquake-related health issues and to develop a checklist to mainstream child protection into humanitarian response.
- Disaster authorities, partners and stakeholders concurrently are responding to two other emergencies: a 7.9-magnitude earthquake on 17 December near Papua New Guinea affecting the Shortland Islands and flash flooding that occurred late in October.

Initial Solomon Government assessments suggest 9,769 people affected in three provinces.
Situation overview & humanitarian needs

Nearly 10,000 people in the Solomon Islands Provinces of Makira, Malaita and Guadalcanal were affected by a 7.8-magnitude undersea earthquake that struck on 9 December. The earthquake occurred at 4:39 a.m. on 9 December 2016 62 kilometres west southwest of the Makira provincial capital of Kirakira in Solomon Islands, triggering a tsunami in Makira Province. The earthquake claimed the life of one person and injured another, affecting a total of 9,769 people, the Solomon Islands National Disaster Council has reported. The earthquake damaged or destroyed 439 homes and damaged 21 schools and four health clinics.

The Weather Coast of Makira, southern Malaita and eastern Guadalcanal were the most severely impacted from the earthquake and tsunami, according to the National Emergency Operation Centre (NEOC) of Solomon Islands and Provincial Emergency Operation Centres (PEOCs). The severity and scale of the impact currently is being verified by Provincial Emergency Response Teams (PERTs), which have been deployed to the three affected provinces to carry out initial disaster assessment (IDA). Data collected from the Provinces of Malaita and Guadalcanal had not been reported to the Solomon Islands National Disaster Council as of the end of the reporting period.

Based on IDA, health sector needs include medical supplies for health clinics and a nurse aid post. Additional sentinel sites are required in Makira Province to allow for better surveillance of disease and medical surveillance also is required in Hailalua in Guadalcanal Province. Water storage containers and purification tablets also are needed in Guadalcanal Province.

The safety of impacted schools needs to be assessed and repair work on classrooms, dormitories and teacher housing completed during school holidays to ensure the 2017 academic year commences as scheduled. Access to safe drinking water, sanitation facilities and clean-up of debris in damaged schools also are priority actions. Needs related to child-friendly spaces, replacement of school supplies, school feeding and psychosocial support are to be assessed further.

The Solomon Islands Government and its stakeholders and partners have begun deploying humanitarian assistance to impacted communities in the Provinces of Makira and Malaita.

Note: In addition to the 9 December earthquake, the Solomon Islands National Disaster Management Council, partners and stakeholders concurrently are responding to other emergencies. Disaster management authorities are assessing the impact of a 7.9-magnitude earthquake that occurred on 17 December near New Ireland Province in Papua New Guinea and affected the Shortland Islands in Western Province. Response is ongoing to communities affected by flash flooding that occurred late in October in northwest Choiseul Province and Shortland Islands.

Humanitarian leadership & coordination

The Government of Solomon Islands is leading and coordinating the overall humanitarian response to the disaster through the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO). Once PEOCs were fully functioning in Makira, Malaita and Guadalcanal on 14 December, the NEOC scaled down to “standby activation mode”, but continues to actively monitor the situation and response activities.
Intersectoral meetings are ongoing to coordinate sectoral response, with participation from the National Disaster Operations Committees (NDOC) for health, education, protection, infrastructure and camp management. The meetings also are an opportunity to confer on sectoral impacts and allocation of resources for response. Non-governmental organizations, Solomon Islands Red Cross (SIRC) and in-country UN agencies have provided specific support through relevant NDOCs. The Recovery Coordination Committee, chaired by the Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination, met on 14 December. A multi-stakeholder meeting was held 20 December.

UNICEF is active on the health, education, protection and WASH committees. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is supporting the NDMO in coordination. Additional support specific to assessment analysis was embedded into the NEOC assessment information management team with the arrival of an OCHA expert on 13 December. The World Health Organization is providing technical support to the Health committee. RedR Australia deployed a structural engineer, with support from Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, who arrived on 13 December to assist the NDOC for infrastructure with a detailed sector assessment of four health clinics that were damaged in Makira.

The World Food Programme is providing in-country support to the NEOC logistics function team. The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force is supporting civil military coordination through NEOC/PEOC operations function teams. SIRC, Oxfam, Save the Children Australia and World Vision also are providing humanitarian assistance to the affected areas.

Disaster assessment & initial response

Solomon Islands National Emergency Response Team (NERT) has embedded its support into Provincial Emergency Response Teams (PERT) in the specific areas of assessment, emergency supplies distribution and disaster management and coordination at PEOCs.

Assessments are ongoing in all three of the affected provinces. IDA data from Malaita and Guadalcanal had not been received by the Solomon Islands National Disaster Council as of the end of the reporting period.

NERT teamed up with six PERTs to complete assessments and provide initial relief on the Weather Coast and northern portions of Makira. PERTs are completing IDA in Makira using Kobo, a smart phone assessment tool, and household surveys. The teams were expected to complete IDA on 21 December and a report on their findings is expected to be available in early January 2017.

Five PERTs are completing assessments in Malaita.

Emergency relief distribution is to commence once assessments are completed.

UNICEF’s response

UNICEF is participating in detailed sectoral assessments of the earthquake’s impact and providing technical assistance to NDOCs for health, education and protection, which are chaired by relevant Solomon Islands line ministries. In addition to the support that has been provided to date, UNICEF stands ready to provide additional technical and material support, as needed, upon request from the Government of Solomon Islands.

Education

- A UNICEF education officer participated in a detailed assessment mission organized by the NDOC for education to collect information on damage to infrastructure and assistance needs in Makira Province.
• Though schools currently are closed for holidays until the end of January 2017, the initial rapid assessment in Makira Province indicated a need for learning shelters and access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities.
• UNICEF has prepositioned stocks such as school-in-a-box kits, tarpaulins, tents and backpacks to support educational-related needs.

Health and Nutrition

• The Ministry of Health and Medical Services has established a communication task force under the NDOC for health to develop a Strategic Health Communication Plan for the earthquake response. UNICEF provided technical support, during the reporting period, to the task force to raise community awareness about earthquake-related health issues through radio spots.
• Information, education and communication materials with key messages about drinking clean safe water and using proper toilets and hygiene practices were provided as part of a package of WASH emergency communication materials on red eye-related infections, breastfeeding, nutrition and diarrhoea that have been distributed to affected provinces.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

• UNICEF has made available, to date, the following material support in response to a request from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services: a 1,500-litre collapsible water tank; 3,000 pieces of handwashing soap; 5,000 containers for carrying water; 80 water buckets; and, two cartons of purification tablets. The items are ready for shipment to Makira and other provinces. The items will help address red eye-related infections and diarrhoea in affected communities.
• Since initial assessments suggest the disaster caused significant damage to water resources and water collection facilities, UNICEF expects to provide further WASH-related support.

Child Protection

• UNICEF provided support for the development of a checklist to mainstream child protection into the humanitarian response, which was endorsed by the NDOC. The checklist is a technical reference for NDOCs and field-based workers to use during planning, implementation and monitoring of sectoral responses to the emergency.

Communication for Development

UNICEF is supporting the development of key health-related messages to be used in drama scripts, church and community announcements, night meetings and awareness-raising initiatives as part of the overall health communication response to the earthquake.
The Government of Solomon Islands had made no official request for international assistance as of the end of the reporting period. NEOC has prepared a service delivery plan for the relief and early recovery phase and the Government of Solomon Islands has made available SBD3,000,000 (approximately US$386,000) to cover costs associated with the 9 December disaster response.

UNICEF spokespeople

Solomon Islands;
English and Korean: Yun Jong Kang
Chief of UNICEF Solomon Islands Field Office
Email: yikang@unicef.org
Tel: 677 749 6172

For more information, please contact:

Sheldon Yett
Representative
UNICEF Pacific
Email: syett@unicef.org
Tel: 679 992 5427

Vathinee Jitjaturunt
Deputy Representative
UNICEF Pacific
Email: vjitjaturunt@unicef.org
Tel: 679 992 5613