

Emergency Response

Solomon Islands Tsunami

Background

At 7:29 am Monday 2 April, 2007 an earthquake measuring 8.1 on the Richter scale shook the Solomon Islands. Its epicentre was just 25 kilometres from Gizo, the Western Province Capital. The quake caused a 3 metre *tsunami* that hit the coast and swept away homes and possessions. On the first day, 53 people lost their lives.



The resulting devastation caused hardship and trauma to hundreds of families and communities across two provinces. Most Solomon Island villages are built on the coastal fringes which gave little or no protection from the waves.

Most families live a subsistence lifestyle, and the loss of a house and contents, tools, canoes and outboard motors, chainsaws and equipment represent a life's work and commitment. These were the essential means for further family education, enterprise, primary health and contributions to community infrastructure development.

Quick front-line relief was sent through the fast action of the Solomon Islands Government and its international friends. Now, the rebuilding of lives and communities must commence.



TEAR Australia is supporting a local partner organisation, *Kokonut Pacific Solomon Islands*, in its efforts to help communities in four coastal locations to rebuild their livelihoods through the production of virgin coconut oil.

Recent visits highlighted the need to assist individuals and communities reach a sense of normalcy and optimism for the future. With limited resources, restarting life is a monumental task. Fortunately, their coconut groves have mostly been unaffected, though the infrastructure and equipment has been lost. The rejuvenation of four Direct Micro Expelling (DME) production sites will enable communities to turn their coconuts into oil and earn much-needed income.

As communities struggle with fear in the wake of the trauma, they need to return to normal life. Resumption of daily routines can bring back the life and hope, activity and empowerment that lifts the spirits of shaken people. Work can encourage people back into meaningful endeavours.

These coconut oil presses will bring enormous benefits to the operators and the surrounding communities. Each DME unit employs six people every day, with jobs shared so as to provide a reliable source of cash income to many village households.

Furthermore, each DME unit needs a constant supply of coconuts, which can be purchased from the groves of palms belonging to the surrounding community. This ready source of cash, available almost daily, will assist a further group of families to rehabilitate their homes and livelihoods.

The organically-certified Virgin Coconut Oil economic activity also generates significant by-product industries: feeding pigs and chickens from the residual de-fatted coconut meal, making soap and lantern oil, and charcoal from the coconut-shell.

TEAR Australia is seeking to raise AU\$26,050 from donations to cover:

- repairs to equipment
- rebuilding sheds
- purchase of coconut supplies that were swept away
- lost fuel
- revival of soap making
- freight of material
- training and supervision of construction and repairs



Photo: The tsunami destroyed homes, infrastructure and business assets across many tiny islands.

Revival of the virgin coconut oil production will help families to get back into the routine of work, and earn much-needed cash income.

To make a donation, go to: <http://www.tear.org.au/appeals/solomons/>

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