

Tropical Cyclone Pam – Vanuatu – March/April 2015

Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF) has been in Vanuatu territory since 16th March 2015 – the day after the passage of Cyclone Pam. The following is an overview of the operations that have been made possible thanks to the support of its partners and the European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO).

Port-Vila, Vanuatu on 14/04/15

CONTEXT

Tropical Cyclone Pam's 250km/h wind speeds caused notable destruction, not least of all to communications infrastructures, cutting a huge majority of the 65 inhabited islands from the capital city, Port-Vila, as well as overseas. There were 11 confirmed fatalities and 166,000 people affected over 22 islands¹.

DEPLOYMENT

Emergency response team I: A team of 5 ICT specialists deployed to preposition in Brisbane on Sunday March 15th 2015. The TSF team arrived on Monday 16th in Port-Vila alongside United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams.

Emergency response team II: A second team was deployed on 22nd March 2015 to reinforce TSF relief efforts in Vanuatu's most affected provinces.

Contacts for all deployed members can be found in the table below.

CONTACTS

Name	Position	Location	Phone Contact	E-mail contact
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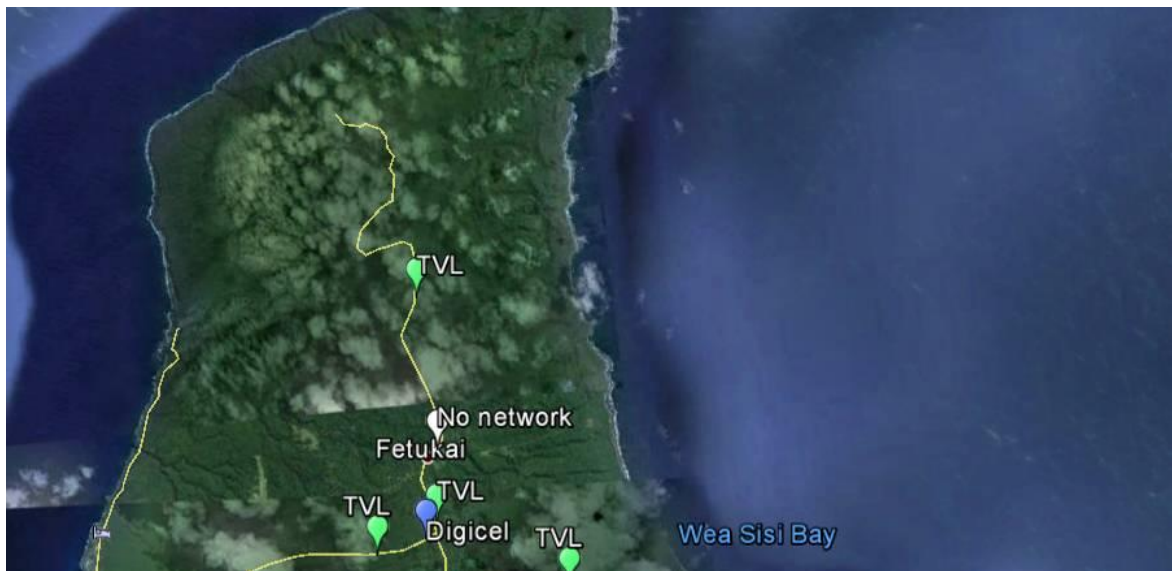
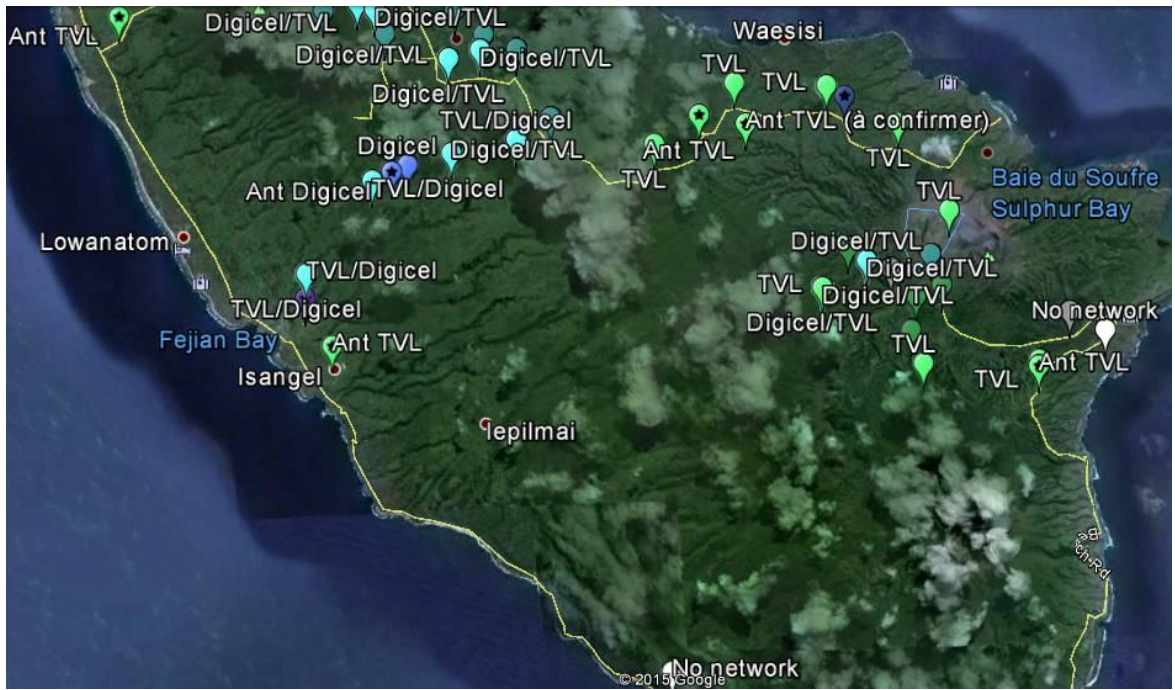
¹ Vanuatu: Tropical Cyclone Pam [Situation Report No. 8](#) (as of 22 March 2015) - UNOCHA

TELECOMMUNICATIONS ASSESSMENT

Following the Tropical Cyclone, mobile operators mobilised their technical teams to provide a rapid restoration of the mobile telecommunications networks, especially in Port-Vila where the majority of humanitarian organisations were initially concentrated. The massive arrival of relief workers in Port-Vila put pressure on the GSM network and the quality of calls was somewhat deteriorated with regular interference and loss of connection.

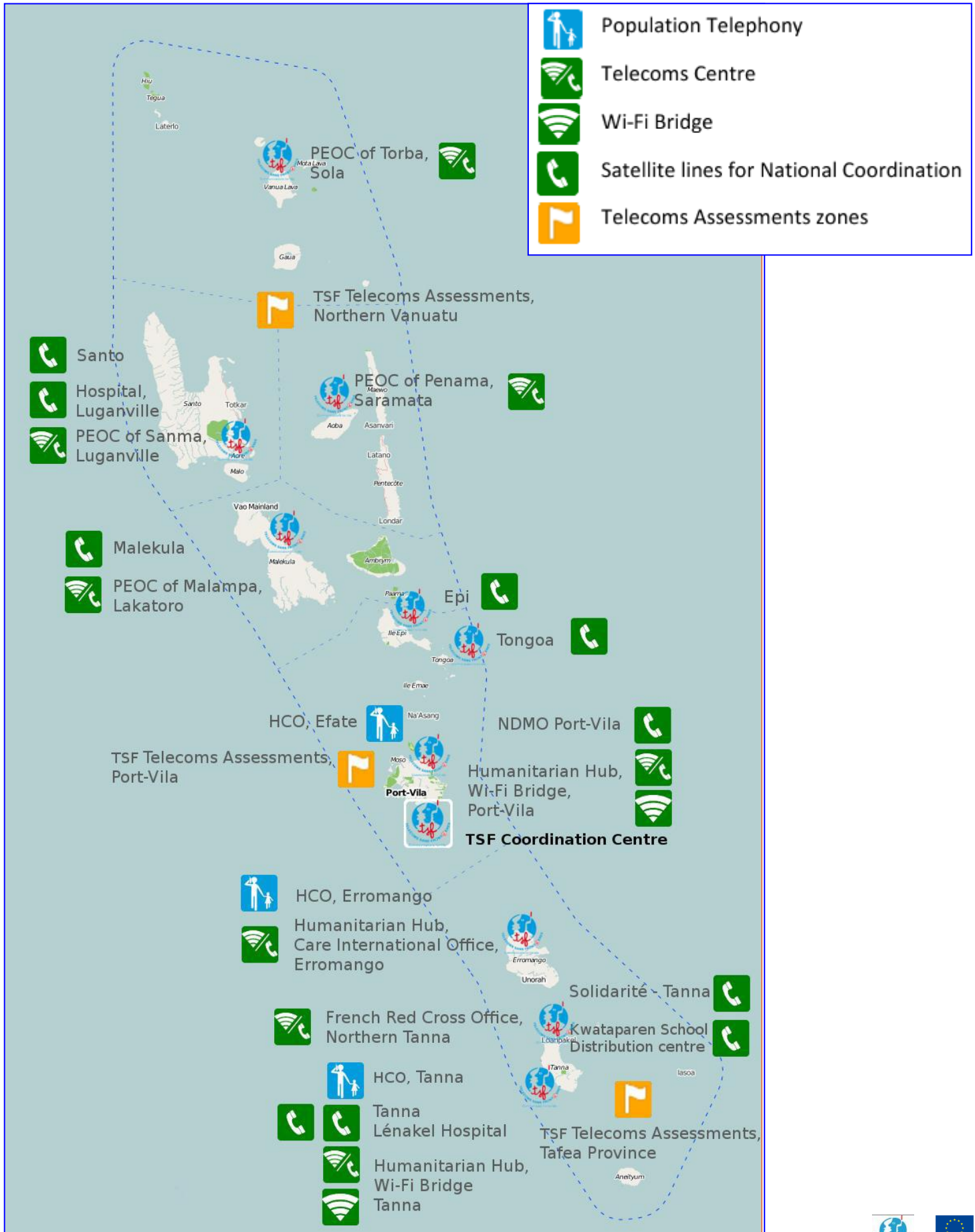
The telecommunications assessments carried out by TSF in all 6 provinces highlighted that telecom response required a particular focus in Taféa, where Erromango and Tanna were out of coverage. These needs were apparent not only for organisations working on relief efforts, but also populations that had been unable to access communications means since the cyclone.

Since this stage, several antennas have been restored in both Tanna and Erromango meaning that coverage is coming back to its regular service. Assessments carried out on 12/04/15 demonstrated that Digicel and TVL coverage in Tanna is as follows:



Island coverage (Tanna) as of 11th April 2015

AREAS OF INTERVENTION



SUPPORT TO NATIONAL RELIEF OPERATIONS

As part of its support to the humanitarian operational sphere, TSF has been facilitating coordination relief efforts by providing satellite communications capacities to government agencies and international NGOs working in Vanuatu. All connections are put in place to deliver common services to all, allowing other governmental departments or NGOs to benefit from these connections.

Partnered with UNOCHA, TSF deploys systematically alongside its Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams. Such was the case in Vanuatu where TSF prepositioned in Brisbane with United Nations teams in order to be present on the ground in the direct aftermath. TSF supports UNDAC in their field assessments by providing communications technology and technical support to facilitate the coordination of their post-disaster surveys.

The impact of the category 5 Tropical Cyclone on the telecommunications infrastructures meant that coordination efforts from the international NGOs and government agencies were somewhat hindered as communication between Vanuatu's islands was rendered impossible thus potentially slowing down the much-needed relief efforts required to rebuild and replenish Vanuatu's communities. In agreement with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer of the Government of Vanuatu (OGCIO), Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF) provided satellite communications, both voice and data connections, to each of the six Provincial Emergency Operational Centres (PEOC) in order to strengthen the coordination capacities between the provinces and ensure that each PEOC Director had the necessary communications tools to make certain that assessment reports on his provinces needs could be sent to overseeing bodies.



TSF installs a common services satellite connection in the French Red Cross Office in Green Hill, Tanna

SUPPORT TO RELIEF OPERATIONS ²

The following table demonstrates the usage of each satellite voice and data connection according to its location.

Installed at	Town	Island	Province	Communication	MB used
PEOC	Luganville	Espiritu Santo	Sanma	Voice & data (Satellite)	968 MB
PEOC	Sola	Vanua Lava	Torba	Voice & data (Satellite)	6940 MB
PEOC	Saramata	Ambae	Penama	Voice & data (Satellite)	2275 MB
PEOC	Lakatoro	Malekula	Malampa	Voice & data (Satellite)	78 MB
PEOC	Isangel	Tanna	Taféa	Data (Satellite)	250 MB
Humanitarian Hub	Port-Vila	Efaté	Shefa	Data TVL (Wi-Fi bridge)	N/A
French Red Cross Office	Green Hill	Tanna	Taféa	Data (Satellite)	3811 MB
Care International		Erromango	Taféa	Data (Satellite)	1154 MB
TOTAL CONSUMED (MB)					15,476 MB

² All data consumption statistics are estimated up to and including 09/04/2015

NATIONAL COORDINATION

It was also part of TSF's objective to use satellite communications technology in order to enhance national coordination efforts. Satellite telephones were used in provinces to boost coordination in the domains of aid distribution, medical care and disaster response.

Attribution	Town	Island	Province	Minutes consumed
Hospital	Luganville	Espiritu Santo	Sanma	555
PEOC	Lakatoro	Malekula	Malampa	299
PEOC	Isangel	Tanna	Taféa	702
NDMO Director	Port-Vila	Efaté	Shefa	109
PEOC		Epi	Shefa	1108
Hospital		Tongoa	Shefa	1606
Hospital	Lenakel	Tanna	Taféa	316
Distribution centre	Kwataparen	Tanna	Taféa	686
Solidarité Tanna	King Cross	Tanna	Taféa	149
Lion's Club	Middle Bush	Tanna	Taféa	42
TOTAL MINUTES				5572

The distribution of satellite phones for Provincial Emergency Operational Offices was carried out as part of TSF's engagement with the United Nations Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC).

Within the framework of its membership with the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster, TSF is also committed to backing up the Cluster in terms of technical support, and provided assistance in the installation of Wi-Fi bridges for the Humanitarian Coordination Hub in Port-Vila and the common services connection situated at the PEOC in Isangel, Tanna.

HUMANITARIAN CALLING OPERATIONS

Calling operations consist in dispatching Emergency Response Teams out to villages and communities and offering free national or international calls using satellite telephones. These calls are the opportunity for the affected population to reach out for help, often asking for financial or material aid from their friends and family abroad, or sometimes, a simple call just to inform their loved ones that they are fine after the cyclone hit their community.

Following evaluations of the damage to the telecommunications structures, Télécoms Sans Frontières identified the following areas for its calling operations.

- ▶ TANNA, Province of Taféa
- ▶ ERROMANGO, Province of Taféa
- ▶ NORTHERN EFATE, Province of Efaté

TANNA

Dates of operation

22/03/15

-

ONGOING

N° of beneficiary families

646

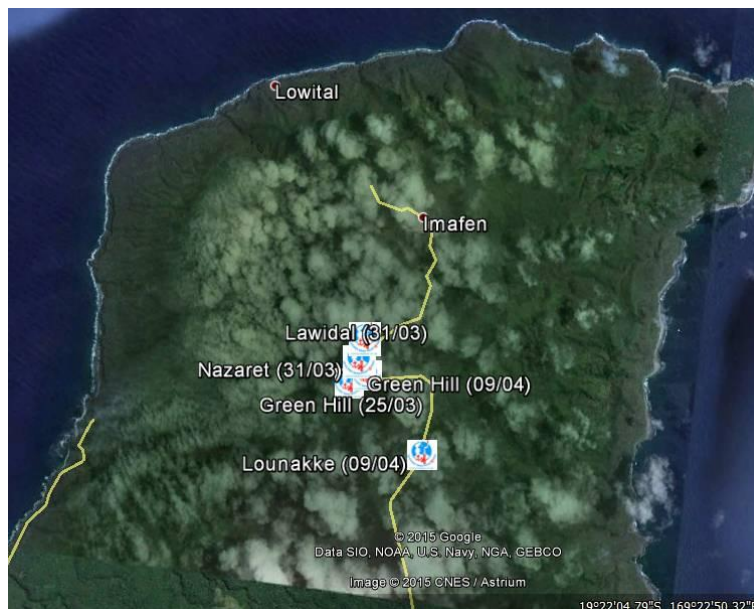
N° of calling minutes

4,055

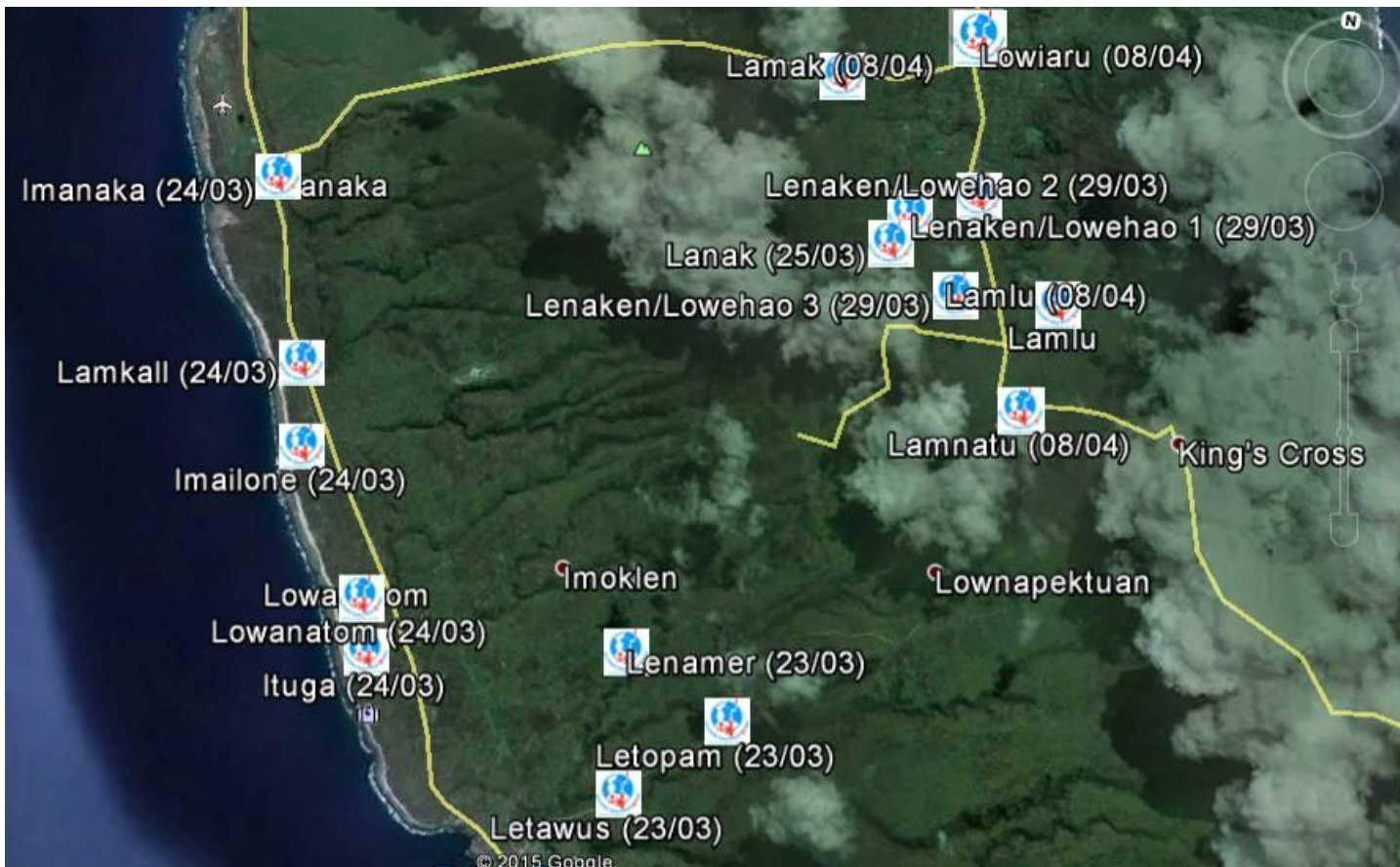
N° of communities covered

52

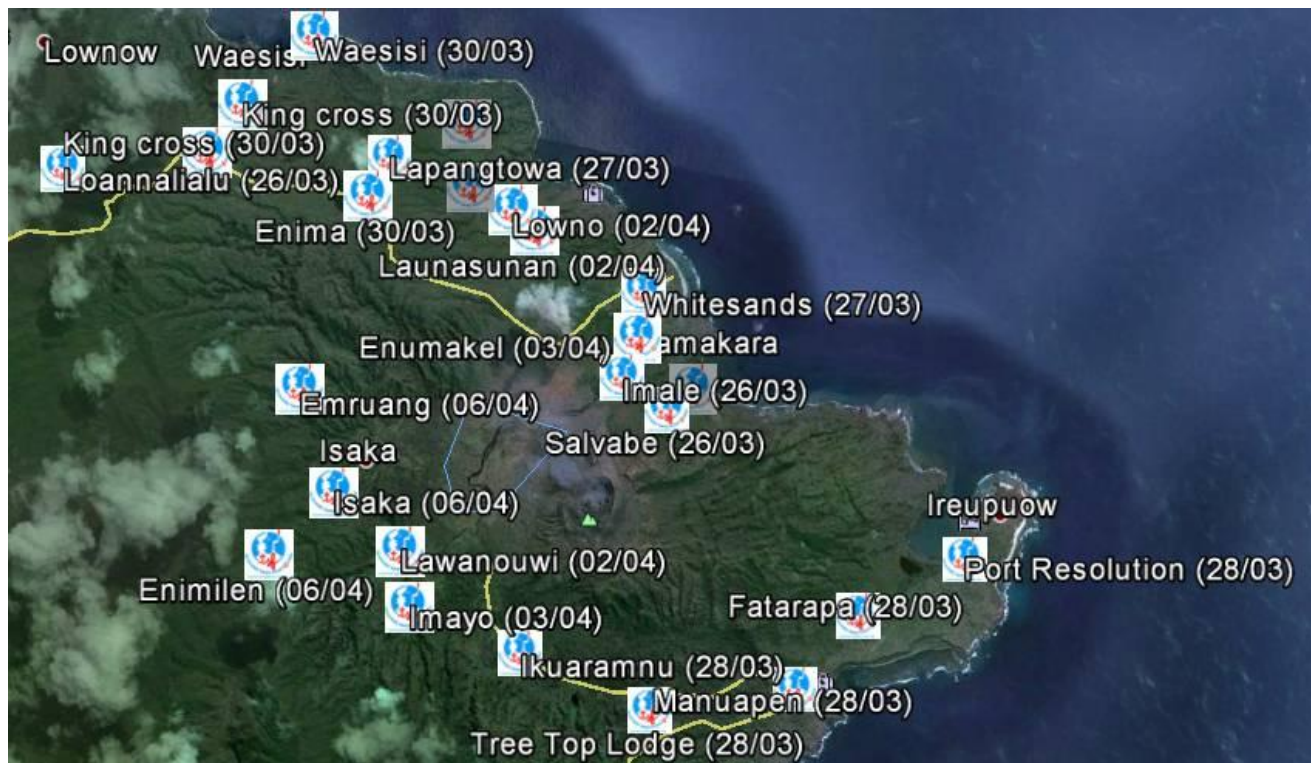
North Tanna



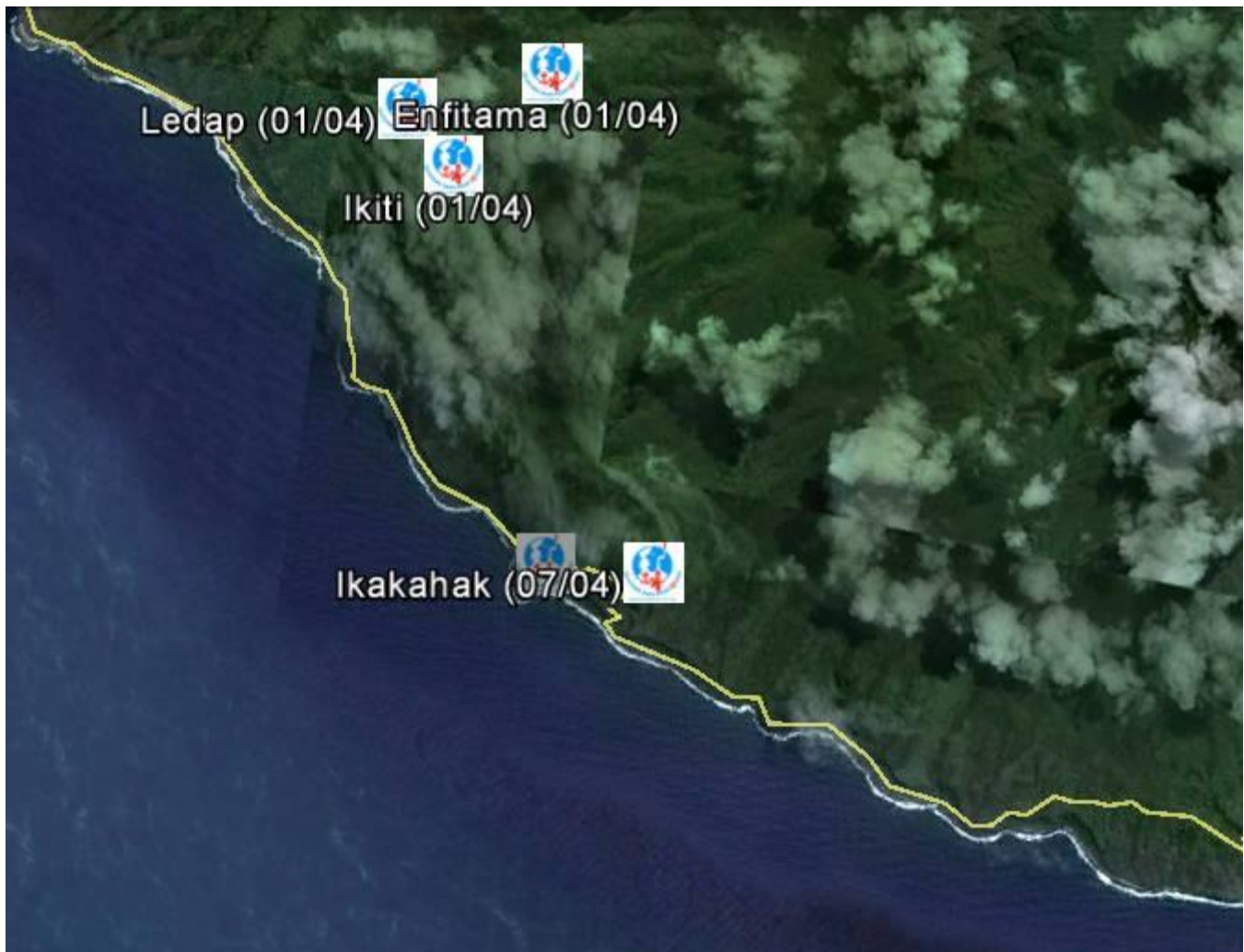
Western Tanna & Middlebush



Eastern Tanna



Southern Tanna



Problems encountered

Logistics on the island of Tanna posed some initial problems for TSF's Response Teams. Following the cyclone, many roads were blocked by fallen trees and road infrastructure was highly damaged meaning that the pick-ups could only access certain areas. The weather also played an important role in targeting areas; the more it rained, the more difficult it was to tackle the south of the island given the quantity of wet ground making navigation near on impossible. Priority areas were identified and calling operations were pursued as and when the conditions permitted.

ERROMANGO

Dates of operation

23/03/15

-

28/03/15

N° of beneficiary families

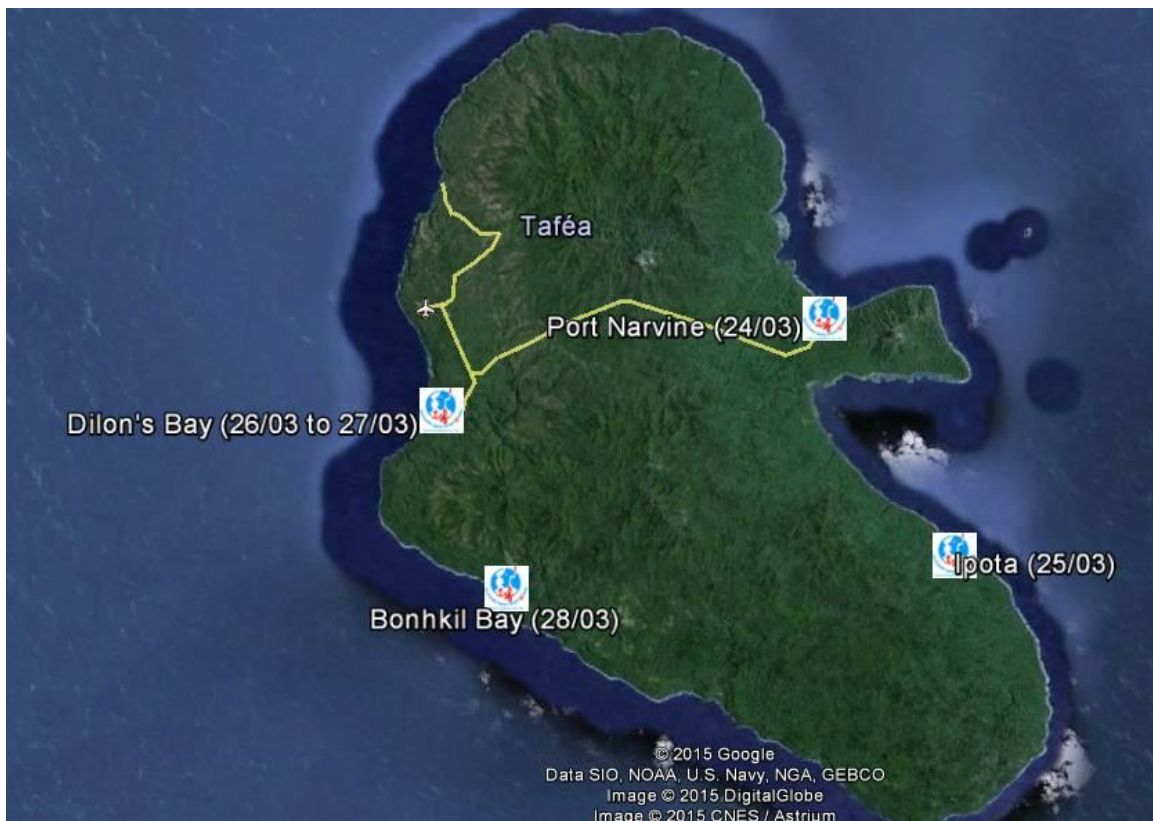
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N° of calling minutes

483

N° of communities covered

4



Problems encountered

There is no road infrastructure on the island of Erromango meaning that access to the four main communities had to be made by boat. This problem was resolved by accompanying NGOs on their food distributions and carrying out calling operations simultaneously.

NORTH & EAST EFATE

Dates of operation

20/03/15

-

21/03/05

N° of beneficiary families

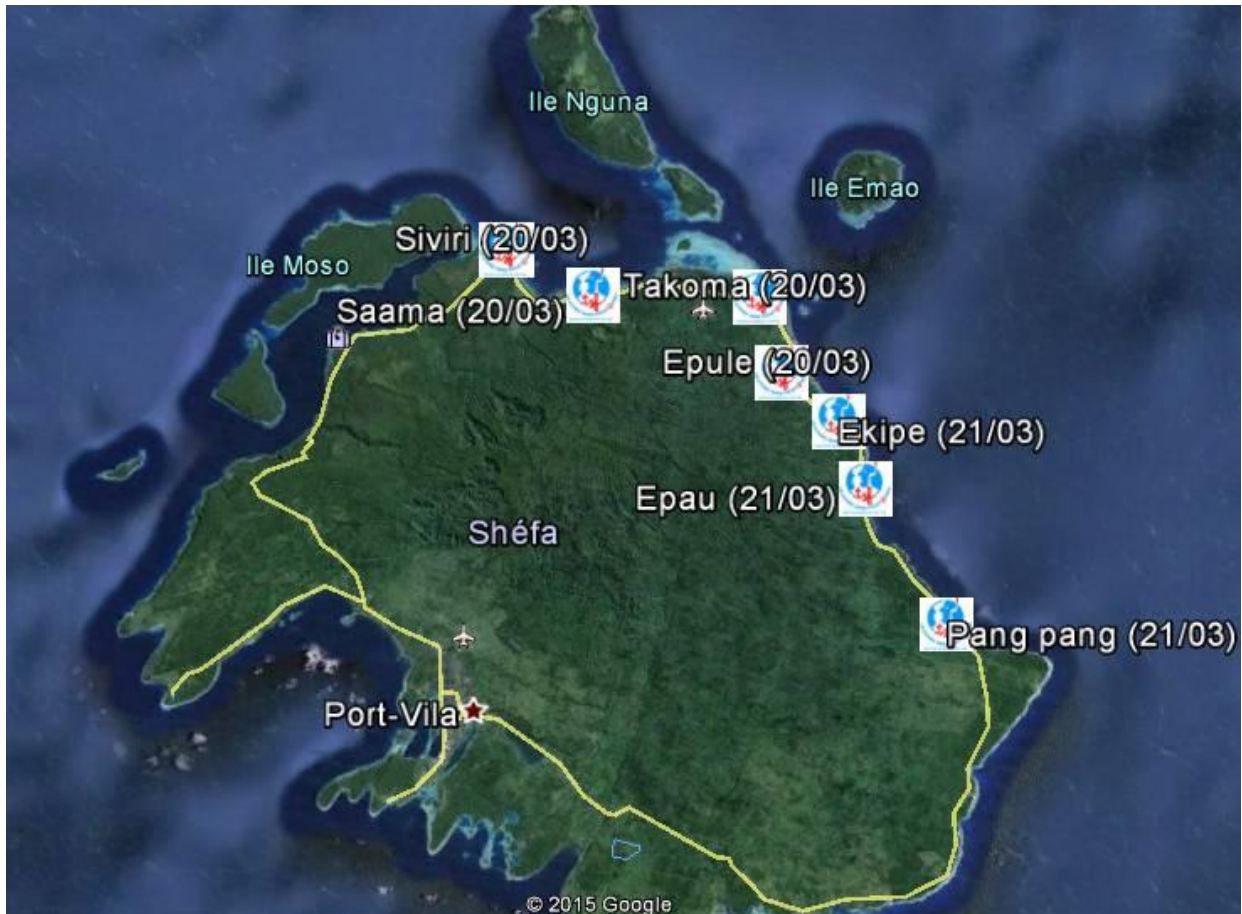
79

N° of calling minutes

596

N° of communities covered

7



Problems encountered

No particular problems were met in Efaté. The GSM network was not affected as much as those on surrounding islands thus operations lasted only 2 days.

CASE STUDY

Marie | 50 years old | Nazaret, Tanna

Marie, a lady of around 50 years residing in Nazaret, North Tanna, had a 23 year old son who was studying in the capital, Port-Vila. She was delighted when the call went through; indeed, it was the first time Marie was able to speak to her little boy in 3 weeks. However, a swift change in her reactions was noticed, as the initial smile dropped into painful tears. Marie explained later on that her son had been hit by corrugated roofing during the storm; the thick metal had torn through his thigh, leading to infection and then emergency amputation. As any mother would do, Marie took a boat the next day to join her son in Port-Vila.

BENEFICIARY ACCOUNT

Dorothy | 60 years old | Lapangtawa, Tanna

I think communication is very important, especially after this cyclone. It has damaged a lot of things and even the network, we are not receiving anything. Our families living away from us are worried about us and we are worried about them, but we are thankful that you have come here today to help us out with communication. We can have news of our families, our friends who are living in other parts of Vanuatu or other parts of the world, and they can hear about us, what we are doing, what happened to us, and all of this, is thanks to TSF.

