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Information bulletin

Papua New Guinea: Drought and Frost

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Glide n° [CW-2015-000116-PNG](#)

Date of issue: 5 September 2015

Date of disaster: 31 July 2015

Number of people affected: estimated 2 million

This bulletin is being issued for information only and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation. The Papua New Guinea Red Cross Society (PNGRCS) will, however, accept direct assistance to provide support to the affected population.

[<click here to view the map of the affected area, or here for detailed contact information>](#)

The situation

The National Weather Service (NWS) on 7 August 2015 declared the country will be experiencing a severe El Nino event, which is forecasted to continue for 8 – 10 months with reduced rainfall in all parts of the country. The situation is expected to be the worst since the 1997/98 drought. The [National Disaster Centre](#) (NDC) estimated that 2 million people are affected. The Provincial Disaster Center (PDC) of Chimbu Province reported 24 people confirmed dead as a result of prolonged drought in the Highlands region.

Papua New Guinea (PNG) has been experiencing a prolonged dry spell since May 2015. The normal rainfall expected in November is now not expected until first half of 2016. This is coinciding with the dry season which usually occurs between May and October. These seasons vary throughout PNG and are considered more pronounced in the Port Moresby area and less so in the northern areas of the country.¹

The most affected areas in the country are Kandep and Sirunki in Enga, Lalibu-Pangia and Upper Mendi (Southern Highlands), Tambul (Western Highlands), Menyama (Morobe), Kundiawa-Gembogl, Sinasina-Yongomugl, Gumine, Chuave, Nomane, and Kerowagi (Chimbu), Unggai-Bena and Henganofi (Eastern Highlands), Rabaul and



Creeks and rivers are drying up in most parts of the country and heavily impacted on the food crops which provide main source of food to the country's population.

¹ International climate change adaptation initiative, 2011

Kokopo (East New Britain), Goilala (Central), and Manus.²

The impact of El Nino is also being felt in Madang, East and West Sepik Provinces, New Ireland, and Oro Provinces. Parts of Manam and Karkar Islands in Madang have already reported long dry period, and a similar situation is being observed in other parts of the country.

The Enga Province (300,000 population) is experiencing the worst frost in 40 years. There are concerns over water and garden food shortages. While the majority of food crops (sweet potato and potato gardens), plants and trees are destroyed and creeks and rivers are also drying up in the agricultural hub of the Tambul district of Western Highlands Province. Bush fires are also reported in some areas. These regions of the country are agriculturally rich and some of the biggest suppliers of fresh vegetables. The loss of produce is already being felt in urban areas which rely on supplies from the highlands farms. Shortages of sweet potato have been reported in Lae. Severe frost has also been reported in the Southern Highlands Province (Lalibu, Nipa, Mongol) and Central (Kosipe, Goilala) damaging both food crops and vegetation.³ Apart from the loss of food crops, the drought also impacted the hospital operations in Kundiawa of Chimbu Province and the mines operation along River Fly of Western Highlands Province.

Provinces with large areas of high intensity agricultural land use and that have been severely affected by below-average rainfall include Enga, Chimbu, Eastern Highlands, Western Highlands and Southern Highlands. Severe food insecurity could potentially result in displacement of a large number of affected populations leading to a breakdown of law and order, widespread inter-tribal conflicts over scarce resources and a spike in incidents of gender-based violence.⁴

The 3rd National Disaster Response Committee (NDRC) meeting was convened on 18 August and attended by representatives from the Government Technical Agencies, UN agencies, international non-governmental organisations and the Papua New Guinea Red Cross Society (PNGRCS). The NDC's summary updates revealed that almost all of the Highlands Provinces are experiencing Category 3 and 4 droughts on the Government's drought scale. This indicates that conditions are difficult with reduced food availability and security, with some famine food being eaten, and water available only at distance. There are reports of babies and elderly people becoming ill as a result of the severe drought. Coastal provinces are less affected.

It has been reported that streams and rivers that were used as primary water sources have dried up. Populations in affected areas are resorting to secondary water sources (traditionally used for washing and bathing) as drinking water and in food preparation. This increases the risk of diarrhoea and typhoid already prevalent in PNG. Diarrhoea is a major cause of morbidity in the country, and deaths associated to poor water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) access and practices are estimated at 6,164 per year.⁵ Access to safe water and improved sanitation in PNG is and has been an on-going challenge. UNICEF in 2011 stated that access to improved sanitation in PNG is estimated to be at 19% (compared to world average of 64%) and access to water at 40% (world average 89%). Furthermore, the distance between homes and available water sources is increasing, which places an increased burden on women who are primarily responsible for managing household water and also puts them at greater risk of violence.

According to the PNG WASH Policy 2015-2030, the Provincial and District Administrators are responsible for planning and delivering WASH infrastructure and services to communities with funding and support from humanitarian and development partners. NGOs are stated to be the implementers of rural and peri-urban WASH programmes. It is expected that humanitarian partners will play a large part in the response in particular in areas of rural WaSH.

The [National Weather Service](#) (NWS) has urged all stakeholders to plan their response for the entire country and not specifically to one particular region. The government is exploring solutions to address water shortages.

The [National Agricultural Research Institute](#) (NARI) has also advised that the food production will be low and financial support from the government is required for rapid multiplication of drought tolerant crops and distribution.

² <http://reliefweb.int/report/papua-new-guinea/two-million-hit-drought-frost-reports-claim-14-dead>

³ CARE PNG: El Nino monitoring – August 2015

⁴ WFP PNG: Brief on the risk of an El Niño-induced drought – August 2015

⁵ Institute for Sustainable Futures: PNG WaSH sector brief

Government response

At provincial level, the PDCs continue to monitor the situations and have started small scale initial responses in some affected areas. The PDCs are updating the NDC regularly.

At the national level, the NDRC has had three meetings on El Nino. A draft drought plan was presented and discussed during the second meeting. Meanwhile, the third meeting has endorsed the immediate deployment of a multi-agency assessment team to the Highlands region and another three teams to the New Guinea Islands, Momase and Southern regions at a later date.

Other humanitarian agencies' response

The UN Clusters (WASH, Education, NFI/Shelter/CCCM, and Health and Nutrition) have organized meetings to discuss the situation and response actions; however there are no concrete outcomes from these meetings yet. Some NGOs/INGOs are likely to respond within their capacity within existing project areas, while many are still monitoring the situation.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The PNG Red Cross Society's National Emergency Operation Centre (NEOC) has been activated effective as of 31 July 2015 to monitor the El Nino event. Concurrently, branches have been informed via Circulars and mobile phone SMS to initiate rapid assessments.

PNGRCS is liaising closely with National Technical Agencies, PDCs, the UN, other humanitarian actors and the media. It is working with branches, particularly those in the most affected provinces, in mobilizing volunteers for assessment and response activities. Early warning and preparedness messages on El Nino are being disseminated by the volunteers.

The PNGRCS as a member of the NDRC deployed one volunteer who was part of the multi-agency assessment team in the Highlands Region while other volunteers and staff are engaged in their own branches to assess the drought situation in the four target regions.

The PNGRCS have identified health and hygiene promotion to be one of the key activities in assisting affected populations to reduce risk of disease caused by exposure to contaminated water and/or decreased hygiene due to water shortages, e.g. diarrhoea, typhoid. There may also be an increase in vector borne diseases, such as dengue and malaria. PNGRC are coordinating with the NDC to develop hygiene promotion dissemination/ awareness campaigns. The NDC is now liaising with media in country for regular dissemination/ awareness campaigns through TV, Local Radio Broadcasting Stations and also Daily Newspapers.

The PNGRCS will also be working with communities to minimise the risk of diarrhoea, by promoting safe water usage that may include appropriate household water treatment methods, such as boiling and safe water handling. The PNGRC has identified an immediate need for jerry cans, and hygiene kits. Apart from WASH, the PNGRCS will also consult the Health Cluster in mobilizing trained volunteers with Epidemic Control for Volunteers (ECV) toolkits as part of health messaging to affected communities.

At this stage PNGRC is prioritising the Highlands region as populations in these areas are severely affected by the shortage of water and food supply. The replenishment of relief items that will be distributed to affected population will need to be replenished.

Given that severe food insecurity could potentially result in the displacement of households which could lead to the break-down of law and order, there is an urgent need for PNGRC to continue to work closely with ICRC and other humanitarian partners that have a long term presence in affected areas and have already established relationships with communities.

Western Highlands Red Cross Branch in particular is collaborating with the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) in conducting initial assessments in nine districts.

The PNGRC in collaboration with the ICRC is conducting assessments in the Southern Highlands and Hela Provinces.

The IFRC Pacific multi-country office in Suva is coordinating response efforts within the Movement and with other regional actors and providing technical advice and support to the PNGRCS. IFRC's representative in PNG is supporting the PNGRCS with coordination within PNG and with planning the response. The IFRC Asia Pacific Office is also monitoring the situation and exploring available resources to support the operation.

Contact information

For further information, please contact:

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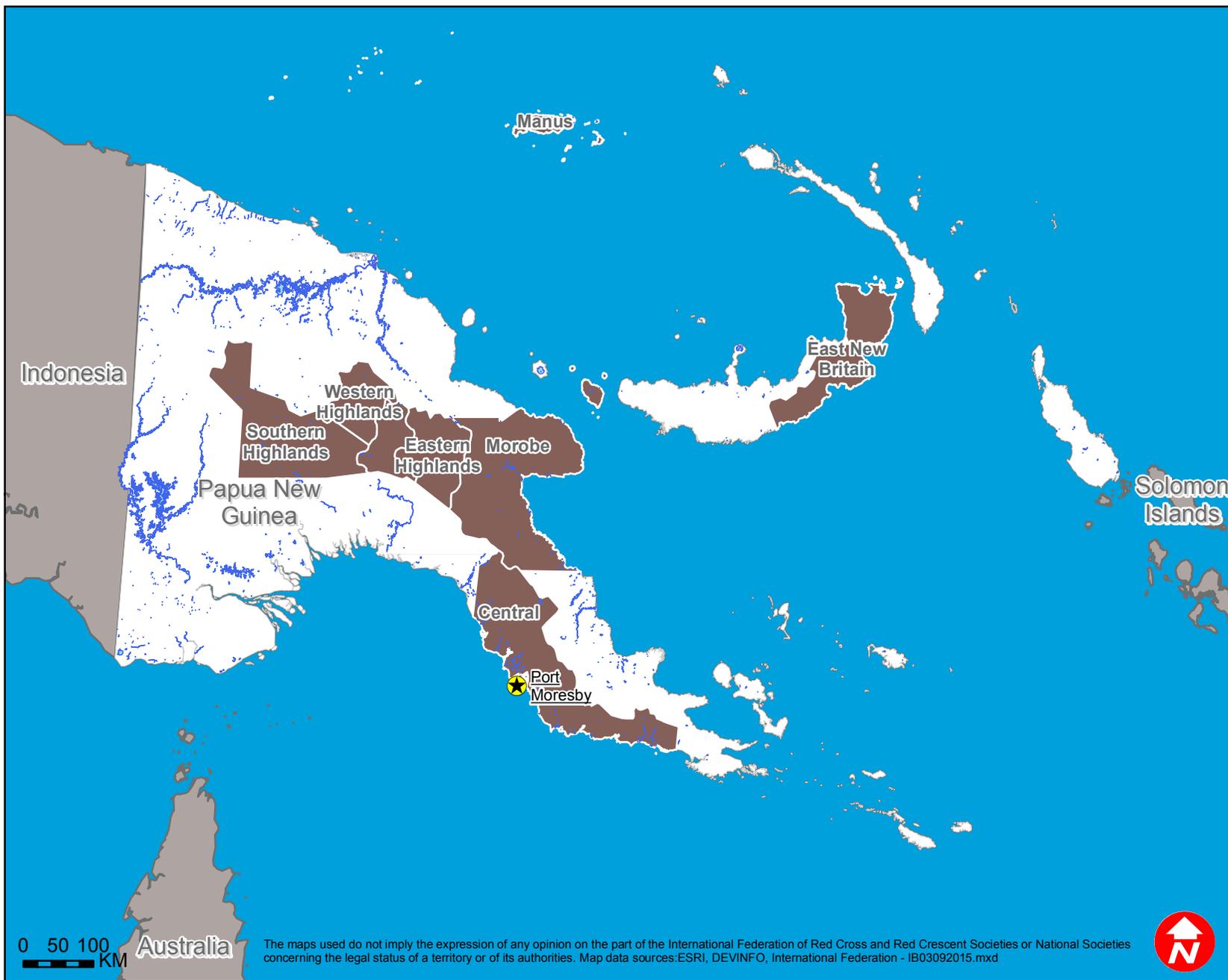
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All IFRC assistance seeks to adhere to the **Code of Conduct** for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief and the **Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response (Sphere)** in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. The IFRC's vision is to **inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities** by National Societies, with a view to **preventing and alleviating human suffering**, and thereby contributing to the **maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.**





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 Most affected areas

0 50 100 KM Australia

