

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: DROUGHT

30 April 1998

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situation report no. 2

period covered: January - March 1998

The PNGRCS/Federation operation has been facilitating and monitoring relief deliveries in its areas of operation, despite major access difficulties, and identifying and implementing aid and rehabilitation projects. Rains in March put an end to the drought, but rehabilitation needs will continue for some time.

The context

The climatic conditions created by the 1997 El Niño, the worst El Niño in decades, severely affected Papua New Guinea. By September 1997 the onset of a serious drought was evident, while bush-fires and acute frost in the Highlands compounded the crisis. The PNG government, through the National Disaster Emergency Services (NDES), initiated a provincial survey and committed 4 million Kina (approx. CHF 3.2 million) directly to provincial leaders, but aid was slow in reaching the worst areas. An AusAID sponsored survey indicated the need for a more technically accurate assessment that would track not only the impact of the drought but the effect and relevance of aid. The PNG Red Cross Society (PNGRCS)/Federation became part of the ensuing survey. An International Federation Appeal for over CHF 500,000 was then launched and subsequently fully funded. In the meantime the Secretary General of the PNGRCS was appointed NGO Co-ordinator to the Drought Relief Working Group set up to manage the national emergency response.

Latest events

A decision to reinforce the provincial administrations with experienced facilitators was agreed by the NDES and the Drought Relief Working Group. The management and the deployment of agencies providing such staff fell to the Secretary General of PNGRCS in her role as NGO Co-ordinator. International government agencies led by AusAID, the Red Cross and international NGO's such as CARE, World Vision, the Salvation Army and OXFAM responded.

Over the past three months, the operation has had to contend with difficulties of co-ordination and communication between Central and Provincial authorities and the NDES and agencies; limited capacity within government departments; political difficulties in approving and releasing funds to Provincial Disaster Committees.

The remote and inaccessible terrain impeded accurate identification and targeting of the most vulnerable groups and monitoring of aid. The Australian Air Force airlift managed to deliver large amounts of food to those areas accessible only by air, but ground follow up and co-ordination of these deliveries remained a problem and NGO facilitators were often under pressure.

By February rain had begun to fall. Planting of kau kau, the basic food, was possible in many areas. However the staple is a slow maturing crop and the vulnerability of mono-culture subsistence cropping

became clear. Most agencies decided to reinforce the government and AusAID's basic rice and oil ration by providing seeds and seedlings for crops that were quicker maturing and more drought and frost resistant.

By late March the worst of the drought was over, but there was a clear need to continue assistance until the new gardens matured. Capacity building, disaster mitigation preparedness and community rehabilitation projects in water, health and food production as well as the need to resettle village communities that had moved because of the drought became a priority for the Red Cross.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The PNGRCS / Federation response •

The Appeal identified two main areas of response from the PNGRCS/ Federation:

1. The provision of Provincial Facilitators.
2. The identification and implementation of mini projects in the Areas of Responsibility (AoR) assigned to the Red Cross -- initially Morobe, Madang, Bougainville, Milne Bay, Oro and later Enga.

A team of six Federation Delegates was assigned to have overall responsibility for Federation support. Family Relief Packs were provided from existing stocks for the ongoing Bougainville Operation. Cash and kind were made available to support a water project on Manus Island through the PNGRCS Branch and fund mini projects in water, sanitation and rehabilitation and resettlement, as they were identified by the delegates in the field or the working group and the NGO Co-ordinator.

Areas of Responsibility (AoR) •

Enga Province

1. Good co-operation with the Provincial Disaster Committee. Red Cross based a delegate in the worst affected area in Kandep.
2. A resettlement project was initiated to aid and settle 800 families (6,000 persons) displaced by drought bush fires and frost from Mariant area. The Red Cross is providing family packs, food, and transport and co-ordinating the overall project with the assistance of provincial staff.
3. With PNGRCS funding and Federation co-ordination and monitoring, a seed propagation scheme has been established in Mt. Hagen for the rehabilitation and supply of new seeds to the Enga and other highland areas.
4. A water project to allow the re-opening of schools closed during the drought is planned and other mini projects are in the final stage of evaluation for this, one of the hardest hit provinces.
5. The delegate is participating as facilitator and co-ordinator of an AusAID funded nutritional survey in the province, working with local staff.
6. An assessment survey by helicopter in a remote area at the end of March identified villages that have never received aid; a plan to address their needs is being developed.

Milne Bay

- 1 Co-operation with the Provincial Officers has been good; distributions have been facilitated by the delegate who provided core assistance and training. The disaster committee has been able to function well, despite the rather erratic delivery of food. As in other provinces, only partial rations were delivered, thus multiplying distributions that are already difficult to organise due to the remoteness and inaccessibility of the affected communities.
2. The Appeal has funded a number of successful projects to deliver food, seeds and seedlings to the most vulnerable in the outer island and remote communities. The projects were identified by the PNGRCS Branch with the assistance of the Federation.
3. Further assistance is being evaluated, emphasising community based awareness, water conservation and disaster preparedness.

Oro Province

1. Reasonable co-operation with the Provincial Committee and the district Patrol Officers. There is no Red Cross branch.
2. Limited opportunity to develop projects due to lack of accessibility and RC staff.
3. With the support of AusAID and the ADF airlift, the delegate monitored distributions and delivery at village level in remote and very vulnerable areas -- one of the few agency officers monitoring in these areas.

Morobe

1. Poor co-operation from the province. Good participation of the Branch resulted in a very successful Disaster Management Course for over 40 Red Cross, NGO, Government and other participants.
2. The branch has identified a number of medium term projects to be run as part of the rehabilitation stage of the operation. Project identification continues with the arrival of a new delegate who will assess the whole province.

Manus Island

1. The Branch, with Appeal funds, successfully completed the water distribution and support programme, delivering containers and water via the Branch ambulance boat.
2. Further water and awareness projects are being developed. As part of a third assessment the HoD will evaluate longer term activities with the branches in Manus and Rabaul.

Central

1. Through the NGO Co-ordinator and with the support of the Adventists Disaster Relief Association (ADRA), the Red Cross organised an airlift of food, medicines and fire packs to a severely impacted area near Kosipe. The ADF provided a helicopter and a medical team. The delegate and ADRA staff monitored the distribution and spent several days walking to villages in the region to assess future needs. An additional distribution is planned shortly to other villages.

Bougainville

Bougainville (not an AoR) was spared the worst effects of the drought: only a limited response in the form of supplying water containers was required.

Other activities •

1. The Red Cross participated in the funding and production of multi language Drought Awareness pamphlets, distributed country wide.
2. Red Cross personnel are participating in the following activities and training workshops:
 - AusAID Nutritional Survey project
 - Village water well construction, run by the Salvation Army
 - The final country wide field assessment (The Federation will provide two team members to establish an exit strategy and determine longer term response and preparedness activities)
 - Working Group and NGO committee activities and meetings.
 - Monitoring village distributions after AusAID/Australian/PNG Defence Force air support missions.

Constraints •

Co-operation difficulties between the central government agencies and their provincial counterparts and a lack of communication between government departments hampered the speedy delivery of aid and in particular the distribution of food at district and village levels.

Efforts have been made to utilise and work effectively with the NGO facilitators. In some provinces the Red Cross experienced widely varying degrees of co-operation and this was reflected in operational results.

The lack of quality data and information on food deliveries and distributions country wide has limited the quality of reporting.

Co-operation •

Close co-operation was enjoyed with Administrations in Enga, Milne Bay and Oro province. Through the NGO Co-ordinator the Red Cross has identified a number of ventures in co-ordination with ADRA, Banzaid, Oxfam and World Vision. The PNGRCS/Federation have also worked in co-ordination with the AusAID/ADF operation in order to access remote areas only reachable by plane or helicopter and carry out their monitoring role, as well as identify and respond to additional needs in these most vulnerable communities.

Outstanding needs

None.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Direct contact as well as representation through the NGO Co-ordinator has been maintained with the government. Red Cross participated in the Donor Working Group and the water committee. The Federation and PNGRCS are part of a Donor/Agency "Lessons Learned" working group, created to carry out a post-operation analysis.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The PNGRCS and the Federation delegation have learned a lot from this operation. The best achievements occurred in areas where the Red Cross had direct control and management of projects.

The reputation and profile of the PNGRCS have been enhanced and a number of significant projects will provide a springboard for response to needs in the post emergency phase. Direct contributions to the Society for the drought have dramatically increased, driving home to the PNGRCS the need to develop a stronger staffing and operational capacity in order to deploy such funds in the future.

Considerable access has been gained to areas that will require Red Cross assistance in 1998 through the Emergency Appeal, specifically in Community Based Disaster Response, Training and Mitigation. An analysis of PNG Government response mechanisms and an evaluation of mistakes, successes and lessons learned, chaired by UNDP with the participation of donors, agencies and the provincial disaster authorities, will be an essential and critical exercise.

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