

# *Papua New Guinea: Flooding after El Niño drought*

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## *The Disaster*

After a prolonged drought triggered by El Niño, parts of Sepik and Madang Provinces recently experienced heavy rainfall causing rivers to rise dangerously beyond the usual seasonal increase. Flooding in Middle Ramu has left some 6,000 families homeless or in serious need of assistance. Up to 28 deaths have been confirmed, while homes have been destroyed and water supplies polluted. The Papua New Guinea Red Cross Society (PNGRCS) and the International Federation immediately assessed the extent of the flooding in Middle Ramu and determined there were urgent needs to be met. The Provincial Disaster Committee, announcing its intention to take action, asked PNGRCS/Federation to help deliver food supplies to the affected region. As they were already delivering goods to the area for a drought operation (Appeal 17/97) they agreed, on a space available basis.

## *Red Cross/Red Crescent Action*

The Federation delegation, through its office in Lae, Morobe Province, immediately procured water containers, buckets and plastic sheeting for 6,000 families, plus a supply of essential drugs. Because the drought relief goods were already on their way, these supplies were rushed overland to Madang by truck arriving just in time to catch the barge for the next stage of the journey.

Two Federation Delegates, one of whom is a water/sanitation engineer, are based in Madang to liaise and provide technical support to the Provincial Disaster officers and other authorities under the drought operation. The water/sanitation delegate is reviewing other requests for assistance in the higher ground to the west of the Ramu river estuary.

The following flood relief goods were loaded onto the barge:

- { 6,000 water containers (20 litres)
- { 6,000 buckets
- { 9,000 kina-worth of standard essential drugs
- { Two tons of the Provincial rice supply.

The barge was expected to take three days to reach Aiome, where distributions were due to start. The two delegates and two PNGRCS volunteers flew ahead to prepare the first distribution site and carry out further field assessments to identify the most vulnerable groups along the middle and lower Ramu. These groups, spread around six distribution points, will receive goods during the return voyage, which will take

four days. Radio and word of mouth announcements through provincial patrol officers have been organised to ensure villagers inland are aware of the operation.

In an effort to solve the problem of transporting a further 60 tons of rice into this remote area, the Federation is investigating the possibility of commissioning a second barge, rather than having the authorities use an extremely costly helicopter airlift. A vessel has been identified, but needs repairs. Once river transport has been established as a viable alternative, further funding may be required. The Province has agreed in principle to have the Red Cross carry out this food distribution.

Flood relief in the adjacent Sepik river basin is being provided via a substantial government donation to the local authorities.

## *Needs*

All needs for the first distribution have been met. A reduction in the numbers of beneficiaries has facilitated the storing of goods for 1,000 families in Lae as a foundation for any additional response .

So far the value of the Federation contribution for the procurement of relief supplies is estimated at PGK 60,000 (CHF 48,606). Operational costs for the delegation and the Operating National Society are valued at PGK 15,000 (CHF 12,150). The repair costs for the second barge are not yet known.

The Federation Head of Delegation has visited the operation's logistics centre at Lae and the set off point at Madang and held discussions with all parties to ensure that operational support from the Federation/PNGRCS is fully understood by the local authorities. Additional contacts and meetings will be held with the PNGRCS Secretary General and the National Disaster & Emergency Services in Port Moresby this week to try to address the outstanding transport needs.

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