

Papua New Guinea: Drought / Enga Province Resettlement

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The Disaster

Following the severe drought, frost and bush fires that hit the Kandep area of Enga Province, the Federation agreed to provide assistance to the area, as part of its PNG Drought Relief Operation (Appeal 17/97).

Conditions in the area drove many people to move from Kandep to neighbouring areas, putting extra pressure on the host populations. After the drought broke the population was unwilling to return to plant their gardens, without any food to survive through the growing period. There is a province-wide shortage of food and a total loss of gardens and seeds for re-cultivation. In addition homes have been destroyed and basic necessities lost.

It was believed that as many as 6,000 persons had left the area. At the request of the Enga Province Disaster Committee, the HoD and the Relief Delegate carried out an assessment and established that some 500 families, approximately 2,600 people (22% displacement) could be resettled.

Enga is a difficult province not only in terms of its extreme vulnerability and remote terrain but also because of tribal conflict. It is a security sensitive region in which most agencies have chosen not to work. The cultural conditions also result in a very rigid and inflexible approach to the distribution of goods.

Despite the difficult security conditions, particularly along the highway to be used for deliveries, it was decided to start an operation.

On 12 May, while the Relief Administrator was away, the Red Cross warehouse was looted. No injuries were reported, but the theft of relief goods (455 family packs, potato seeds) has certainly compromised the distribution phase. Any decision regarding suspension or termination of the operation will be taken after consultation with the PNGRCS, Provincial Governor and the Federation Secretariat.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

A Federation delegate was assigned to the province and an office/residence set up in Kandep. The acquisition of a 4WD vehicle fitted with an HF/phone interface linked to the Red Cross channels ensured free mobility and secure transport. Detailed surveys were carried out to identify and register the target families. With rice and seed supplies from AusAID, and the Federation funded seed propagation project in Mt. Hagen, the following relief package was procured and delivered to Kandep for distribution:

- a. 500 Family Packs from the Bougainville Operation emergency stock;
- b. Water containers;

- c. Basic food for one month to allow planting and maturing of crops;
- d. Kau Kau vines (20kg); English seed potatoes (10kg/family);
- e. 25 tons rice, donated by the Japanese Red Cross (20kg/month/family for 3 months).

Registration is complete, transport of families from their current residence back to their villages (distance 35-60 km) has commenced and distributions will be carried out over the next few weeks.

Transport for the families is being provided through locally contracted transport. Brochures in Tok Pidgin explained operational objectives. Through a village crop diversification programme introduced by the New Zealand NGO "BANZAID", booklets on crop management have been provided to each family.

Security has worsened. Tribal fighting is continuing in the area and relief food brought into the province is being hi-jacked. There are threats, fraudulent attempts to benefit from the operation, and blackmail based on the attitude that every village along the transit route from Mt. Hagen to Kandep ought to be given supplies. The delegates have been exposed to abuse and minor physical harassment. The operation is proceeding as planned, with good support from local officials who themselves are exposed to even greater pressure to divert goods.

The HoD will join the Relief Delegate to assist in the distribution phase of the operation next week. Plans to spread the distribution over two months to ensure that it benefits only bona fide resident families who remained behind and cultivated the gardens have been amended, due to the risk of stocks being attacked by jealous or more powerful neighbours. The operation will be completed by the end of this month.

Needs

All needs have been met from the funds for the Drought Appeal. A last minute failure of the province to contribute to transport costs has meant an increase in this budget line, but savings made through seedling donations from AusAID have helped offset this extra cost.

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