

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: DROUGHT

**appeal no: 17/97
28 October 1997**

***THIS APPEAL SEEKS CHF 570,000
IN CASH, KIND AND SERVICES
TO ASSIST 160,000 BENEFICIARIES FOR SIX MONTHS***

Summary

There has been no significant rainfall in Papua New Guinea (PNG) since April 1997. According to official estimates, following an extensive assessment mission which included Red Cross Red Crescent representatives, around 550,000 people are seriously affected by a ruinous drought that has destroyed staple crops, weakened water supplies and is undermining the immediate well-being of whole communities, where self-sufficiency has been the norm.

With six years' experience of assisting victims of the long-running conflict on Bougainville Island, the Papua New Guinea Red Cross (PNGRCS), together with the International Federation, is targeting directly 152,000 beneficiaries through essential and requested technical/coordination support to the government's supplementary feeding programme and a series of vital water and community development projects; some 8,000 people whose homes have been destroyed by bush fires are also being helped through the provision of family packs. In addition, a drought-awareness initiative will bring collateral assistance to a further 500,000 people.

The Disaster

Overview •

Papua New Guinea, which lies off the northern tip of Australia, is a country of diverse terrain ranging from mountains to coral atolls, with normal rainfall patterns also varying widely. However, the current El Nino phenomenon, which is affecting the Pacific region (and elsewhere) has resulted in a cooling of the sea water in the western Pacific. Consequently there has been no significant rainfall in PNG since April - and the forecast is for continuing dry conditions at least until the end of the year.

Due to the drought, water shortages and serious crop damage are devastating a nation where most of the 4.5 million population rely on subsistence agriculture.



The lack of cloud cover, caused by the cooler sea temperatures, has further exacerbated the problem, bringing a series of severe frosts to the heavily populated Highlands region, where the normal cycle of subsistence sweet potato crops has been completely broken, leaving no prospect of a new harvest for at least nine months, from the time when replanting can take place. In the south of the country, the drought struck when vulnerable communities were already struggling to recover from Tropical Cyclone Justin in March this year.

Although the entire country is affected, the worst hit areas at present are in: Milne Bay, Morobe, Madang, East and West New Britain, Manus, New Ireland, Bougainville (outer islands) and the high altitude districts.

Population affected •

A detailed needs assessment has been carried out, led by a team of experts provided by the Australian government and including the Secretary-General of the PNG Red Cross (PNGRCS) and an International Federation delegate.

The drought assessment team (DAT) rated the needs of communities according to a scale of 1 through 5, where five was defined as: 'extreme situation - only famine foods available, water very short, many people ill, small children and old people dying'.

In its final report, the assessment team indicates that there are approximately 550,000 people (12 per cent of the total population) classified as categories four or five and, therefore, in need of immediate supplementary feeding. If the drought continues, it is expected that many thousands more people now in category three will also move into this group.

Future predictions •

It is forecast that there will be no significant rain before the end of the year. Because of the long growing period required for the traditional staple sweet potato crop, supplementary feeding for many thousands of people will be required for at least the next six months.

Other factors •

PNG is an extremely rugged country with a great number of isolated communities in areas where roads are few or non-existent. There are also many communities situated on small isolated coral atolls. Many of these isolated communities are among the worst affected. Much of the relief operation will depend heavily on air and sea transport to reach these communities, driving up the straight-line cost per beneficiary indicator.

The Response so far

Government action •

Since the scale of the disaster became apparent, the PNG government has: deployed the drought assessment team provided by the Australian government; released four million PNG kina (CHF four million) to the affected districts for food relief, which is being purchased in-country by government officials; established the national drought relief committee to coordinate the relief operation; and appointed a disaster working group to undertake drought-related activities.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action •

PNG Red Cross branches have been supporting their provincial governments primarily by acting as NGO coordinators on provincial disaster committees. In Madang, the Red Cross assisted with the needs assessment while in Manus, Red Cross boat transport was used for water delivery. Throughout the disaster, the Society's national headquarters has been liaising closely with government disaster committees.

The PNGRCS Secretary General - also appointed to the disaster working group as NGO coordinator - and the chairman of the disaster and first aid committee have both provided advice and guidance to the disaster assessment teams and remain pivotal to the implementation of the intended operation.

Action by other agencies •

Some NGOs have been providing limited assistance to communities in their particular programme areas, for instance in water supply establishment and repair, and food distributions. A CARE Australia logistician was a member of the DAT.

The Intended Operation

Assessment of Needs •

The DAT's report is now finalised and confirms that 550,000 people are in need of immediate food support (including 100,000 facing water shortages), with these numbers increasing monthly. The assessment was carried out over a period of four weeks by 14 teams which travelled extensively throughout the country.

The DAT itself was headed by Australian agriculture specialists with considerable experience and knowledge of PNG, and also included Australian members with experience in disaster management, logistics, hydrogeology and primary health care. However, the majority of the members on the assessment teams were Papua New Guineans, with relevant technical skills

Immediate Needs •

Technical/monitoring support for PNG government supplementary feeding programme: The most pressing need is for the assignment of expatriate delegates to work with PNGRCS national/branch officials in assisting provincial authorities - through planning, monitoring and coordination support -

to implement a government-lead, emergency supplementary feeding programme for 550,000 of the most affected people across all PNG provinces. Relations with the PNG government, at both national and provincial level, will be guided at all times by the Red Cross Red Crescent principle of independence and the imperative of building long-term PNGRCS relief skills and capacity.

Water: With water in desperately short supply, the 220 litre and five litre containers specified in this appeal are also urgently required, particularly for vulnerable communities in Manus.

Family packs: The PNGRCS has also identified families, who lost their homes in recent bush fires brought on by the drought, for distribution of packs with basic day-to-day items

Red Cross Objectives •

Key priorities for the PNGRCS/International Federation operation are:

- ◆ To ensure that the PNG government relief assistance is targeted and delivered effectively to the most vulnerable and needy communities, through a transparent and accountable operation.
- ◆ To raise awareness of simple measures communities can take to help themselves to recover from the effects of the drought and maintain an acceptable standard of health.
- ◆ As and when necessary to implement community rehabilitation mini projects; undertake targeted water supply support; and assist families who lost their homes in recent bush fires.
- ◆ To contribute to enhancing the capacity of the Papua New Guinea Red Cross Society, particularly in relation to disaster preparedness and community development.

Anticipated Later Needs •

A follow up evaluation will take place early in 1998 to determine the range of any on-going Red Cross Red Crescent activities, as events - and especially changes in prevailing weather conditions - unfold.

Capacity of National Society •

The PNG Red Cross has won plaudits for its neutral and impartial work on behalf of victims of the long-running conflict on Bougainville Island and has strong fund-raising and health programmes.

However, apart from an operation after the 1994 volcanic eruption, which destroyed Rabaul, it has little direct experience of major relief activities at national or branch level. A key element of the planned programme is to develop the Society's disaster preparedness and community development capacity.

Capacity of International Federation Delegation •

The International Federation has been working directly with the PNG Red Cross since 1993, mainly in relation to the Bougainville operation. Until earlier this year when a delegation was formally established in Port Moresby, line responsibility was maintained by the International Federation's Sydney regional delegation. Currently the PNG complement comprises a head of delegation supported by a relief administrator (for Bougainville) and finance delegate. With the planned drought operation, there will be up to six International Federation expatriate delegates assigned to Papua New Guinea.

Humanitarian operations in Papua New Guinea •

Papua New Guinea's 4.5 million population have gained a deserved reputation for self sufficiency and resilience, far removed from any suggestion of a dependency culture. Accordingly, based on the Bougainville experience, the planned operation will present a particular challenge to those charged with organising and monitoring the food distributions.

The Papua New Guinea kina remains one of the strongest currencies in the Pacific region, while the country's capital, Port Moresby is a high-cost city. A significant number of PNG's population centres are remote and only accessible by air or sea - both expensive forms of transport.

National Society/Federation Plan of Action

Following extensive discussions with the government, PNGRCS proposes the following projects to assist in the drought relief operation :

Project 1 - Drought awareness print materials : 400,000 technical information pamphlets will be printed on each of the following: water conservation and quality; drought- related health issues; and agricultural advice (1.2 million leaflets in all). The text and overall presentation will be prepared by experts in each field and will deliver basic and simple messages in PNG's three official languages of English, Pidgin and Motu. Emphasis will be placed on clear graphic illustrations to take account of the low literacy rate in some areas. The Red Cross role - jointly managed by the PNGRCS Secretary General and the International Federation Head of Delegation - will be to coordinate production, print and distribution.

Project 2 - Provision of Red Cross relief administrators : The PNG government is implementing a supplementary feeding programme to provide 550,000 beneficiaries each with a monthly ration (white rice, wholemeal flour and cooking oil) intended to supply 1,400 kcals per person per day over six months. In order to ensure that relief supplies reach those people in need as quickly as possible and maintain operational transparency, PNGRCS has sought support from the International Federation to meet a government request for experienced relief personnel to assist, the provincial administrations in key aspects of this vital operation - in particular:

- ◆ planning of relief distributions;
- ◆ establishment and monitoring of relief distribution systems;
- coordination of agencies involved in the relief operation;
- training of local NGOs and provincial government personnel conducting relief operations; and
- on-going monitoring and assessments of the needs of communities.

Since the PNGRCS does not have the available capacity to provide this expertise, the International Federation intends to recruit three appropriately qualified delegates for the operation. As the food distributions are expected to start within the coming weeks, it is important to deploy these delegates as soon as possible, in order to ensure that the food reaches those communities most in need.

The delegates will operate in the three most affected regions where the PNGRCS has established branches and cover a combined caseload of at least 100,000 beneficiaries. These regions will not necessarily correspond to provincial boundaries and will be determined in cooperation with international NGO colleagues, including World Vision, Adra and possibly Save the Children Fund. According to the latest information, PNGRCS are expecting to work in the following provinces: Central, Milne Bay, Oro, Morobe, Madang, Manus, New Ireland, East and West Britain and Bougainville. The delegates will be assisted by PNGRCS branch staff, who themselves will gain experience in major relief operations, thus increasing the capacity of the branches to cope with future disasters. Support for these branch staff forms a significant component of this project.

It is clearly understood by the government that the delegates must have a high degree of autonomy and independence in their monitoring and advocacy role. This will be recognised in a formal memorandum of understanding which will be prepared once the operational details are finalised. The delegates themselves should possess strong Red Cross Red Crescent track records and be used to operating in harsh conditions with rigorous security considerations. As PNGRCS does not yet

have the human resources nor the capacity to provide support to all provinces in the country, international NGOs are being requested to offer similar expertise in any outstanding areas.

Project 3 - Drought relief mini projects: During the operation, currently 'unknown' community needs will be identified, requiring quick action, for example: lack of agricultural or irrigation materials, repairs to water systems or damage to basic infrastructure. This proposal, initially budgeted for 60 projects, is intended to ensure small scale assistance - seeds, shelter/construction materials, tools (for digging latrines) and water protection facilities, for instance - can be made available rapidly, benefiting an estimated 40,000 people. Such initiatives will be authorised by the respective delegate - with the concurrence of the PNGRCS - and limited to a maximum expenditure of CHF 500 per project. Guidelines for expenditure and implementation will be prepared.

Project 4 - Water distribution (Manus branch): This project has been proposed by the Manus branch in consultation with the Manus provincial disaster and emergency committee and will provide clean water to a group of islands (population 12,000) where there are serious shortages and no transport facilities for external supplies. Manus Red Cross branch has a sea-ambulance boat, which can transport water to these communities. Funds for this project will provide fuel and a driver for the boat and eight 200-litre and 5,000 five-litre water containers.

Project 5 - Family relief packs: Family packs of day-to-day domestic items - including kitchen utensils, blankets, mosquito nets, clothing, garden tools, soap, detergent and nappies - will be provided to at least 1,200 families (8,000 persons approx.), whose homes have been destroyed by bush fires.

Budget summary

See Annex 1 for details

Conclusion

In common with a growing number of nations, the people of Papua New Guinea have been hard hit by a disaster brought on by the El Nino phenomenon, which has also affected countries beyond Asia and the Pacific. International Federation delegates in Port Moresby and Sydney have worked closely with their PNG Red Cross counterparts to devise a realistic and focused operation, which enhances and complements the capacities of both government and National Society and also includes forward-looking community development and disaster preparedness components. Donors are asked to recognise the creativity and cooperation inherent in this appeal, with an expeditious response that meets in full the urgent needs of communities which have never before requested such assistance.

Margareta Wahlström
Under Secretary General,
Disaster Response & Operations Coordination

George Weber
Secretary General