Papua New Guinea: Cyclone Guba OCHA Situation Report No. 2

This report is based on information from UN Agencies, the Government of Papua New Guinea (GoPNG), and other responders and donors.

SITUATION

1. Category 1 Tropical Cyclone Guba struck Papua New Guinea 12-16 November 2007, bringing torrential rains and high tides which caused severe flooding in Oro and Milne Bay provinces in the east of the country. The Government of PNG reports that some 143,000 people are affected, while the Oro Provincial Police report to date some 164 casualties, with at least 13,000 displaced.

2. Oro province remains cut off, with most access possible only by air or sea. Popondetta, the provincial capital, should have access to potable water within the next 24 hours. Numerous roads and over 13 bridges have been made impassable by landslides or washed away by floodwater, including the road to Oro's Girua airport.

3. Aid is beginning to reach the affected areas, but provincial authorities have requested specific assistance with food and medical supplies, and disease prevention efforts. UN agencies and NGOs also highlighted urgent temporary shelter and watsan needs. While information management continues to challenge accurately targeted distribution of relief supplies, analysis is indicating where impacted communities still need to be assessed and which initial areas should be prioritized.

NATIONAL RESPONSE

4. A State of Emergency was declared by the Government on 19 November and GoPG formally requested assistance of NGOs, INGOs and diplomatic missions in-country. As well as the immediate release of PGK 50 million (18.5 million USD) to assist affected communities, and 2.6 million USD made available directly to the Papua New Guinea National Disaster Centre (NDC), the NDC was granted PGK 7 million in emergency funds earmarked by the recently appointed emergencies Minister.

5. PNG Defence Force and Navy aircraft and vessels have been dispatched to affected areas with relief supplies. Essential shuttles travel between the Port Moresby and Popondetta Emergency Operations Centres three times a day (08h00, 14h00, 19h45) to ensure effective coordination and communication.

6. The PNG Red Cross Society (PNGRCS) has shipped 1,700 tarpaulins and 800 water containers to Popondetta. Up to 50 local volunteers have been trained to assist with disaster assessment and distribution of emergency relief supplies. A watsan expert arrived late last week and three specialists are due in-country to establish and maintain a 5,000l/hour water purification plant.
COORDINATED IN-COUNTRY RESPONSE

7. The National Coordinating Committee for Cyclone Guba is co-chaired by OCHA, and is meeting daily to coordinate between GoPNG, UN agencies, I/NGOs and the PNG Red Cross Society.

8. Inter-agency teams are currently conducting village level assessments, focusing on overall priority needs, sectoral needs, and number of affected households. Observations from aerial assessments indicate that acute flooding was localized to communities along riverbanks and water courses, rather than widespread flooding as assumed earlier.

9. Good progress was made in the distribution of relief supplies to villages in the Tufi and Itukama Local Level Government areas. Food and Non-Food Item (NFI) kits made up the input package. Distributions are currently utilizing Australian Defence Force air assets (C130s, Caribous, Black Hawks and King Air craft), supplemented by privately-hired helicopters. I/NGOs jointly drafted and approved a set of distribution guidelines.

10. An additional inter-agency assessment team has been mobilized to travel to Milne Bay Province on Wednesday to meet with provincial disaster authorities and survey the level of impact in Rabaraba District, the most heavily impacted area in this province.

11. OCHA and AusAID continue to provide additional staff to support NDC coordination operations in Port Moresby (PoM) and provincial coordination/response efforts in Popondetta. AusAID has now deployed fourteen in-country international staff to support the EOC, including logistics, medical and administrative officers to the relief operation.

12. PNG Defence Force and Royal PNG Constabulary have deployed 80 and 75 staff respectively to supplement local law enforcement efforts. Security personnel have been tasked to accompany assessment and distribution teams to ensure the safety of humanitarian personnel and the orderly distribution of relief supplies. Security assets are also protecting warehoused supplies in Oro Province.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

13. AusAID received a formal request for support on 21 November, and has undertaken a number of assessments using ADF and commercial aircraft. Based on food shortages in specific areas, AusAID purchased 84MT rice and 50MT of other assorted food (tinned fish, cooking oil, salt, cooking cubes), which is currently awaiting shipment from Lae port to Oro Province overnight on 26 November. Australian Defence Force Assets also brought in a variety of NFIs including tarpaulins, water containers, medical supplies, blankets and generator sets.

14. The Japanese Ambassador is due to hand over a contribution of more than 7MT of humanitarian supplies to GoPNG tomorrow morning in support of the relief effort.

15. As part of the FRANZ Partnership agreement, the Government of France has transferred more than 2MT of relief supplies from its warehouse in Noumea which is due to arrive by CASA aircraft in Port Moresby tonight for final delivery to Popondetta 27 November.

16. This situation report, together with further information on ongoing emergencies, is also available on the OCHA-managed ReliefWeb website at http://www.reliefweb.int.
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