

# Papua New Guinea



## KEY FACTS:

- ◆ Joined Commonwealth: 1975
- ◆ Capital: Port Moresby
- ◆ Population: 6,331,000 (2007)
- ◆ GDP p.c growth: 0.2% p.a. 1990–2005
- ◆ Official language: English
- ◆ Time: GMT plus 10hr
- ◆ Currency: kina (K)

## Current vulnerabilities and threats

### 1. What are the health risks from current or future climate change impacts that are of most concern to your country?

Papua New Guinea Department of Health is already experiencing the following risks as a result of climate change:

- ◆ Weather related diseases patterns such as malaria are now a threat to the people living in the higher altitude colder regions. Changes in the disease pattern, for example, malaria from coastal area has moved to the highlands because of a change in temperature. The malaria transmitting vectors rise up to the higher altitudes among the people with low immunity against malaria which is posing a risk to our highlands' densely populated areas.

Table 1: Malaria cases

Outpatient treatment	Inpatient discharged	Deaths	CC impact colder new areas
1,620,066	23,937	561	30,818

The 30,018 malaria cases that occurred in the colder climate (highlands) of Papua New Guinea, where malaria has never been encountered before, is the climate change impact figure. The population in those areas are vulnerable as they have low immunity against malaria parasites.

- ◆ Increase in water-borne and water-related diseases primarily due to water shortage or water being contaminated.
- ◆ Environmental changes due to climate change causing over-heating and stress on people's health and increased skin cancers.
- ◆ The poisonous snakes like pythons, Papuan blacks and dead adders are now moving towards the highlands valleys as a result of climate change causing increased risk of snake bites among the remote population.
- ◆ Some of the Papua New Guinea islands are affected by rising sea levels and suffer from food shortages, pneumonia, water- and vector-borne related diseases in their new locations.
- ◆ In tropical conditions subsistence farmers are at risk of losing food crops through changing weather patterns (continuous sunshine may result in dry spells or flooding and the washing away of food crops or land slides) may cause malnutrition problem.
- ◆ Climate change is likely to cause a lot of unprepared for and unpredicted health problems and risks which the Department of

Health will not have the resources to meet.

### 2. What population groups in your country are most vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change and what are the impacts likely to be?

- ◆ The most vulnerable would be children and the elderly, as well as the sick or disabled.
- ◆ Rural villagers along the coast line, small island villages, rural villages in the remote and mountainous parts of Papua New Guinea.
- ◆ Low wage earners and the unemployed semi-urban population living in and around the urban centres and their children are most vulnerable group in the country.
- ◆ The weather pattern is already irregular and the temperatures in the coastal areas are very hot while up in the highlands they are very cold. Some of the streams and creeks from which people collect their drinking waters are now beginning to dry up in the rural villages because of continuous bush clearance and long spells of dry weather.
- ◆ The major problem in most of our urban centres is poor waste management which normally ends up in water courses, rivers, the sea and coast line and other bodies of water causing pollution likely to result in waterborne diseases, contaminated food sources and water.
- ◆ Climate change with its long dry spells or continuous rain is certainly leading towards a shortage of staple food crops as water sources are either contaminated or drying up and vegetables become scarce resulting in poverty, malnutrition, social problems and medical burdens.

## Strategy and policy

### 3. How much of a priority is addressing the impacts of climate change on health for your country?

The Department of Health needs a specific Strategic Policy Development to adequately address climate change and its impacts on human health.

Currently the Department of Health is putting up with the available, limited resources to address climate change impacts. Capacity building is the second area which is necessary and finally the resources to effectively deal with the impacts and risks brought about by the climate change.

Addressing climate change has been a low priority. The Government

of Papua New Guinea only recently (2008) established The Office Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability. Still, after years of neglect and after much destruction and loss of life and property as a result of climate change, the country is beginning to realise the seriousness of this issue. However, much awareness and political will is needed to give prominence to this issue, and the message needs to trickle down to the national departments, provincial departments, local level governments and the communities. Each of these different tiers of government needs to give prominence to this issue, which at this point in time is not a priority and the initiative by the national government to create the Office of Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability, is a start. Priority in terms of funding and resource allocation to address climate change at the sectoral level is perhaps the greatest challenge right now.

In the meantime, the Department of Health is already stretched and has to cope with its climate change related health risks with the available resources allocated to other activities. If the resources are used for unplanned activities then the approach to climate change health risks will be disorganised..

In Papua New Guinea, the Department of Health is already experiencing climatic change effects such as malaria carrying vectors climbing to the higher altitudes, poisonous snakes are also moving to the higher altitudes, malaria cases are on the increase and attending to natural disaster affects public health problems and programmes.

The Sustainable Development and Healthy Environmental Programme under the Health Protection Section is lacking staff, resources and capacity building particularly for the new changes brought about by climate change.

#### **4. Please describe the strategies your country has developed (for example, health and climate change adaptation strategies) that address the health impacts of climate change.**

Although the Government has institutions such as Department of Health, Department of Environment and Conservation, University of Papua New Guinea, the National Forest Authority, Department of Agriculture and other agencies and non-governmental organisations, the strategic policy documentation required for climate change and its risks has yet to be worked out.

Generally, the Environmental Impact Assessment Policy and Environmental Planning Act 2000 are in place but there is nothing specifically for climate change.

The Office of Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability (OCCES), with the support of the Department of Health, and others, is

a. currently undertaking sector wide consultations with the authorities concerned for each sector, including the health sector, to identify cross-cutting issues, conditions, needs, gaps in each sector in order to develop a comprehensive national climate change policy;

b. also presently, planning to undertake a risk and vulnerability assessment of all disaster hotspot areas in the country to gather baseline data and profile each hotspot areas;

c. Following a & b the National Adaptation Framework, strategies and plan of actions will be formulated, that encompassing all sectoral issues, including that of the health sector.

Sector-specific adaptation strategies (including policies) will be developed by each sector with linkage to the National Climate Change policy. This will be done in consultation with the OCCES.

#### **5. The health been integrated into national climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies?**

The health sector is an important agent and should be an integrated part of the national climate change mitigation and adaptation system with other government agencies which play related roles and activities.

No! We have yet to integrate the Department of Health climate change strategies into the national climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

#### **6. What steps have been made towards implementation of these strategies?**

The Government had established the Office of Climate Change to take the lead in an integrated role with all relevant government agencies to implement the climate change strategies. At present stage it is not possible for the Department of Health to implement climate change activities and is a low priority as nothing concrete has started.

However, in concert with the National Climate Change Strategy, and as with other sectors, the Department of Health will ensure that climate change issues are not considered as separate to national and local environment/health concerns by integrating climate change objectives into the national and local strategic planning processes.

#### **7. What are the current policy gaps in addressing climate change and health?**

The National Climate Change Policy is in its draft stage, but will become a policy by the second quarter of 2009.

The Department of Health has an overall National Health Plan 'Vision 2010' which addresses all health issues affecting the lives of Papua New Guineans.

However, the gaps in policy development specifically to address the climate change and its likely health are as follows:

- ◆ There is a need to update the present Public Health Act and Regulations to accommodate current changes in development and particularly in climate change.
- ◆ A review of the draft Environmental Health Impact Assessment Policy is necessary.
- ◆ The National Waste Management Policy needs to be developed to prevent further global warming and climate change to locally control health risks and environmental impacts. This area is a major problem in the country which is a contributing factor in the climate change. A major overhaul in waste management is required with expertise for a universal system from outside.
- ◆ These are the weak gaps in the health system particularly in the Health Protection Section that deals directly with environmental health issues.

#### **8. How well equipped is your health system to cope with the impacts of climate change?**

The Department of Health is yet to be equipped to cope with the impacts of climate change and health risks. This means the Department of Health or the country will have lots of problems, particularly challenges in adapting to changing geographical conditions.

The Papua New Guinea health system is beginning to change direction from 2009 in order to ensure that the most needed health services are delivered to communities that need them as much as possible and most effectively, but the health problems brought about by climate change is a new challenge to be dealt with:

- ◆ human resource development as first priority;

- ◆ medical equipment and facilities;
- ◆ distribution and supply of drugs and consumables;
- ◆ financial support and transparency when spending available funds.

**9. Have you made any changes to your health system in response to increased risks resulting from climate change and if so, what change have you made.**

No! There is more to be done in terms of specific advance preparation to response to the increased risks resulting from climate change. There are preparations needed to work on the climate change because the present conditions still require more resources. The new changes and conditions require extra resources, which includes staff skills training, policy and strategic planning, consumables, funds and experts to assist Papua New Guinea.

**10. What are the main constraints to addressing the health impacts of climate change in your country and how will these be addressed?**

The Sustainable Development and Health Environment Programme under the Health Protection Section of the Department of Health would be the appropriate programme that would co-ordinate this programme. Currently it is understaffed and lacks resources, expertise for technical support, review of the Environmental Health Impacts Assessment Guideline and Public Health Act Review and Revision to accommodate the current and future health problems such as climate change and its impacts on health and environment. Over the years the Sustainable Development and Healthy Environment was not a priority activity.

Funding and moral support to Sustainable Development and Health Environmental Programme, which at present is the lowest priority.

The Sustainable Development and Healthy Environment Programme is to be an integrated activity with all other activities within the health sector.

**11. Have national resources been allocated to address climate change in your country and how will these be addressed?**

The Government have yet to allocate resources to the line government agencies like the Department of Health directly, or indirectly, who are responsible for addressing health impacts and risks related to climate change in the country. Papua New Guinea needs the support and assistance of the international community and development partners, in terms of funding, capacity building, awareness and education resources, etc., to adequately address climate change in the country.

The Government is attempting to address this issue and some of the steps it has taken are:

- ◆ The Minister for Environment and Conservation at the national level has campaigned for every citizen to plant ten trees a day, but is yet to confirm how much been planted.
- ◆ The Right Honourable Grand Chief Sir Michael Thomas Somare, CGL, CGMC, CH, CF, KST J, Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea has taken great steps by presenting the Papua New Guinea Natural Forest Preservation Campaign at world summits. Papua New Guinea is a leader and one of the few in the REDD (Reduce Emission from Degradation and Deforestation) community that is trying its best to undertake REDD demonstration projects to demonstrate to the global community how developing countries can address the GHG emission agenda by developing and implementing mitigation and adaptation measures at the national level, in spite of the limited resources it has. However at local level the nation of Papua New

Guinea is yet to do more to put up with the risks brought about by climate change.

- ◆ Presently, the Department of Health is consulting with OCCES and other responsible authorities in various sectors to develop appropriate policies and mechanisms, and to ensure that the development of a streamlined National Climate Change Policy takes into consideration gaps in capacity, knowledge and resources and addresses these in a responsible manner.
- ◆ At the top management level there may be some kind of inter-departmental arrangements to address climate change, health impacts and its risks. However, at a lower level information is yet to be disseminated for readiness.

**12. Is the Ministry of Health working together with other ministries (such as the Ministries of Agriculture, Environment, Fisheries and Finance) to address health and climate change issues?**

Yes! There is integration and cooperation with related government agencies such as Department of Environment and Conservation, Department of Mining, National Forestry Authority and Department of Agriculture and its ministries.

**13. Has your country been involved in work to manage climate change and health at the international level?**

Yes, Papua New Guinea is part of the international community and has participated in many ways such as international conventions, seminars and meetings to work and manage climate change and its impacts on health and environment.

Papua New Guinea participates in UNFCCC, Convention on Biodiversity, Convention on Desertification.

**14. How would you describe the capacity of your country to participate at the global level on climate change and health?**

Papua New Guinea will do everything to participate in climate change and health impacts at the global level from the political and management levels to ensure that what is required and what is to be done should carried out to ensure the country's participation and contribution to the global community.

The Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea is co-Chair of the Rain Forest Alliance Countries and that means that Papua New Guinea, as a country, is taking serious steps to address climate change, including ensuring Papua New Guinea's readiness to participate in the global carbon trade, and many other issues.

Papua New Guinea is very much aware that the El Niño and La Niño weather events are becoming prevalent in Papua New Guinea as a result of climate change. The country is experiencing the effects of these events on the environment and health of its populace. However, at local level preparedness is behind or lacking so the government and management should attempt to give priority to this. At present, the government is developing its climate change legislative framework (to be tabled in Parliament in the next sitting) and policies and strategies on climate change.

**Any other comments or information that you would like to provide**

The Department of Health is the main Government agency that will deal with health problems and risks created by the climate change (El Niño and La Niño).

My Ministry is firmly requesting that the Climate Change Co-

ordinating Office should be established and funded at national level to coordinate climate change health impacts and risks in the country to increase awareness, co-ordinate, liaise and undertake climate change health impact assessments for the country. My Ministry and the Department is fearful that health problems and risks will be brought about by El Niño, La Niño and other weather events brought about by climate change, which Papua New Guinea is already experiencing. We need to be prepared for this as well as dealing with the normal activities and problems.

The unusual occurrences of climate change related to flooding, islands sinking, malaria parasites transmission and malaria vector moving up to higher altitudes, rising temperatures in certain areas, more landslides and over flooding causing severe damage to lives and the economy, etc. are some of the abnormalities Papua New Guinea is experiencing presently.