



IOM Emergency Coordinator, Wonesai Sithole, conducting an assessment in the Highlands  
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## Highlights

■ El Niño is affecting the Highlands of Papua New Guinea as of 12 August 2015 and it is likely to last until March 2016. The Prime Minister issued a press release asking the nation to brace

themselves for a severe drought

■ The Southern Highlands Province has declared a state of emergency while other Highlands Provinces are also contemplating doing so.

■ IOM joined the Government-led vulnerability assessment team in the Highlands regions.

## Situation Overview

Papua New Guinea's National Weather Service forecasts that the current El Niño, which is already affecting large parts of the Highlands and will last until March 2016, will be more severe than the one in 1997/1998 which affected three million people. Rural populations are particularly vulnerable in Simbu, Eastern and Western Highlands, Southern Highlands and Enga. Media reports and information collected on the ground indicate that ground frost has destroyed food gardens and plantations and that river levels have fallen significantly in local streams and rivers. Staple foods like sweet potato and other tubers have been stunted in growth or destroyed. Drought has led to reliable water sources drying up, forcing people to resort to using water from unsafe sources, raising the likelihood of severe health problems. PNG's National Disaster Centre estimates that at least a million people from a population of 7.5 million have already been affected by drought and frost. There are also unverified reports of up to 10 deaths caused by sickness and malnourishment brought on by El Niño. The Governor of Southern Highlands has declared a State of Emergency, with other Provinces considering the same move. It's reported that schools and health centres are scaling back operations because of the water shortages. In addition, there's growing concern about the potential knock-on effects of the severe weather conditions on the affected populations including a breakdown in law and order, inter-tribal conflicts over scarce resources and gender based violence.

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## IOM PREPAREDNESS AND ASSESSMENT



### Food security

Five million PNG Kina (circa US\$ 2 mln) has been received by the NDC and is ready to be used for assessments and to provide immediate relief. Of the K5 Million, K2 million has been used to purchase emergency relief rations in the Highlands (basic food supplies) for 4 Provinces. These supplies will be assigned to provincial authorities for distribution. IOM has joined the assessment team that was dispatched on 23 August to the Highlands; the team is assessing the impact of El Niño on agriculture and livelihoods, markets, health, water and sanitation, migration, internal displacement, humanitarian needs and setting up logistical arrangement. Food stocks will decline in the Provinces for nine months as a result of drought conditions and frost which has destroyed local production. The supply of basic food stuffs on the market has remained stable. This condition is expected to prevail



Upper Wage Village (Enga Province) family harvesting remains of their crops © IOM 2015

throughout August 2015. The peak period will be September 2015 with highest prevalence of food insecurity projected in the Highlands Provinces. Disposable income for the majority of poor rural households in the Highlands is likely to remain low given limited income-generating opportunities. Access to food will remain limited for these poor households. The current increase in basic commodity tax by five per cent will affect the market policy that was prevailing throughout the assessment period. This will affect the continuous supply and access to basic commodities on the market. Domestic production which was complimenting imports will affect the supply chain as most households will be depended on imports for nine months. Households are reducing the frequency and portion size of their meals and sale of livestock to meet food needs is also on the rise. In Kandep some families have migrated to Pogera, Wabag and Mendi in search of food, which is likely to reduce the time that food-insecure households will dedicate to their own farms and compromise their ability to produce enough food for the next season. This trend was observed in 1972 and 1998 frost and drought.

### Food Aid Recommendations:

Three main priorities are being set:

1. The highest level of damage to agriculture and highest level of subsistence dependency can be observed (so far) in Kandep, Laigap Surunki and Karinz. Full food rations are recommended. Voucher or Cash programming could also be considered as some areas are not accessible by road.
2. Moderate to high levels of damage to agriculture and

moderate level of subsistence dependency can be observed in Mt Hagen and Tambul. The food gaps are smaller but food rations supplementing left-over harvestable produce are required.

3. Low levels of drought and frost damage to agriculture and subsistence dependency can be observed in areas between Mendi and Kandep. Food gaps in these communities are minor but smaller rations sizes or cash support could be considered.



### Health

The health situation is still normal but constant surveillance is required. The water levels are declining and communities need participatory health and hygiene education as they are drinking water from stagnant sources.



### Pathway to Recovery

It is suggested an immediate replanting of all new fast-growing, frost and drought tolerant crops to alleviate the negative impact of El Niño in the Highlands. The introduction of crops with long storage life could increase resilience. It is noted that the food gap is exacerbated by a lack of food-storage techniques (such as drying sweet potatoes, burying yam underground, food security DRR) and the extent of the food gap is directly linked to the damage on crops, dependence on subsistence farming and household resilience. The growth will take time but the soil in the Highlands is highly fertile, and characteristic of short harvest periods for many crops. It is estimated that farmers will be at risk of being without locally produced food by the end of September and until at least January-March 2016. This is when the first harvest from the post-El Niño replanted fast-growing food crops (for instance, cabbage, sweet potatoes and yam) will be available. Those communities which practice traditional techniques of storing vegetables, taro and yam will be better placed to fill their food gap for the period until their first harvest. Other communities instead will need to act fast following



Frosts have destroyed vital crops in Papua New Guinea's Highlands © IOM 2015

the drought and begin preserving and storing any available foods. The provision of seeds, farming equipment and agricultural expertise to severely and highly affected communities would help in efforts to rehabilitate agriculture. IOM participation in the assessments and consequent response is a continuation of IOM existent preparedness and response programme in the country (and not a new initiative). IOM is ready to provide logistics support to the Government and partners during the response phase (including

## Assessments Results (as of 28 August 2015)

targeting and distribution).

Province	District	Affected Population	Status	Response needs
Enga	Kandep	80,000	74 Wards were severely affected with 90 per cent staple destroyed and 60 per cent vegetation burnt by ice in Wage and Vamarup. Violence is still ongoing in three villages. Murip, Kaman Tupin has 33 houses burnt down and four people killed. Schools are dismissing children early and the attendances are on the decline.	Food  Reviving of Kaman research station  School feeding is not advisable
Enga	Laigap and Surinki	70,000	The water levels in the rivers are on the decline. 95 per cent of sweet potatoes were destroyed by frost. The current food supply will last for three weeks in Tambatitalis.	Food  Seeds
Southern Highlands	Karinz Wembip	6,500	Popre village ward 25 is the severely affected. Banana and sweet potatoes were affected.	Food Seed
Mt Hagen	Tambul	56,000	Lower, Upper Nebeilyer, Upper Kagul with 53 ward's sweet potatoes was affected and the current harvest will last for three weeks.	Food Seed for replanting
<b>Total</b>		<b>212,500</b>		



Families affected by drought in the Highlands  
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