



Evaluation of Australia's response to El Niño drought and frost in PNG 2015/16

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Scope

Focus was Australia's humanitarian response Sept 2015 to June 2017 comprising a 'package of assistance' costing approx. \$8 million. The largest investments (85%) included:

1. \$3.32 million to CARE, Oxfam & World Vision for WASH, public health, nutrition promotion and food security responses; and recovery and resilience building.
2. \$1.56 million for logistics support including airlifting government rice to Oksapmin LLG in West Sepik Province; shipping rice donated by OTDF to Western Prov; and airlifting some of this to Morehead and Bamu LLGs.
3. \$1.03 million to the CPP for recruiting and paying salaries and costs of disaster response coordinators for each of the seven mainline churches, and an overall coordinator.
4. \$0.92 million provided to NARI mainly for planting material and seeds for agricultural recovery and resilience.

Evaluation questions

Three evaluation questions were agreed with DFAT:

1. Was Australia's humanitarian assistance to affected populations appropriate, timely and effective?
2. Was Australia's humanitarian assistance to areas of protracted drought well planned and efficient?
3. How and to what extent did Australia's response contribute to resilience and national and local leadership and capacity?

Primary limitation: Uncertain evidence for reported results and limited opportunities to test against primary evidence



2015 El Niño impacts

- There was reduced rainfall in many areas from April 2015. Major **drought** subsequently took hold. Reduced cloud cover in high altitude locations in July-August led to damaging **frosts**.
- Impacts on rural population included reduced access to clean **drinking water** and **staple foods** and resultant **health problems**. Some **displacement**.
- Although there is conflicting evidence and insufficient data to quantify this, there must have been an **increase in all-causes mortality** because the health status of many of those affected would have deteriorated making them more vulnerable to morbidity and mortality.



Assessment shortcomings

Neither GoPNG nor the international community should have tolerated uncertainty about the seriousness and specificity of impacts. NGO and church assessments were valuable but begged further assessment.

The high underlying wasting rate and anecdotal reports of drought related mortality would normally be triggers for good practice rapid food security and nutrition assessments.

Although no substitute, GoPNG was quick to field teams to conduct a basic crop damage assessment. However, the release of reports was delayed; the methodology overstated food aid needs; and the sweeping estimates totalled 48,000 MT even half of which could not be funded or distributed.

While positive that the GoPNG took the lead, it inhibited a more collaborative and more rigorous assessment.



GoPNG relief response

GoPNG also took the initiative to procure some rice (only) but the quantity remains unknown and it was channelled through MPs with little reference to NDC or prov or local authorities. It is unclear what was distributed where or when. There were complaints distributions were politicised.

GoPNG also authorised the use of District Services Improvement Programme funds for drought relief – up to PGK 2 million for all 89 districts. This had the effect of disregarding the central concept of focusing on 35 Category 4 & 5 districts and the Highlands Region.

Common practice was to provide a family with 10 kgs of rice, enough rice for < than a week (i.e. nutritionally meaningless).

Preparedness for future emergencies must include agreeing on evidence based thresholds for food relief, a far more targeted approach & a commitment to apply political leadership.



Evaluation Qu 1: Well planned and efficient?

Despite the early warning that the 2015 El Niño may be more severe than 1997-98, it took DFAT some months to focus on the crisis and along with other donors the bulk of assistance was not delivered until 2016-2017 (very late).

The most consequential delay was HPA funding (discussed from Sept 2015 but funds not remitted to NGOs til Jan 2016)

There were 'confounding factors' including the uncertainties mentioned above, heightened sensitivities in the relationship and the fact that the GoPNG did not request assistance.

But these circumstances (and other permutations) could and should have been anticipated.

Both rated **3. *Less than satisfactory quality***



Contingency and scenario planning

Post's initial plans assumed GoPNG would request assistance and that NDC would be willing to host Australian specialists, initially to help with assessments. Both should have been treated as risks.

A proper planning process would have addressed the 'strong resistance to assistance' scenario well in advance (and the likely uncertainties about needs and approp. of GoPNG response).

When Post put together assistance options in August 2015 the process used to engage across the department did not effectively test critical assumptions or consider how humanitarian advocacy could be pursued without undermining diplomatic imperatives.

There was also insufficient analysis by DFAT of the likely protection, gender equality and disability inclusion constraints.



Qu 2: Appropriate and effective?

- From diplomatic (risk) perspective, yes - **5. Good quality**
- From the perspective of Australia's role and contribution, which was engaged but modest - **4. Adequate quality**
- From an investment perspective, most parts appropriate but there were notable omissions to the package and quality ranged from - **4. Adequate** to **2. Poor**
- From a humanitarian advocacy perspective, while there is no evidence diplomatic imperatives 'interfered', it is a reasonable assumption - **3. Less than adequate quality**
- From the perspective of reasonable expectations of affected communities - **3. Less than adequate quality**



Appropriateness of individual investments

- CARE, Oxfam, WV projects – response **5**, recovery & resilience **3**
- Logistic support rated **5** – facilitated distribution to remote areas
- CPP coordination rated **5** – great concept, albeit modest in scope
- NARI rated **4** – appropriate in principle altho lacked attention to NARI's capacity to propagate & deliver planting material & seed
- GA & Dr Bourke's TA both rated **4** – sensible investments
- WV WASH assessment rated **4** – appropriate although evidently needed more attention to the application of the results
- CHS providing water tanks to health centres rated **3** – not capable of continuing to provide water in sustained dry spell

Rated **4. Adequate quality** overall but only barely.



Effectiveness of individual investments

- CARE, Oxfam, WV projects – response **4**, recovery **3**, resilience **3**
- Logistics support rated **5** in relation to diplomatic objectives (good recognition), but **3** from community perspective (late and too little)
- CPP coordination rated **4** – modest achievements, good foundation
- NARI rated **3** – probably did not improve recovery of production
- GA rated **4** but should be **3** - insufficient evidence of utilisation
- Dr Bourke's TA rated **4** – but methodology overstates food needs
- WV WASH assessment rated **2** – poor quality, little if any utilisation
- CHS water tanks for health centres rated **3** – but needed more info

Rated **4. Adequate quality** overall but only barely.

DFAT management did not demand critical real time evaluation.



Qu 3: Contributed to resilience and national and local leadership and capacity?

- DFAT respected national leadership (a big positive)
- In the absence of interest in receiving technical advisors DFAT was unable to strengthen NDC's capacity
- Sub-nationally there was successful collaboration in some provinces which reinforced local leadership and there was some useful disaster management training through partners
- But not in others
- Efforts to form or revitalise WASH committees unsuccessful
- Support for CPP reinforced role of the churches
- PNG is left at best very marginally more resilient

Overall rated **3 *Less than adequate quality*** recognising that the national government did not provide much opportunity.

Recommendations to DFAT

1. DFAT (post) develop by mid-2018 broad contingency plans for assessing and responding to the human impacts of future slow onset disasters in PNG ... including where there is no request for assistance despite risk of increased morbidity and mortality ...
2. Once a decision is made to respond to a slow onset disaster in PNG, DFAT apply a formal (but efficient) planning process ... This should address both diplomatic and humanitarian imperatives ...
3. In concert with other donors, encourage the GoPNG to formally agree thresholds and SOPs for standing up a high-level PNG inter-departmental technical working group for rapid disaster assessments which includes representation from humanitarian partners.



Recommendations to DFAT

4. In any future slow onset emergency in PNG affecting water and food security where there are reasons for concern about impacts on malnutrition and mortality, DFAT join with other donors in advocating for the conduct of rapid food security and nutrition assessments as per widely accepted international standards ...
5. DFAT advocate for the replacement of the phase categorisation used in 1997-98 and again in 2015-16 to assess food supply with an internationally accepted food security standard that more broadly encompasses access to food e.g. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) ...
6. DFAT embed longitudinal data collection and analysis on livelihoods and community level resilience and vulnerability to ENSO events in suitable DFAT development and/or AHP programs that have reach into vulnerable LLG ...



DISCUSSION

Recommendations to DFAT

7. DFAT strengthen its appraisal processes to provide more rigour in critiquing the feasibility of:
 - the recovery and resilience building components of proposed humanitarian activities (e.g. for agricultural recovery a proposal to bulk and distribute large quantities of planting material, for water security a proposal to drought-proof health facilities)
 - the behavioural change or adoption expectations of proposed humanitarian activities (e.g. changing hygiene practices or adopting climate smart agriculture).



Standby slides

Context and constraints

- Slow onset disasters are inherently difficult to call
- Information was available but certainly not in a standard phase classification form, and it was unclear if or to what extent high SAM rates related to the drought & frosts
- GoPNG gave mixed signals and finally did not request assistance and announced funding for food relief
- Actual GoPNG response was unconventional – MPs played key role and didn't coordinate with administration
- UN Res Rep was unable to exert much influence and did not have strong support from diplomatic community
- Australia was in an unusually weak position vis-à-vis GoPNG and proceeded with extreme caution



International response

- The response did not proceed according to normal international standards. For example, there should have been rapid food security and nutrition assessments as per SPHERE standards in the 3rd quarter of 2015
- Needs assessments focused too much on crop damage but this was not challenged by UNDP and WHO/UNICEF apparently did not adequately investigate SAM in 2015
- If the crisis had been more acute and prolonged and high mortality resulted and was documented it would have been seen as a serious failure of international community
- Fortunately the affected population was more resilient than had been implied by forecasts and assessments (although 'excess' mortality remains unknown)



Contingency/scenario planning

Rated **3. *Less than satisfactory quality*** for lack of prior planning

- No evidence of contingency planning, despite having reason to develop a plan in 2014 when El Nino thought likely
- August 2015 cables suggests the plan developed at that time was to (i) provide technical specialists to assist with GoPNG assessment and the analysis of results; (ii) respond with a package of assistance to expected GoPNG formal request; and (iii) set in train initial support to map impact of drought (GA), conduct WASH needs assessment (WV), consider logistics of a relief operation (ACC) and prepare to provide planting material and seed to farmers (NARI)
- In the absence of request, alternative was to approach the Chief Secretary to get sense of what assistance would be acceptable, which got the nod for some of the initial assistance proposed and for provision of limited logistics support to airlift some quantities of rice

Contingency/scenario planning cont.

- In some respects Canberra was pulling in a different direction
- At the outset not appreciated by DFAT that mounting large efficient relief operation was not within capacity of GoPNG
- Some important aspects of responding had not been resolved in advance, including financing and utilisation of development program capacity (which led to considerable delays)
- DFAT supported the transport of < 2% of total food relief in 2016, albeit to some of the hardest to reach areas. It echoes 1997/98 (although the ADF moved 4% of total food back then). This strategy works but will not be appropriate for a much more severe event –Australia would have to do much more to support an effective GoPNG led operation



Lessons and recommendations cont.

- Resilience to adverse climate events is a development problem and there will be limited opportunities to build resilience on scale in the months leading to an ENSO event
- If resilience building is to be considered in humanitarian programming, be tough! on feasibility at appraisal
- Agree (with Arti Patel) that country programs should now consider livelihoods, food security and social protection investments
- DFAT has made investments in the past to address child malnutrition and should now look around for a good program to support (Scaling up Nutrition – SUN?)
- Continued *access* to food in a climatic crisis includes access to cash. Resilience programming should include VSLA schemes
- The AHP partners need to be pushed to develop and test practical, feasible actions to address resilience/vulnerability



Lessons and recommendations cont.

- DFAT needs to continue to liaise with and support BOM and its work with the NWS, while recognising increasing importance of Regional Integrated Multi-hazard Early Warning (RIMES)
- Contingency planning for the provision of any form of assistance should address equity, targeting, protection and social inclusion (not addressed during this response!)
- M&E is letting you down and it is a question of leadership. A response manager has to encourage if not demand critical analysis and ensure staff have the right M&E tools e.g. real time evaluation tools



Appropriateness (strategic, timely, needs based?)

Telefomin, Middle Fly and South Fly Districts Logistics Support

- *5. Good quality* - Helpful donor contribution, and visible. Not timely but supply would have been further delayed without DFAT's intervention. Not a 6 because it was very modest.

Australian Civilian Corp Support

- *5. Good quality* - Helpful donor contribution and a vital investment in organising DFAT logistics support. Not a 6 because should probably have replaced Ron Hodges when he fell ill to provide more coverage.



Appropriateness cont.

Geoscience Australia mapping / imaging

- 4. *Adequate quality or better* – Sensible to seek to better inform stakeholder planning and policy decisions, although a lack of forethought to utilisation

ANU Enterprises crop production & loss advice

- 4. *Adequate quality or better* - A sound investment, although needed to be complemented with food security & nutrition expertise



Appropriateness cont.

World Vision WASH assessment

- **4. Adequate quality** - Appropriate for DFAT to address WASH. Asking WV to identify projects for other stakeholders including ANGOs is within terms of HPA, but needed follow up

National Agriculture Research Institute project

- **4-5 Borderline** - Appropriate to engage NARI to provide clean planting materials, information materials and training, although insufficient attention to NARI's capacity to deliver



Appropriateness cont.

Church Health Services investment

- 4. *Adequate quality* - Main activity was the installation of 9,000 litre Tuffa tanks at health facilities. Appropriate in principle to 'water-proof' health facilities, although unclear if actually feasible

Church Partnership Program investment

- 5. *Good quality* – Great concept. Post recognised churches have access to hard-to-reach areas and provided a coordination platform, leaving it to the churches to mobilise inputs. Not a 6 because not operational until 2016 and DFAT assumed too much about church resources. But it did help churches attract funds and partners



Appropriateness cont.

CARE, Oxfam, World Vision ANCP/HPA investments

- Response – **3-4. Borderline** - Main elements of response including WASH NFIs and < SAM treatment appropriate in principle, but the main component (HPA) arguably too late (delays in Canberra)
- Recovery **5. Good quality** - Main elements of recovery including provision of planting material, seeds, tools appropriate in principle and more timely
- Resilience **3. Less than adequate quality** - Main elements of resilience including agric., health & disaster management training attractive in theory but feasibility of achieving results was never strong



Effectiveness

Telefomin District Logistics Support

- *5. Good quality* – Furthered diplomatic objectives (good recognition)
- *2. Poor quality* – Did not meet humanitarian standards (late, and rice distributed would not have lasted more than a week)

Middle and South Fly Districts Logistics Support

- *5. Good quality* – Furthered diplomatic objectives (good recognition)
- *4. Adequate quality?* – Unclear if met humanitarian standards (very late, but more substantial than Telefomin and helpful to recovery)

Australian Civilian Corp and Operations Team

- *4. Good Quality* – Dedicated personnel; effective; good feedback received



Rice quantities distributed in perspective

- The cereal component of a full 2,100 kcal ration is 400 gm per person per day = 1,440 kcals (the other 660 kcals coming from oil and pulses)
- A common government ration during the drought was 10 kgs rice per family or household. For a family of 5 that's enough carbs for 5 days
- In Oksapmin LLG in Telefomin most families shared a 10 kg bundle with several families – so it was only enough rice for a few meals
- In Morehead LLG (South Fly) and Bamu (Middle Fly) the ration was higher – 40 kg per household. For a small household that's enough carbs for 20 days; for a large household 10 days
- Little or no other rice was provided to the 3 LLGs supported by DFAT



Logistic support in perspective

- As in 1997/98, DFAT assisted with air transport to remote locations (using a private contractor in 2015/16 rather than the ADF)
- In 1997/98 DFAT airlifted 4% of total food aid; in 2015/16 < 1%
- Of the OTDF rice for Western Province, DFAT airlifted 4% of the total (129 of 3,100 tonnes) – albeit the hardest bit
- Of the rice for Telefomin sitting in Mt Hagen DFAT air lifted 20% (11 of 56 tonnes)
- These are real but modest contributions
- If a disaster of far greater magnitude than 1997/98 or 2015/16 was to occur, a less modest approach would be required to save lives



Effectiveness cont..

ANU Enterprises crop production & loss advice

- **3-4. *Borderline*** - Everyone appreciated Dr Bourke's advice. However, the assessment methodology introduced in 1997/98 and continued in 2015/16 overstates food aid needs
- The proof is that despite the Category 4 and 5 ratings, and the food aid called for, people were self-reliant and survived
- This will be disputed with reference to excess mortality (5,000 plus will be claimed) but this level of mortality does not appear credible



Effectiveness cont.

Geoscience Australia mapping / imaging

- **3. *Less than adequate quality*** - until evidence is provided. Who utilised the maps? What impact did they have on decision-making?

Church Health Services investment

- **3 *Less than adequate quality*** - If the tanks collect water from the roof of the health facility they are likely to run dry in a drought. Different story if gravity fed. Rated 3 until evidence of effectiveness is available

World Vision WASH assessment

- **2. *Poor quality*** - Judging by the poor quality 3 page report WV provided which refers to 4 projects without identifying them, and the apparent lack of utilisation of the WV assessment



Effectiveness cont.

National Agricultural Research Institute

- **3-4 *Borderline*** - Most critical objective was *'Improved food supplies within 3-4 months after rainfalls resume'*. Not addressed in completion report and NARI probably doesn't know.
- NARI has no idea about the survival rates of planting materials (very odd for a research institute)
- Indications that multiplication at community level doesn't work.
- Judging by what we heard and saw, NARI Tambul doesn't have a plan for providing clean planting material on scale
- NARI has built contacts with partners including churches which is positive



Effectiveness cont.

Community Church Partnership investment

- 4. *Adequate quality or better* - Assessments were narrowly focused on damage to gardens but assessments were helpful in confirming or re-prioritising areas of need
- Helped the churches play a role alongside other humanitarian actors e.g. on DMT
- Church coordination was improved and they will build on this, including through AHP
- Only Caritas appears to have been able to target the most vulnerable



Effectiveness cont.

CARE, Oxfam, World Vision ANCP/HPA

- Response **3-4. *Borderline*** - SAM cases were identified and treated and NFIs were generally useful, but very late
- Recovery **3-4. *Borderline*** – depends on evidence in particular that planting material helped production to recover
- Resilience **3. *Less than adequate quality*** – 2 day training events unlikely to lead to the adoption of resilient agriculture, or better health practices, or to be taken out to community those trained as trainers or expected to be role models



A note on WFP's mVAM

- WFP have to be credited for bringing the numbers down to something manageable in 2016 (162,000 in 6 LLG plus other pockets = 223,700)
- And mVAM is a good innovation. But it is odd that only 4 of the 27 questions asked drive the criteria behind the classification system and it is of concern that the criteria do not appear to adequately capture resilience/vulnerability and ability to cope/not cope
- Not convinced that mVAM could be reliable in the absence of a means of triangulation (ideally household sample surveys in selected LLGs).
- The response in 2016 to the question about drought related deaths in the community (Qu 12) appears to bring into doubt the reliability of responses
- WFP refers to 'phase classification' regarding mVAM, but mVAM does not use IPC (International Phase Classification)



