EL NIÑO AND HEALTH - PAPUA NEW GUINEA overview - January 2016

**EL NIÑO FORECAST AND HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES**

- Drought conditions related to El Niño are expected to last in the first quarter 2016 with at least 2.4 million people (one third of the country total population) immediately affected.
- The economic, agricultural, education and health sectors will probably be impacted the most. The drought is also starting to limit electricity generation and supply in affected areas.
- Concurrent severe frosts have also affected domestic gardens and crop yields this planting season, with associated food insecurity and malnutrition consequences.

**CURRENT AND PROJECTED HEALTH CONDITIONS**

- It is anticipated that the current situation will become devastating as the drought is expected to continue. Major immediate public health threats include the interruption of critical infrastructure, water and food-borne diseases, vector-borne diseases, measles, malnutrition and food security, declining maternal and neonatal conditions and violence relating to distribution of drought relief supplies. Some deaths attributable to the drought have been already reported.
- Key needs include the provision of safe drinking water. Access to effective health care, hand in hand with access to clean water, adequate food intake and environmental sanitation and hygiene will be the primary determinants of health and survival in this crisis.
- Health care facilities require safe and accessible water supplies in order to be open and functional. Health care services were facing challenges prior to the onset of El Niño, affecting their outreach and functions and are now further weakened by the crisis. Lack of water could lead to the closing of health facilities with further reduction of access to health services. This is a special concern in the most affected areas, some of which have an immunization coverage as low as 29%.

**HEALTH PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE ACTIONS**

- Based on preliminary health and other risk assessments, Papua New Guinea has identified actions to strengthen health preparedness and response. Measures include:
  - Establishing El Niño response task forces or committees;
  - Drafting drought management plans;
  - Mapping water points and vulnerable agricultural areas.
- An El Niño Health Cluster response strategy has been developed, indicating the provision of water to health facilities as one priority.
- In November 2015, WHO developed an El Niño Health response plan 2015-2016 that costs USD 840 000, with the following objectives:
  - Monitor events that can have an immediate impact on the people's health;
  - Provide prompt and effective responses to meet populations' health needs;
  - Build synergies with the work of the other sectors that are responding to the crisis.
- WHO produced a public health risk assessment highlighting the associated health risks with the

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**INFORM index 29**

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El Niño conditions, and highlighted the priority interventions:
- Essential health services
- Water and sanitation
- Management of malnutrition
- Food and safe food preparation
- Early warning and response
- Vector control and personal protection
- Risk communication.

- WHO is scaling-up surge capacity to provide technical support to the Papua New Guinea Country Office by working on a standard approach for critical items to be provided to improve environmental health facilities and by providing support in malnutrition screening. There is also an identified urgent need to scale-up the guidance in handling malnutrition cases in emergency.