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Aid** 

We Reached the Unreached Places*

**Australia Assists Support to the PNG
Highlands Earthquake Response**

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*Cover quote by a Local Community Mobiliser, engaged for a UN protection program that was supported by Australia Assists in the PNG Highlands.

What happened in PNG in February 2018?

Early on 26 February 2018, while the people of the Highlands were sleeping, a 7.5 magnitude earthquake struck Western Papua New Guinea, significantly affecting the Western, Southern Highlands and Hela Provinces. The earthquake destroyed homes and critical infrastructure, triggered landslides, and contaminated water sources. The Papua New Guinea Government's National Disaster Centre estimated that over 544,000 people were affected across five provinces, with more than 270,000 people in need of immediate assistance. Heavy aftershocks followed until mid-March, which continued to distress an already traumatised population. The official death toll from the earthquake stands at 160.

A humanitarian response was initiated, the speed and scale of which was unprecedented in the country. However, the response to the earthquake was hampered by the remoteness of the affected areas, ongoing tribal fighting in those communities and limited provincial-level capacity to respond. The Government of Papua New Guinea requested assistance in March 2018, with water, food, shelter, medicine and the provision of health services identified as the priority needs. In attempting to meet these needs over the ensuing months, humanitarian access remained a key challenge. In late March, the security situation deteriorated in the most affected provinces to the extent that the PNG government and humanitarian actors were largely forced out of those areas. The earthquake response was then limited to agencies that were able to negotiate access to provide critical relief.

Australia Assists support to partners in PNG

The Australia Assists Program, delivered by RedR Australia, is the Australian Government's deployable civilian capability, designed to support overseas partners (particularly national governments) before, during and after disasters. The program was in its infancy when the earthquake struck and a formal partnership had not yet been established with the Government of PNG to enable the program to directly support government agencies. Strong existing relationships with United Nations partners, however, saw RedR receive 15 requests for earthquake-related support from six UN agencies. As a result, **Australia Assists supported coordination, gender and protection and food security** at a critical juncture in PNG through the rapid deployment of

“ We’re opening minds in the quietest places ”

- Community Volunteer in the PNG Highlands, engaged for an Australian Government funded, UN delivered protection program to support the 2018 earthquake response. Australia Assists deployees were instrumental in the success of this program.

three humanitarian experts – amounting to eighteen months of technical support. Notably, all three deployees worked closely with PNG government representatives and local humanitarian actors, particularly at the provincial level.

In November 2018, RedR Australia undertook formal monitoring of Australia Assists' support to the PNG Highlands Earthquake. This included in-country interviews with stakeholders involved with all three deployments, with particular focus on the Australian Government funded, UN delivered 'Learning, Empowerment and Protection Program', which was directly supported by two Australia Assists deployees. This report forms part of the outputs of this monitoring visit. In addition, an *Internal Action Plan* was developed for RedR's organisational accountability and learning and an *External Action Plan*, detailing findings, lessons learned and proposed actions was shared with all monitoring participants.



Anggie Burchill

Gender and Protection Specialist with UN Women (eight months)

Evidence shows that women are often the most affected by disasters – and protection concerns for women, children and other vulnerable groups in the PNG Highlands certainly intensified following the earthquake. Australia Assists deployee, Anggie Burchill, was deployed for eight months to **UN Women in PNG as a Gender and Protection Specialist**, to act as the humanitarian focal point for UN Women and lead the Protection Cluster during the earthquake response. Most significantly, Anggie managed the implementation of a joint UN gender and protection program ('Learning, Empowerment and Protection - LEP', delivered by UN Women, UNICEF and UNFPA) which was one of very few interventions to reach the epicentre of the earthquake.

The program established ten LEP Centres, nine Child Friendly Spaces and appointed 110 'Community Mobilisers' across the two provinces, which ensured that women, children and other vulnerable groups in those areas had access to the support and protection they needed following the earthquake. LEP Program staff formally briefed over 200 humanitarian personnel on PSEA (Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse), established an emergency hotline for victims of trauma which received 1820 calls, and provided over five thousand reproductive health and dignity kits to women. **The final Joint Program Review found that the program reached over 71,000 earthquake survivors in eight months.**

The joint nature of this program was a real strength, especially given the accessibility and security issues. According to a local field coordinator engaged for the program: 'The UN coordinated well and used our existing systems... that 'oneness' is the thing that made this program flow'. Interviews with stakeholders involved with the program revealed that Anggie's consistent focus on mentoring and strengthening the capacity of field staff and volunteers was particularly effective.

In addition to coordinating the LEP program, Anggie delivered a raft of achievements including building the capacity of government, military, police, private sector and development actors to be aware of and engage with PSEA commitments.

UN Women's Deputy Representative in PNG remarked: 'Through her role, Anggie succeeded in ensuring that the PSEA agenda was well received and the right attention of the government given to accelerate it.' She was also responsible for revitalising and driving improvements to the Protection Cluster in PNG, which was the first time that UN Women had taken the lead on this.

The following quotes, obtained from a range of stakeholders during RedR's field monitoring, highlight Anggie's ability to work at both policy and grassroots levels and point to the strengths of her approach:

"Anggie was very determined to achieve and she literally pushed everything along. We have this plan – mentoring and capacity building of the community and our partners is a big part of that plan. She agreed that what we had in place already was a good model and she pushed us to move forward. She was strategically positioned in Port Moresby so she was able to communicate directly [with our implementing partner] to get things moving. And she often travelled to the Highlands to be with us, to work face-to-face."

"She is always concerned with our needs – sometimes you don't get that with international staff – they seem to forget about us. Anggie is constantly asking me, 'Are you ok?' So now I do the same with my Community Mobilisers. At first they may not open up but I have learned to be persistent and open up myself, to keep asking them: Do you need help? Are you ok? And then... they open up! And it flows on like that."

- UN Women Field Coordinator for Southern Highlands Province, on Australia Assists deployee Anggie Burchill.



Case Study



"I think she understands the nature of Papua New Guinea because she herself was born in Indonesia, and she understands the locals, so she fitted in well and she was able to push because she understands what our weaknesses and strengths are, and the locals accepted her because of that."

- Hela Province Field Coordinator (male PNG national), LEP Program, UN Women

"Anggie came in and she fit in with the team like a hand to the glove. She stepped in when there was no structure whatsoever to humanitarian work here. She helped to bring that structure and identify actions that needed to be taken. She pulled together resources really quickly, consolidated funding and work plans for our humanitarian work and at the same time she managed high level coordination of the Protection Cluster – engaging with everyone, presenting issues to management. She was absolutely critical. We simply don't have that humanitarian expertise."

"Overall, this has been a very successful assignment. Her role in facilitating UN Women's ground breaking effort in the Protection Cluster is

commendable. Key project objectives were achieved and several exceeded expectations. While many other agencies requested cost or no-cost extension for their CERF work, that was not necessary for UN Women as Anggie ensured that the project was well coordinated with project partners meeting their obligations on time and on budget."

- Deputy Representative, UN Women PNG

"I feel so comfortable working with Anggie. What I mean is that there are some internationals who I've worked with and there seems to be a barrier between us, like we're not so close. I think it's the culture. The first time she came here, she had that warm approach. She has boosted me to really help my Community Mobilisers. She explains everything really well, she has the right experience and background and she's concerned with our needs – I have learned a lot from working with Anggie. I have learned to prioritise activities, that's the most important thing."

- Southern Highlands Province Field Coordinator (female PNG national), LEP Program, UN Women

Case Study

On working sensitively and effectively in Papua New Guinea

The following quotes were obtained during RedR's in-country monitoring interviews in PNG, November 2018:

PNG national staff on international staff working in Papua New Guinea:

" Firstly, the culture here is so strong. Our customs are strong. This is what international staff need to know. The attitude nowadays has changed and the people of PNG today are more educated, but they are not as respectful as previous generations. The best advice I can give is: be careful of communities and villages that are not so friendly. Be careful of where you are going – be careful of corruption, don't get too close to people too quickly. You need to study people first and see what kind of people they are. Listen and pay attention to the communities – they know. "

" There are some internationals who I've worked with and there seems to be a barrier between us, like we're not so close. Sometimes international staff... seem to forget about us. I think it's the culture. I mean, in Papua New Guinea, we are a social people, we don't work individually and so when you go out and mingle with people, that's how you pave the way for yourself and for others. "

- UN Women Field Coordinator (female PNG national) during RedR's monitoring interviews (Nov 2018)

On politics, gender roles and stigma in Papua New Guinea:

" For women to get involved in politics, our male leaders take it very personally. It's not easy for the women. But the UN program [overseen by Australia Assists deployee, Anggie Burchill] brought the enemies together and they're working as sisters in harmony. I've seen women being so marginalised and vulnerable and this program has given a boost to them, to be counted in the community, to be considered someone special. That drives something deep in the ladies, it touches them. One HIV+ woman stood up and said 'You've made me feel like a special person. I never felt that because most men in PNG think about us as slaves and labourers'. "

- LEP Program Coordinator (male PNG national) during RedR's monitoring interviews (Nov 2018)

Case Study



Sarah Elliot

Humanitarian Affairs Officer with UNOCHA (five months)

The complexities of operational risk and security in parts of PNG cannot be overstated, and these only intensified following the earthquake. Two of the worst-hit provinces, Southern Highlands and Hela, have been beset by years of tribal fighting and political instability, resulting in limited humanitarian access for provincial, national and international actors.

Australia Assists **Humanitarian Affairs Officer with UNOCHA**, Sarah Elliot, brought her experience from other humanitarian contexts to play a vital field-level coordination role in the earthquake response. Sarah developed and led a remote coordination mechanism which was instrumental in improving communication of operational information for the response and drafted the UN Joint Operational Plan for Hela Province, in collaboration with UN partners and provincial authorities. Of note, **Sarah's greatest achievement was regaining humanitarian access for Hela Province**, which had been halted following a significant deterioration in the security situation in March 2018. RedR's interviews with community members in Hela provide testament to what this actually meant on the ground: 'We are the lost ones here... the dangerous ones. No one ever comes'. This sentiment was indeed reflected during RedR's interviews with national-level actors in Port Moresby.

The following quotes further demonstrate the impact of Sarah's deployment through Australia Assists:

"Despite the extremely complex and highly dynamic operating environment, Sarah fulfilled her terms of reference with commitment and minimal direction. She took initiative to drive field coordination to meet the objectives of effective humanitarian response, including identifying opportunities for recovery activities, using phone apps to improve communications and coordination. Her pro-active and close coordination with field security staff was essential in ensuring implementing agencies had access to government security escorts."

- Humanitarian Coordination Specialist, UNDP PNG (and deployee's supervisor for UNOCHA)

"Working with Sarah? Well, I miss her! She's open and she mingles with people, and at the same time

Case Study

she listens... somehow she manages to listen and then she gets in your ear and says 'What did you say? What do you mean by that?'. She has a very good communicative ability to listen and then step in and contribute. That's a real strength of hers."

- Hela Province Field Coordinator, UN Women, PNG Highlands 'LEP' Program

"She was very direct but very helpful. She's one of those tough ones but tough in a way that she wants to get things done. We have to do things and she pushes us. I thought that was quite good."

- Southern Highlands Province Field Coordinator, UN Women, PNG Highlands 'LEP' Program

“ Sarah's a very brave person. Here was this Australian woman coming from nowhere! She came and she said 'I'm going to Hela - that's where the needs are'. She was the person who paved the way for UN access in Hela Province. And then we were permitted to go back because it was more peaceful and Sarah was there, leading the entire UN team. So she's... ah, a superwoman! The biggest impact of her role was going there, paving the way for others to get into Hela, chatting to the people and mingling with everyone. I mean, we are a social people in PNG... that's how you pave the way for others to come. ”

- UN Women Field Coordinator for Hela Province on Australia Assists deployee Sarah Elliot, deployed to UNOCHA as a Humanitarian Affairs Officer. Humanitarian access to the province had been halted due to insecurity in late March 2018, prior to Sarah taking up the role.



Mohamed Ugool

Food Security Cluster Coordinator with WFP, based in the Office of the National Emergency Controller (five months)

The PNG Highlands earthquake crippled roads, destroyed water reservoirs and disrupted river flows – and subsequent landslides throughout the affected provinces wiped out thousands of root crops and vegetable gardens. As a result, community coping mechanisms were extremely limited. Immediately following the earthquake, the National Disaster Management Team in Port Moresby identified the most immediate needs as **clean water, sanitation, food, shelter and protection.**

To support the food security sector in both coordination and logistics, **Australia Assists Food Security Cluster Coordinator, Mohamed Ugool**, was based in the **Office of the National Emergency Controller** for five months. Mohamed supported the restoration of gardens through the widespread distribution of seeds and agricultural tools to the affected provinces. Key to this activity was his logistics expertise, which was required to ensure the supplies were correctly calculated, loaded and actually reaching the communities. Throughout his deployment, Mohamed focused on working closely with local staff, taking time to mentor them in humanitarian logistics operations. The following comments encapsulate this:

“What Mohamed was saying made sense... he was using the UN logistics calculations, which was a good way to do it. On the technical side of things he was very much the right person. Our local staff were working with him directly and his approach worked for everybody. The Captain [responsible for logistics in the PNG Defence Force] said he’d love to have Mohamed back because he personally learned a lot from him.”

“Overall, I was very happy with Mohamed. One thing he did was show my guys the order in which supplies need to be loaded on the ships. Some of my staff didn’t know how to load a ship before and I feel confident that they could go and do that now. They weren’t being utilised and they really benefitted from Mohamed’s guidance and expertise. The best example is [female national staff member] – after working with Mohamed, she can load a ship now. She’s got that confidence. That’s pretty incredible.”

- Representative of the Office of the National Emergency Controller in PNG

“ The effectiveness is in his approach. He gets along well with everybody, especially with the logistics people in the PNG Defence Force. He’s clearly got the right experience and he’s so nice that he tells everyone what’s happening with a smile and people can’t argue with him! It’s a very effective style. ”

- Representative of the Office of the National Emergency Controller in PNG, on Australia Assists Food Security Cluster Coordinator, Mohamed Ugool.





Quotes from RedR's Monitoring

Voices from the PNG Highlands:

The following quotes were obtained during RedR's program monitoring in November 2018. 'Community Mobilisers' were locally engaged volunteers for the joint UN program, 'Guptla Sindaun bilong ol Meri na Pikinini: Learning, Empowerment and Protection (LEP) for Women and Children in the Earthquake-affected Zone.'

The program was funded by the Australian Government and overseen by an Australia Assists deployee with UN Women, Anggie Burchill, with humanitarian access and security support from another Australia Assists deployee with UNOCHA, Sarah Elliot.

From the Community Mobilisers:

“ When the earthquake destroyed Hela, it destroyed us for a while. But we are strong. We will not be destroyed. The LEP training helped to empower us at that time when we really needed a boost. ”

“ We crossed mountains and rivers to do our work, actually. And the people are interested in what we are speaking about... they will change their life. ”

“ I climbed two mountains to deliver my awareness to women. I'm proud of that! ”

“ The thing we realised with this program is that our women are so strong – they can laugh and cry at the same time. ”

“ We've seen that our women are lifted up with this program, they actually feel like somebody. ”

“ We have seen a real change because of this LEP program, especially with the youths – but what about employment, farming? I'm sorry, I hope this is ok, but I need to ask – what is next? ”





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Photos: RedR Australia

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