



What a Difference a Drought Makes

If you have seen any of our recent newsletters, prayer requests, or posts online you will know that PNG is suffering from a nationwide drought. It is having an effect on everyone. It is also influencing our ministry in many ways, and even our day-to-day lives. I'm sure if you went to any web browser and did a search for PNG Drought 2015 you would see many articles of what is going on around the nation. They would give you a much broader scope, I'm sure, and projections for when the seasonal rains should return. I can only offer how the drought affects us here in the village of Samban, Angoram District.

The largest effect on everyone is of course drinking water. The entire population is suffering from lack of good drinking water. We collect drinking water from rainfall. It has only rained 3 times in the last 2 1/2 months. The two tanks we have for the community have been dry since late June. We hope that eventually we can afford to have eight more tanks to provide more drinking water for the community.

We were in town for a large part of these 2 months for various reasons. So our tanks are down to a level about waist high. Our clinic has seen many cases of giardia, diarrhea, dehydration, dysentery, and stomach issues because of lack of good drinking water. The amount of dust and smoke from all the fires is also causing an increase in respiratory issues and eye infections.

Many people have dug wells deeper than anyone's recollection. The problem is that we are about 30' above sea level. The wells that they are using now are so deep that the water tastes salty. In a nearby village, a man was killed when the well he was digging collapsed on him. These wells are not only used for drinking and bathing but also for washing sago. Sago is a starch

extracted from the pithy insides of the sago palm tree. Sago starch is extracted by washing the pith and squeezing it out. No water, no sago; no sago means no staple food.

Travel has been a major issue for us, as well. We normally can take a canoe or boat powered by an outboard motor. It is within a 10-minute walk from the house; that is far from the case now. On this last trip of bringing supplies from Wewak (nearest town) to Samban the trip that normally takes 8 hours became a 5-day ordeal. In order to get the boat and canoe down to where they would float it took around 30 people to drag them to where they would float. Then the 2 crews of the canoe and boat paddled downriver until the outboard motors could run when the water got deep enough.

Once we had loaded the cargo into the boat and canoe we began our trip back. Since we were heavier because of the cargo the outboards could only be used two-thirds of the way back to Samban. In fact, the canoe ran aground in a low spot and couldn't go any farther. Most of the crews in the boat and canoe slept in the boat and canoe overnight. Since I was sure Karie and the kids would worry about me, I walked an hour and 45 minutes to Samban. I arrived home at 2:30 a.m.

The next morning some smaller canoes were sent down to disperse the cargo into them to make it float again. Then all the canoes and boat were poled and dragged further 'upstream'. I have never seen it this dry in the East Sepik Province. We got them close enough to where our ATV and old tractor could drive near the bank and pick up the cargo. People from 3 different villages came down with us to help haul, carry, pull, and drag the supplies and boat back to Raten village, a 45 minute walk from Samban. We sent our canoe back downstream to Wom, so that if we need to use it, it's already near the deeper water. (Just to let you know, 6 months out of the year Raten and Wom are completely underwater. Now because of the drought I'm driving the tractor and ATV where I would normally run an outboard motor!!) It took us 3 days to haul all the supplies from where we unloaded between Wom and Raten to our house in the village of Samban.

Another item of concern is that this same 'river' is sometimes the only avenue we can send a medical evacuation on. This means that if we have an urgent case, there may be no quick solution. While we are continuing to use the airstrip here, flying is very expensive. It may prove a difficult decision indeed when we have to decide between an evacuation by river or plane due to funds or lack thereof. While keeping the grass on the airstrip cut is normally a task that is required every 2 weeks, due to lack of rain, we've only had to cut the grass there 3 times in the last 2 and ½ months.

Please pray for rain. In many families food supplies are short because while a dry season is a normal planting season, in many cases it got dry so quickly, that whatever was planted just dried up and didn't grow. The effects of this drought are experienced by all of us every day. Pray that we have positive attitudes in dealing with all the different situations because of the lack of water. We may be confronted with a grim reality: Extra time will be necessary just to access supplies and more medical evacuations will be necessary, but we may not be able to help due to these conditions. Pray for the drought to end.

In other news...

We are pleased to report that the clinic continues to improve its services in the past quarter we have started an immunization program. This is something we have wanted to do for some time but have had difficulty in getting the vaccines from the health department. In the past 4 months more than



500 children have received vaccines for diseases that are very real to us here. We have treated outbreaks of measles, mumps, whooping cough, and worst of all TB. Polio is still very real in many parts of PNG. We are so pleased that more and more of the parents are taking this opportunity to have their children vaccinated.

On the education front, our adult continuing education program is going well and I have my hands full grading as well as teaching now. We have been advised by the Provincial office, to grade our own students work and recommend those that are ready for promotion. This is a huge step forward as the last lessons I took to town to be graded took 6 months to be returned. This should help us cut through some of the red tape and get the courses done in a more timely fashion. I am not secondary teacher and some of the grading is difficult as I was not provided any answer keys. Please pray for patience on my part and persistence so that I can keep on with it until God provides a more suitable teacher for this program.



Samban School



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