

Country profile

Papua New Guinea

GEOGRAPHY

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is located immediately to the north of Australia and is our closest neighbour. It occupies the eastern half of the second largest island in the world - the western half is part of Indonesia – and many smaller islands. The landscape is dominated by mountains, rivers and coastal lowlands.

The climate is tropical, with temperature and humidity levels both high. The monsoonal or rainy season is from May to October. Tropical forests which covered much of the country are rapidly being logged.

PEOPLE

PNG is the most linguistically diverse nation in the world with over 700 indigenous languages spoken. While English is the official language the dominant language is Melanesian Pidgin.

Christianity and indigenous animist beliefs are the dominant spiritual beliefs. The connections between people and their land are very significant and central to their identity.

HISTORY

The first Europeans to sight New Guinea were probably Portuguese and Spanish sailors in the early part of the 16th century.

In 1885, the eastern half of the island was divided between Germany (north) and England (south). During World War I, Australia occupied the German area, and continued



Map of Papua New Guinea courtesy of The General Libraries The University of Texas at Austin.

to administer the combined areas until independence in 1975. A secessionist revolt on the island of Bougainville claimed some 20,000 lives between 1988 and 1997. A peace deal signed in 2001 provided the framework for the election in 2005 of an autonomous government for Bougainville.

The founding father of independent Papua New Guinea, Michael Somare came to power as Prime Minister in 2002. Affectionately known as 'The Chief', Mr Somare has been Papua New Guinea's prime minister twice before, and led the country to peaceful independence from Australia in 1975. Australia continues to have strong ties with the country.

ECONOMY

Many tribes in the isolated mountainous interior remain predominantly independent with limited contact with each other and the outside world. However, there is an increasing urban population and the economy is a mix of both traditional subsistence agriculture and the newer cash-based economy.

A small proportion of the land is suitable for growing cash crops, including coffee, copra and cocoa. Abundant rainforests provide the raw material for a logging industry. However, there are concerns about the social and environmental impact of unsustainable deforestation.

PNG has extensive mineral deposits - including gold, copper and nickel - but the difficult terrain and inadequate infrastructure (poor roads and communications) make mining difficult. There are significant reserves of oil and natural gas and the country has hopes to become a significant energy exporter. Oil, copper and gold account for two-thirds of export earnings.

Australia provides approximately \$240 million in aid each year, which is nearly 20% of PNG's national budget.



Children who had to scale cliffs to fetch clean water can now fill a pot from a water catchment tank in their village.

LIVING CONDITIONS

*"We just want enough, plus a little bit more: good clothes, a tin roof and to be able to send our children to school."
(A mother, Madang province)*

Some 80% of Papua New Guinea's people live in rural areas with few or no facilities. The main problems are access to basic health and education services. Roads often don't exist or are of a poor standard. They are hard to maintain because of the high rainfall and erosion-prone soil. People must walk long distances to get to school or to reach a medical care centre.

Health services, especially in rural areas, are poor. Lack of access to safe water and adequate sanitation means that communicable diseases like diarrhoea and malaria are major causes of illness and death, especially in young children. Malnutrition, HIV and AIDS plus marijuana and alcohol abuse are increasing problems.

People in rural areas live in a variety of traditional housing made from bush materials, while people living in towns tend to live in western-style housing. Food consists of what can be grown in gardens – sweet potato, taro and greens supplemented by meat, mainly pig and imported tinned fish and rice.

Limited availability of electricity restricts the use of televisions, although a village will run a generator for everyone to view a communal television. There are about 9 televisions for every 1000 people.

EDUCATION

Education is highly valued by the people of PNG. However, the public education system is poorly funded and under-resourced – particularly in the more remote areas. Approximately 30% of children never attend a primary school.

There are increasing moves to expand the use of *tok ples* (local language) in education programs. There is also increasing recognition of the need to improve teacher training and make the curriculum more relevant to student needs.

In the future, one of the challenges for the people of PNG is to reconcile their traditional way of life with the introduction of a modern, urban economy.



Medical consumables donated through a corporate gift in kind program are presented to hospital staff in Papua New Guinea

Comparatively speaking...

CATEGORY	PNG	AUSTRALIA
Population	5.7 million	19.7 million
Urban population	13.2%	91.9 %
GDP per capita (PPP US\$)	\$2,619	\$29,632
Population living on less than \$2 a day (PPP US\$)	51%	0
Population using improved water sources	39%	100%
Adult literacy rate	Male: 63.4% Female: 50.9%	Male: 99% Female: 99%
Net primary enrolment ratio	73%	97%
Life expectancy at birth	55.3 years	79 years
Under-five mortality rate (per 1000 live births)	93	6
Malaria cases per 100,000 people	1,688	nil
Children underweight for age	35%	...
One year olds immunised against measles	49%	93%

Source: UNDP Human Development Report 2005.
International Cooperation at a crossroads.

WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA IN PNG:

- supports a wide range of development and relief projects.
- works with the community on programs supporting water sanitation and hygiene initiatives.
- supports a range of health projects primarily focusing on women's and children's health and the impact of HIV and AIDS.



World Vision

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