Rapid Needs Assessment Report on Kadovar Island Volcanic Eruption, East Sepik, Papua New Guinea

Assessment Sites: Kadovar & Ruprup Islands
Date: January 11, 2018
Summary

On Friday, 5th of January 2018, the volcano on Kadovar Island began to erupt following earthquakes which occurred the previous day. This forced the islanders to flee for their lives to a neighboring island called Ruprup. The displaced islanders, a total of 691 men, women & children (figure according to the local village recorder) are now crowded on Ruprup island & are dependent on the locals there for basic survival needs. Out of 691, 31 are children between the ages of 0-5 years, 76 are children between 6-16 years. 4 pregnant and lactating women were identified. From Save the Children and Oxfam baseline data from 2016 El Nino response, we know that there are approximately 30 people from Kadovar living with disabilities.

Even though the Ruprup Islanders are accommodating and helping to meet the needs of the displaced islanders, their urgent needs include shelter, clothing, food, water, sanitation, hygiene and medical assistance. Currently, there are military personnel on Ruprup Island monitoring the situation. The East Sepik Provincial Administration have dispatched 20 bales of second hand clothing and food rations to those affected but these (especially clothing) were not enough. It is very likely that the longer those displaced islanders live on Ruprup, there will be increasing food & water shortage, illnesses due to poor water, sanitation and hygiene conditions caused by overcrowding and pre-existing protection issues will be made worse as people begin to adopt negative coping mechanisms to sustain livelihoods.

Introduction

Geographic location

Kadovar Island is volcanic island situated south-east of Wewak, East Sepik Province in Papua New Guinea.
An initial assessment on Kadovar Island Volcanic Eruption was conducted by teams from the East Sepik Provincial Administration on 7th January after receiving reports from the islanders concerning the volcanic eruption. According to the assessment report, it was noted that:

- The eruption began on 4th January 2014 but got worse on the 5th of January causing the Kodovar Islanders to relocate to its neighboring island, Ruprup,
- 80% of the island was destroyed by volcanic ashes,
- Shortage of food, clothing and water.

On 11th January, a second assessment was done, comprising of members from the PNG National Disaster Centre, Oxfam and Save the Children. The purpose of the assessment was to identify immediate problems/threats faced by the affected islanders and to come up with recommendations on ways to assist those affected people.

**Methodology**

The team carried out focus group discussions amongst groups of males and females and the responses given were noted. Village leaders like the councilor, village recorder and village health volunteer were also interviewed and their responses were recorded on questionnaires. Those responses were analyzed and compiled into this report.

The assessment team was made up of 2 x Save the Children officers (1 male, 1 female), 1 x Oxfam officer (male), 1 x Volcanologist from Rabaul Volcano Observatory (male) and 2 x National Disaster Centre officers (2 x males).

**Findings**

1.1. **Current situation on Kadovar Island**

Since the eruption on January 5th 2018, the locals have fled for their lives to the nearest island Ruprup. A total of 15 houses collapsed into the sea following landslides caused by the earthquakes. The volcano is still very active emitting dust and ashes. A volcanologist from Rabaul Volcano Observatory who joined the assessment team has set up instruments to locate volcanic hot spots around the island. Should the volcanic heat intensity increases, it is likely that the island will sink completely into the ocean and could trigger a tsunami which will affect other islands and the coastlines as well.
Picture taken on 11th January 2018 around 11:30am. The deserted area is where 15 houses used to be but have collapsed into the sea during the landslide.

Picture taken on 11th January 2018 at 2pm showing smoke coming out from the another spot right on the sea at the side of the volcanic mountain. Note that there wasn’t any smoke coming out from the sea when the first picture was taken two and a half hours earlier.
1.2. Life on Ruprup Island
1.2.1. Food Security & Livelihood

The main food sources on Rup Rup Island are gardening (bananas, coconuts) and fishing. Fishing activities on Ruprup Island are now limited as people are fearful that the volcanic eruption on Kadovar Island might worsen and disrupt the seas. Now that the displaced Kadovar Islanders are at Ruprup Island, bananas and coconuts will be running out in approximately 10 days’ time. There’ll be need for people to make new gardens but there will be a land shortage if the Kadovar Islanders are not relocated from Rup Rup.

The East Sepik Provincial Administration have dispatched food rations and clothing to the affected population, these are expected to run out shortly. At the time of the assessment, these rations were not yet distributed and were set to arrive on Jan 12th. Since the Ruprup Islanders are accommodating the Kadovar people, these rations will be given to each Rup Rup household. The assessment team observed that there were approximately each Rup Rup household will receive:

- 3 x bales of rice (each bale containing 20 x 1kg packets),
- 1 carton of tinned fish (contains 24 tins of fish),
- 30 tins of Ox & Palm meat,
- 6 packets of sugar,
- 6 packets of salt,
- 1 x 1L container oil,
- 1 x 20L jerrycans,
- 1 carton of biscuits and
- 1 Carton noodles.

If a constant supply of food is not maintained, there is a risk that vulnerable groups will start resorting to negative coping mechanisms, such as females selling themselves for food, stealing or fighting over food and water may arise.

1.2.2. Protection

There is no formal authority on the island to deal with protection issues with the nearest welfare officer based in wewak. There is no report of physical or sexual violence as yet but the women interviewed expressed their fear that this might occur if they stay on Rup Rup Island much longer. They feel especially vulnerable when collecting water from the only well on the island. Women and girls are mainly responsible for water collection on the island and need to walk 3 hours to collect water each day. Vulnerable groups, including women, children, persons living with disability and the elderly are currently dependent on their relatives from Rup Rup island for food and shelter. Although the Kadovar Islanders have family ties with the Ruprup Islanders, it is possible that if the current situation continues, vulnerable people might be excluded from basic needs when survival needs increase.
1.2.3. Health

There is no functioning health post on the island and no trained Community Health Workers (CHWs). Although there are Village Health Volunteers (VHVs) trained by Save the Children in 2016 to diagnose and treat acute malnutrition, those VHVs have not been active because of lack of nutrition medical supplies (like MUAC tapes, plumpy’nut and micronutrients) as well as the burden to work voluntarily without any form of incentives.

The assessment team found that children were developing fevers and skin rashes, cough and diarrhea. The East Sepik Provincial Health Authority has not sent any health workers with medical supplies to set up on Ruprup Island to assist those affected communities. Those ill were assisted by the military personnel based on the island to monitor the situation, using their first aid kit supplies, with only enough supply for themselves. The supplies have ran out and the military officers are now requesting for medical supplies and trained Community Health Workers to be sent to Ruprup Island by the Provincial Health Authority to assist the islanders.

There is a continuous flow of smoke and ash flowing towards Rup Rup Island when the wind heads in that direction. This could pose a health risk for the population on the island if they are exposed for prolonged period.

1.2.4. Nutrition

We know from 2016 baseline that malnutrition is a problem on Rup Rup and Kadovar. In May 2016, during the screening for Mid Upper Arm Circumference to identify children with acute malnutrition, it was revealed that 4 out of 166 children screened had acute malnutrition, giving a global acute malnutrition (GAM) rate of 2.4%. If water shortages continue, the nutritional status of children under 5 and pregnant women will deteriorate as they go without food, leaving them vulnerable to illnesses.

1.2.5. Shelter

The Ruprup Islanders are housing at least two to three families from Kadovar Island in each of their respective houses. It is estimated that there are about 15-20 people living a house that is made out of bush materials. There is overcrowding and women and girls have no privacy when it comes to sleeping, washing and getting dressed. The displaced islanders have no hope of returning to their island to rebuild their houses and will not be able to settle on Ruprup Island due to shortage of land and building materials. As they have no shelter of their own, they lack and are in need of basic household items such as bedding materials and cooking utensils.

The picture below shows the displaced Kadovar Islanders housed in a small family house on Ruprup Island.
1.2.6. Water and Sanitation Hygiene

Difficulties in accessing clean water for drinking and cooking were experienced by those living on the mountainous areas of the island where the main water source is the rain water tanks. These people, especially the women and young girls, had to travel three hours a day to the coastal area to fetch water from the water points put up by Oxfam in 2017. They store water in jerry cans and then carry it back up the mountains.

Sanitation conditions are poor as there are no latrines currently on the island. People just practice open defecation in the bush and on the beach. There is no soap available for proper hand washing as due to limited financial means and very high transportation to get soap from Wewak. This increases the risk for diarrheal diseases and malnutrition. Women are using bits of clothes and in some cases bush materials (such as leaves) to manage menstrual hygiene.

Recommendations

- Continue providing emergency water and food supplies to affected area
- Immediate mobilisation of health service providers to Rup Rup Island equipped with medicines
- MUAC screening and emergency nutrition supplies (including plumpy’nut and micronutrient powder) to treat and monitor nutrition situation of children. Consider reactivating Village Health Volunteers trained to treat and monitor malnutrition in 2016 El Nino response.
- Reactivate child protection and gender focal points on Water Management Committees and engage PDCD to provide advice on access to protection services
- Immediate plan required for resettlement of Kadovar islanders
- Dig more pit latrines with locks and lights to ensure protection of vulnerable groups from abuse