Health briefing sheet
How VSO works in the health sector

Papua New Guinea
The state of health in PNG

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), PNG has some of the worst health indicators in the Pacific. PNG faces significant challenges, in particular in the areas of health systems, health workforce, maternal and child health and non-communicable diseases. The health workforce crisis in PNG is currently taking extreme forms, with an average of 5 doctors and 4.6 registered nurses per 10,000 population. Healthcare facilities are chronically understaffed, health education remains below international standards and teaching curriculums are out-dated. The number of rural health facilities is decreasing instead of increasing and facilities often lack running water and communication infrastructure (National Health Plan 2011-2020: 2013 Sector Performance Annual Review, 2013). With 87% of the 7.3 million population living in rural areas, poor infrastructure means that existing health services can be difficult to access with many unable to receive treatment.

PNG’s maternal mortality rate is very high, double that of any other Pacific islands, with almost half of all women giving birth without the assistance of a doctor or midwife. Although PNGs life expectancy at birth continues to rise, the number of maternal deaths remains unacceptably high. The number of neonatal deaths hasn’t decreased and figures show that infants are twice more likely to die before their first birthday if they are born in rural areas (Child Morbidity and Mortality Annual Report 2013). In particular in the rural areas women and men have limited access to family planning services and quality sexual and reproductive health care. Referral chains are ineffective leading to obstetric emergencies and a high number of neglected and untreated sexually transmittable infections (STIs).

Malnutrition is one of the major causes of death in children under 5. Although data in this area is scarce figures from 2013 show that malnutrition either directly caused or contributed to 33% of all deaths in children under 5. 18% of children are moderately or severely underweight and 11% of the newborns weigh less than 2500 grams at birth. In the not too distant future, non-communicable diseases will become the most critical health problem in PNG and between 2010 and 2030 the number of people living with diabetes will rise by 140%.

Recognising that the lack of health human resources is one of the major long-term constraints on the health sector to deliver quality health services to all people living in PNG, in particular the population living in the rural areas, it is essential to improve access to quality health care.
VSO’s priorities in health

VSO PNG is working together with the PNG National Government and other stakeholders to address major challenges, such as the workforce crisis. The health programmes main areas of focus are:

**Strengthening maternal and neonatal health care**
To improve the quality of maternal and neonatal health care our volunteers deliver a combination of on-the-job training, mentoring and coaching and provide support in direct service delivery.

**Improving Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH)**
Increasing the quality of SRH services, volunteers build skills in local healthcare staff to prevent and treat STIs and implement reproductive health services. Strengthening the knowledge and understanding of HIV/AIDS and increasing the access to care, VSO volunteers and national Peer Educators support most at risk populations and people living with HIV/AIDS.

**Increasing the availability and accessibility of nutrition services**
Re-introducing nutrition education, our volunteers work together with Divine Word University in the delivery of a Post Graduate Diploma on nutrition and dietetics. Simultaneously our clinical nutritionists are setting up nutrition offices across the country.

**Strengthening the delivery of nursing education**
Implementing innovative teaching techniques and strengthening the students’ clinical practice, volunteers work with the National Department of Health and Schools of Nursing to improve the quality of nursing education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nurse education support project (NESP)</th>
<th>To improve delivery of nursing education and clinical practice, volunteers build the capacity of nursing lecturers, health care workers and help to facilitate clinical placements. NESP will expose nursing lecturers and selected nursing staff at training hospitals to professional development, demonstrations of lecturing techniques, the opportunity to practice clinical facilitation and assistance with school-led revision of resource and teaching materials.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015-ongoing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutrition and dietetics support project (NDSP)</th>
<th>NDSP builds the capacity of healthcare professionals on nutrition. Clinical volunteers mentor and coach hospital staff and provide in-service training on healthy lifestyles and nutrition. Volunteers will design and deliver a post-graduate programme of nutrition and dietetics and train graduates to become educators.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015-ongoing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maternal health</th>
<th>To increase the accessibility of obstetric and gynaecology services, VSO supported Modilon hospital with the delivery of clinical services in the labour ward, postnatal ward, gynaecology ward and outpatients clinic.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013-2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability in PNG</th>
<th>To enable people living with disabilities to access appropriate hospital services, VSO PNG designed and delivered the physiotherapy programme. National lecturers were trained and hospital physiotherapy departments established. Provincial hospitals now have stand-alone physiotherapy departments and physiotherapy is a recognised profession.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VSO Papua New Guinea

Physical Address
Lot 10, Section 31
Binnen Road
Madang
Papua New Guinea

Postal Address
PO Box 1061,
Madang, PNG.

(+675) 4221924/4221925
vsopng@vsoint.org
www.vsointernational.org

VSO is the world’s leading charity that fights poverty through volunteers.
Registered charity number: England and Wales 313757, Scotland SC03911