

1. Papua New Guinea

MAF's program in PNG continues to provide essential air transport into very isolated communities, located in some of the most rugged terrain in the world. This unique topography and poor infrastructure mean that MAF provides the only viable access to the outside world and the help and hope needed by many of the 5 million people in PNG.

Papua New Guinea is a nation where hundreds of communities are isolated by mountains, jungle, rivers, and swamps, making them dependant on air transport. The welfare and development of people in Papua New Guinea (PNG) has been eroded by economic decline, failing infrastructure, insecurity, poverty, religious syncretism and a rapidly growing threat of an AIDS epidemic.

MAF has been providing essential air transport in PNG for nearly 60 years. As a result, many otherwise inaccessible or isolated communities across the country have gained access to the outside world and many of life's essentials. In the new circumstances in PNG, MAF continues to be a vital link in the work of donor groups, missions, government and non-government organizations and in the development of communities.

1.1 MAF in PNG

The PNG geography contains significant areas of high, steep and rugged terrain as well as major swamp areas. Such terrain isolates many communities, often making air transport the only safe, reliable and efficient link to the outside world. Without MAF, entire regions simply would not have access to basic health care and education, let alone emergency medical transport and valuable trade income through the transportation of produce to market centres. Church and mission organizations undertaking evangelism, Bible translation and theological education depend on MAF's subsidised transport to work in isolated areas.

With headquarters in Mt Hagen, MAF PNG operates from ten satellite bases to serve relief, development, church and mission organizations and support over 300 remote communities with airstrips throughout the country.



Unfortunately the total number of aircraft available to meet PNG's air transport needs has reduced dramatically in recent years. Because of a struggling economy and the hardships of operating in PNG, the number of aircraft operating within the country has fallen from approximately 300 at the turn of the century to approximately 100 today. MAF is now the only transport service provider to the majority of remote bush communities. This means MAF's fourteen aircraft are a lifeline for many isolated people whose only alternative may be to walk for days through jungle with limited river crossings or over steep mountain ranges. MAF's role in developing and sustaining remote community life is greater than ever.

In 2006 MAF aircraft in PNG enabled:

- over 470 medical evacuation flights for people requiring urgent assistance, such as women with birth difficulties, patients with severe cuts, burns or injuries, or snakebite victims;
- over 55 tonnes of medical supplies to go where they were most needed;
- over 58 tonnes of schooling materials for classes and education;
- over 690 tonnes of freight for community development - primarily bulk coffee to be delivered to market centres at a subsidised rate, but also building materials for schools, bridges and housing; and
- 3,474 seats on flights were for teachers and health workers living in remote areas.

MAF in PNG does not just fly mission and NGO workers in and out of communities, but rather sustains whole communities with its air-link. Doctors and health workers, teachers and local produce growers alike depend on MAF, along with anyone needing emergency medical care. The rugged environment and lack of profit margin mean MAF is now the only organization willing to do this valuable work, flying to over 300 separate isolated communities each year. As a result, MAF and its staff have formed strong and trusted relationships with the remote people of PNG and the many agencies who serve them.

To compliment the provision of essential air transport, MAF is linked to CRMF, which provides technical support for a growing network of over 850 HF radios across PNG. HF radios enable basic communication for those in bush communities including health and education workers, who regularly need contact with the outside world to report progress, arrange supplies and request support.

1.2 MAF's work in PNG

There are opportunities for MAF in PNG to bring more relief and development, and to build remote community capacity to participate in the health care, education and other development opportunities offered by the outside world.

1.2.1 Medical

The remote regional hospital (run by Pioneers Mission) at Rumginae, in PNG's Western Province is an example of MAF's key role in health care. The hospital has established clinics throughout the whole district and MAF carries medical supplies, trainees, qualified clinic staff and severe medical cases to and from the clinics. Dr Addy Sittther, head of the Rumginae hospital says:

"MAF and CRMF are my right and left arm – I simply could not operate without them".

Although such hospitals and clinics represent the only medical support for the whole bush community, their ability to fund essential air transport is declining as transport costs increase. Whilst many emergency cases are heavily subsidised, there is increasing need for MAF to subsidise the cost of carrying 62 tonnes of medical supplies annually as well as the staff needed by these hospitals, so the hospitals can stay financially viable.

In addition, the annually reported number of AIDS cases in PNG has continued to rise more sharply each year since the mid 1990's¹. According to AusAID²:

- PNG is facing a major HIV epidemic, with annual increases of 15-30% in numbers of people infected;

¹ World Health Organization Report "HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific Region: 2003".

² Major conclusions from the "Potential Economic Impacts of an HIV/AIDS Epidemic in Papua New Guinea" report commissioned by AusAID in February 2002.

- HIV has the potential to increase poverty in PNG, with measures of economic welfare falling between 12 and 48% by the year 2020;
- the labour force could be 13 - 38% lower by 2020 than that projected without HIV; and
- the national budget deficit will increase between 9 – 21% by 2020.

MAF PNG recently employed a full time HIV/AIDS Project Officer and is now seeking partnership with agencies responding to the growing threat of AIDS. MAF could have a substantial impact on any response, through communications and transport and its influence in the remote communities.

1.2.2 Education

The PNG Government has centralised secondary schools and offers boarding facilities to students who gain places at the schools. MAF contributes to the education of PNG citizens by flying students, their teachers and supplies to and from schools.

Many schools, both those run by Government or Church, are in areas where no road or other easy access is available. The availability of teachers and materials, along with the viability of these schools, depends entirely on the availability of MAF flights.

For example, the education of approximately 400 students at the Telefomin regional high school, near the border with Indonesia, is completely reliant upon MAF's support. The transport of teachers in and out, the supply of books and equipment, even building materials and the rice the students eat, require regular MAF flights. Typically, as local government funding has diminished and economic conditions worsen, the school's inability to fund the true cost of essential air transport now threatens the viability of the school. MAF's support and additional subsidies are needed.

1.2.3 Training



MAF trains and employs over 100 PNG national staff in wide ranging roles including pilots, engineers, managers, and ground staff. MAF's Overseas Aid Fund was established in 2003 to assist in the direction of funding toward projects that support not only relief and development activity, but also the training of staff with valuable skills that lead to professional qualifications. Such training is essential for the long-term provision and sustainability of air transport throughout the country.

So far about 30 national pilots have been trained at MAF's Aviation Training Centre (the only licensed flight training school in PNG), up to and including the level of flight instructor. Aircraft Engineers have also been trained through MAF's apprenticeship program.

MAF works closely with PNG Civil Aviation Authorities in the development of curricula, training processes, examinations, safety management and accident investigation. MAF's Aviation Training Centre is critical to the development and qualification of indigenous pilots and to the whole aviation industry in PNG.

1.2.4 Development

In the remote highlands of PNG and other areas where there are no viable roads, the livelihood of entire communities depends on MAF carrying their produce to market and returning with general goods and materials. This is particularly important for many coffee-growing communities who depend on MAF. In 2005 MAF delivered over 800 tonnes of coffee for growers in the highlands to market providing them with essential income. Much of this freight was carried at subsidised rates, but still the profit margins for growers are very low and transport is a



big component of cost. Income earned from these sales enables purchasing of supplies to improve living standards.

Day to day and in times of emergency or crisis, MAF is a lifeline. Our aviation service includes medical evacuations (medevacs), transport for mobile clinic personnel and teachers and the delivery of life-saving medicines, educational aides, essential supplies, trade goods, market produce, mail and building materials.

MAF is also the preferred (or only) method of transport for aid agency personnel, government and business leaders into and out of bush communities. MAF flies pastors, Bible college students, mission workers and all sorts of local Christian organizations at heavily subsidised rates to enable them to function in a place where air transport is not a luxury, but a lifeline.

1.2.5 Churches and Missions

MAF continues to play a vital part in the work of churches and missions as they serve in isolated communities throughout PNG.

Donations from MAF supporters, enable us to carry church and mission workers at heavily subsidised rates. Each year MAF is able to subsidise fares for over 6,000 church and mission staff and transport hundreds of tonnes of "church" freight (building supplies etc) great distances in PNG.

Churches with commitments to health service programs also benefit from MAF flights.

The team of MAF international and national staff are active in ministry within their local churches and communities, in addition to their service with MAF.

Resources like the "Jesus" film and discipleship training programs are used to support these activities.

