



Context Overview

At approximately 2:00 a.m. on 31 October 2025, a major landslide struck Kukas Village in Unda Ward 30, Minamb Valley, within the Wapenamanda Rural Local Level Government area of Enga Province. The disaster affected a total of 45 individuals.

At the time of the incident, 28 people were temporarily staying in a large Enga communal house to attend a funeral gathering. The landslide buried the structure, resulting in the tragic loss of 21 lives (17 men and 4 women) including two children and a pregnant woman. Seven individuals survived, five of whom sustained injuries. Community members and local authorities later recovered all 21 bodies.

The communal house was situated just a few minutes' walking from the main Highlands Highway and close proximity to the Minamb River. Most of the victims were members of the Yabalekin community from Lower Lai in Wapenamanda, who had traveled to Kukas Village for the funeral.

Local leaders reported that while minor landslides had occurred in the area over the past five years, no homes had previously been built at the affected site, and no significant damage had been recorded. The communal house where the funeral was being held had been recently constructed at the site affected by the landslide. Field observations and discussions with community members indicate that the area remains highly susceptible to future landslides, driven by unstable soil conditions and persistent heavy rainfall.

Kukas Village lies adjacent to the main Highlands Highway. Access to the landslide site from Mt. Hagen remains open, allowing vehicles to reach the area. However, travel from Wabag currently requires security escorts due to ongoing tribal conflict between the Yangakun and Yakuman tribes near the Wapenamanda Station area.



Methodology

On 31 October 2025, a joint assessment team was deployed to Kukas Village in response to the landslide. The team included representatives from the Enga Provincial Disaster Centre, Wapenamanda District Administration, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), with support from the United Nations Department of Safety and Security. Working in partnership with local authorities, IOM activated its Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Emergency Event Tracking (EET) tool to assess the situation in Wapenamanda Rural District, Enga Province.

During the mission, the team conducted focus group discussions and key informant interviews with community leaders and church

representatives. These engagements offered critical insights into the impacts of the landslide, the urgent needs of affected families, and the community's coping strategies in the aftermath of the disaster.

Field observations indicated loosened soil, unstable slopes, and ongoing water seepage across the Minamb Valley, creating conditions that pose a continued risk of secondary landslides. The affected site is situated less than five meters from the Minamb River, where sustained heavy rainfall likely exacerbated the instability of the already saturated ground.

Current Response

- Local Response:** Immediately following the landslide, community members mobilized to recover those trapped and retrieve the bodies of those killed. Using spades, sticks, and bush knives, they worked tirelessly to clear debris and locate victims. According to local authorities and community focal points, all bodies have since been recovered and transported to the morgue. The Papua New Guinea Fire Service team from Wabag also responded to the incident, providing support to local residents during the retrieval operations.
- Provincial Authorities:** Due to ongoing tribal fighting in Wapenamanda, the Provincial Administrator sought consent from the families of the deceased to transport the bodies to Mt. Hagen Paradise Funeral Home, as safe repatriation to their home villages for burial was not possible. The Enga Provincial Government, through the Disaster Centre, provided emergency relief items including tents, tarpaulins, clothing, food rations, and water to support affected families at the funeral site. The deceased remain under the care of the Enga Provincial Government. The joint assessment team recommended that communities residing along the affected slope consider relocating to safer areas, given the continuous rainfall and unstable conditions. The team also recommended maintaining regular security patrols to help ensure safety in the area.
- Accessibility:** The situation around Wapenamanda Station remains volatile due to renewed tribal clashes between the Yangakun and Yakuman tribes. As a result, travel from Wabag to the affected area is considered unsafe without a security escort. Access from Mt. Hagen remains open and is currently being used as the preferred route for response and assessment teams.



Joint assessment underway at the landslide site in Wapenamanda. © IOM 2025

Humanitarian Needs and Response Priorities

Affected families require food, essential non-food relief items (NFI), medical assistance for injuries, and psychosocial support. The Enga Provincial Government has initiated the response by distributing food and NFIs to the affected population.

The Enga Provincial Health Authority (PHA) deployed a medical and surveillance team that assisted three of the five injured individuals, those in critical condition, including their transfer to Wabag General Hospital. All five injured persons were initially taken to the Unda Aid Post in Wapenamanda, with the three critical cases later referred for further treatment at Wabag General Hospital.

Community leaders have emphasized the urgent need for psychosocial support for both survivors and bereaved

families. They also stressed the importance of awareness-raising activities to inform local residents about relocating to safer areas, particularly in light of the ongoing rainy season and the heightened risk of additional landslides.

As part of its programming, IOM has strengthened the capacity of local authorities in Enga Province in mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). IOM will work closely with the Enga Provincial Government, including trained personnel, and with humanitarian and development partners to deliver MHPSS services to the affected population.

Recommended Next Steps

To ensure an effective and coordinated response to the landslide in Kukas Village, the following actions are recommended:

- Continue monitoring weather conditions to anticipate and mitigate the risk of secondary landslides, particularly in light of ongoing rainfall.
- Enhance coordination with the National Disaster Centre (NDC), Enga Provincial Government, and humanitarian and development partners to support the timely mobilization of additional relief assistance and the provision of mental health and psychosocial support.

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