Impact of COVID-19 on food systems

Pacific Island Countries
Focal countries overview July 2020

Land use
Small islands average 1,336 km² (51% agriculture)
Medium islands average 3,893 km² (29% agriculture)
Large islands average 64,058 km² (14% agriculture)
20.6% GDP from agriculture and fish (average)

Population
Small islands 130,000 people
Medium islands 299,000 people
Large islands 1,867,945 people
62% rural (average)
Adjusted income per capita US$3,343 (average)

COVID-19 and health
First recorded cases:
18 March (Samoa); 19 March (Fiji)
At 3 August: 509 known cases; 8 deaths*
Cases in 6 out of 21 countries (excluding PNG)

Local response to COVID-19
State of emergency: March 2020 (all 7 countries)
Rapid closure of national borders
Quarantine established, from 14 to 28 days
Suspension of schools, mass gatherings; changes to working arrangements

Agriculture and fisheries
Top staples: coconut, taro, cassava, bananas, sweetpotato, yams
Low farm productivity; traditional farming and fishing practices
Primary production focuses on domestic markets

Key risk multipliers
Climate impacts, declining fresh water resources
Agricultural and biosecurity risks
Persistent malnutrition and dietary issues

This assessment is organised around a typology of island groups that is consistent with other Pacific studies. The three types are small reef and composite islands (Kiribati and Tuvalu), medium-sized volcanic, limestone and composite islands (Samoa and Tonga) and larger composite, limestone and sand-based islands (Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji).

* Of the seven focal countries, all but Fiji were free of COVID-19 at the conclusion of the assessment. At 9 July, Fiji had reported 21 cases.
Impact of COVID-19 on food systems

Pacific Island Countries

Key findings

**Smallholders**
Farmers, fishers impacted by movement restriction and input availability
Tropical Cyclone Harold increased production challenges in affected countries
Return to rural areas increased food demand and agricultural pressure

**Supply chains**
Disruption to limited distribution services problematic on small and medium islands
Reduced demand for exports from large islands
Tourism decline has ongoing impacts for farm incomes
Local market closures; reduced availability of fresh produce

**Governance**
Domestic travel restrictions eased in July
Some governments enacted price stabilisation for staples
Limited formal social protection; support activities include distribution of planting material, support for fishing

**Community**
Increased tension over ‘idle’ and disputed land
Changes in food consumption; cheaper, less nutritious foods
Impacts on women include exclusion from workforce, particularly food markets

**Employment**
Reduced income from tourism a major concern
Reduction in remittances across the Pacific
Poverty likely to increase as economies contract
Pandemic worsens existing challenge of high youth unemployment
Impact of COVID-19 on food systems

Pacific Island Countries
Suggested opportunities for action

**Short term**
Up to 1 year
- Prepare for the 2020–21 cyclone season
- Support sustainable practices and healthy diets
- Strengthen evidence and data coordination for COVID-19 response activities
- Enable and engage with regional resilience dialogues

**Intermediate**
Up to 5 years
- Evaluate impacts on food systems from past interventions and COVID pivots
- Identify the costs and benefits of new agribusiness activities
- Mitigate biosecurity, climate and water risk
- Map context-specific vulnerabilities and strengths to improve adaptation of local farming systems

**Longer term**
Up to 10 years
- Capture social protection benefits from agriculture and fisheries in post-COVID-19 economic recovery
- Generate a pipeline of future farmers and fishers through innovative forms of youth engagement
- Invest in initiatives that support women’s recovery from shocks

Short-term opportunities include resource mobilisation and pivoting existing activities towards COVID-19 responses (up to 1 year). Intermediate-term opportunities include addressing gaps in knowledge, redressing negative impacts and/or boosting aspects of recovery or resilience (up to 5 years). Longer-term opportunities include research and development to address systemic challenges and options for transformational change (up to 10 years).