Australian Government

Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research

FACT SHEET

Impact of COVID-19 on food systems

Papua New Guinea

Country overview July 2020

Land use

Land area: 462,800 km^2

25.6% agricultural land

17.7% GDP from agriculture and fish (2018)

Population

8.9 million people

81% rural

Adjusted income per capita US$2,037

COVID-19 and health

First recorded case: 13 March 2020

At 31 July 2020: 63 known cases; 2 recorded deaths

At July 2020: no spread; no hotspots

Local response to COVID-19

State of emergency: 23 March 2020*; National Pandemic Act: 12 June 2020

Schools, markets and international border closures

Restricted movement between provinces and communities

Funding call for production and transport subsidies

Medical systems supported by international agencies

Agriculture and fisheries

Top staples: sweetpotato, banana, yam, cassava, taro

Top exports: palm oil, coffee, cocoa, copra

Low farm productivity; limited access to markets

Range of farming systems and land use intensity

Extensive fisheries sector for export, local markets and subsistence

Key risk multipliers

Agricultural pests and diseases

Problematic post-harvest storage

Risk of COVID-19 outbreak for health system

Existing gender and nutrition issues

Occasional droughts and frost; changing weather patterns

Assessment approach: National level assessment, with information sought from most provinces and agricultural subsectors; particular focus on sale of fresh food and impacts on female sellers, urban consumers and local communities.

* The state of emergency was lifted in mid-August 2020.

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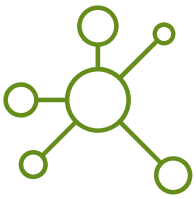
Key findings



Smallholders

Limited availability of agri-inputs

Increased transport costs, challenges with storage

Persistent, underlying food and nutrition insecurity in rural areas

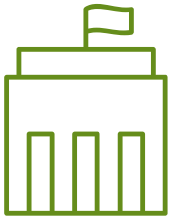
Supply chains

Supply chain disruption between rural and urban areas

Border closures limit travel to sell produce

Urban market closures affect food availability and pricing

Innovative use of information and communications technology to help farmers sell produce



Governance

Official enforcements impede food transport and sales

Agricultural institutions not part of COVID-19 response development

Community

Health impacts minimal; higher risk at borders

Strong urban response overlooks vulnerable remote communities

Increased risk for women from market closures and reduced income

Employment

Extensive job losses in informal and formal sector

Recovery unclear even if COVID-19 caseload minimal

Informal retailers lose trade because of formal job losses

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Suggested opportunities for action

Short term (Up to 1 year)

- Gather and synthesise existing PNG food security knowledge

Intermediate (Up to 5 years)

- Collect and disseminate production and marketing data focused on fresh foods and exports
- Encourage urban and peri-urban production of vegetables, fruit and poultry
- Use emergent information and communications technology systems to improve access to agricultural information and markets
- Improve cross-institutional coordination and R&D programs for key export tree crops
- Support non-government organisations to assist vulnerable communities through targeted production and livelihoods strategies
- Support capacity building activities for food systems actors
- Mainstream basic nutrition, hygiene and health into all development programs

Longer term (Up to 10 years)

- Support farmers to grow a crop mix that improves their food security
- Support measures that bolster smallholders' access to cash income
- Enhance institutional capacity to breed, select and distribute improved planting materials, and support smallholder adoption
- Strengthen teaching and research outcomes in tertiary agricultural programs

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).

Visit www.aciar.gov.au/covid19-assessment-stage2 to learn more about the impacts of COVID-19 on food systems in Papua New Guinea and the Indo-Pacific region

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