Impact of COVID-19 on food systems
Papua New Guinea
Country overview July 2020

Land use
Land area: 462,800 km²
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
- 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

Intermediate
Up to 5 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

Longer term
Up to 10 years


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).