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EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO EFFECTS OF COVID-19 CRISIS IN PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

September 2024

SDGs:



Countries:

Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu

Project Code:

TCP/SAP/3801

FAO Contribution:

USD 500 000

Duration:

10 July 2020–9 July 2023

Contact Info:

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Implementing Partners

National Ministries responsible for Agriculture, Fisheries and Livestock; National Statistics Offices; National Disaster Management Offices.

Beneficiaries

Governments, Ministries of Agriculture and Fisheries, civil society organizations, vendors and food producers.

Country Programming Framework (CPF) Outputs

Pacific Multicountry Programming Framework (2018-2022). Output 1: Safe and healthy food production and consumption. Output 2: Sustainable and climate-smart practices towards resilient agriculture, fisheries and forestry production systems.



BACKGROUND

Despite the lack of COVID-19 cases in Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the pandemic's impact in the region was significant, with a state of emergency issued by all islands, border closures, and limited access to food supply and livelihood opportunities. It was recognized that a prolonged pandemic with disruptions to global and local supply chains (including production, processing, export and transportation) would seriously affect the region's food systems.

In many Pacific SIDS, imported foods constitute half of an average person's food intake. However, most rural populations produce and consume their own food. While some island nations have a price control mechanism for foods considered essential (including rice, vegetable oil, milk, salt, canned tuna and sugar), the prices of other, non-controlled foods (such as fruit and vegetables) increased as a result of domestic supply chain disruptions. Access to seed, fertilizer and livestock feed was hampered by lockdowns, border closure and a shortage of supply in exporting countries.

Small-scale fishing activities by local communities increased as a result of reduced access to imported foods and atoll nations in particular introduced plans to increase small-scale fishing in their coastal areas. Communities living in urban and peri-urban areas turned to growing food, setting up vegetable gardens where possible and buying more local foods.

The need to keep diseases and pests at bay also emerged more strongly, with heightened interest across the region to stop the spread of African swine fever (ASF), recently confirmed in Papua New Guinea.

Quality and real-time data were required to respond to the structural effects of the pandemic and design well-informed policy interventions that promote medium- and long-term changes in order to achieve more sustainable and resilient food systems, able to provide healthy diets for all.

The regional COVID-19 Response Plan of the Pacific Humanitarian Team outlined the following requirements for the Food Security Cluster: i) strengthen national and household food and nutrition security, resilience and livelihoods affected by COVID-19; and ii) strengthen national coordination, preparedness and response capacities to address and protect the food security and nutrition and livelihoods of the most vulnerable populations affected by COVID-19. In response to the request by governments of 13 SIDS for emergency assistance, FAO focused its response work on providing evidence-based policy direction and advice, enhancing local production and food supply and access to markets, strengthening local food systems and enhancing national preparedness response. In complementarity with ongoing initiatives, the project aimed to support the development of evidence-based response measures for food security and nutrition, and the adoption of fisheries and agriculture practices that addressed COVID-19-related needs in food production.

IMPACT

The project successfully addressed the emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the agriculture, livestock and fisheries sectors of the Pacific Islands. As a result of the project's activities, the technical knowledge required by farmers to enable them to improve their skills and increase production has been enhanced and strengthened.



ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS

The planned project outcome was Pacific Islands' governments and food producers with increased capacity to respond to the COVID-19 impact on food systems, food security and nutrition. The project had three outputs. The first output regarded the strengthening of regional and national information and coordination mechanisms to analyse and respond to the effects of COVID-19 on agrifood systems, food security and nutrition. This was achieved. Household surveys to monitor the effects of the pandemic, the coping strategies adopted and the effectiveness of response measures applied were carried out in four selected countries. A regional report consolidating data from 100 regional and country-level assessments was produced, and feasibility studies conducted for Fiji, Palau and Solomon Islands. Output 2 regarded the provision of support to fisheries-dependent households, and the maintenance of fisheries and aquaculture supply chains in selected countries. Sustainable programming for nearshore fisheries on fish aggregating devices (FADs) was supported in the Cook Islands and Solomon Islands. Output 3 was concerned with the enhancement of agriculture and livestock production systems in selected countries for food security and nutrition. Three countries were selected this output: Solomon Islands for agricultural production and the Federated States of Micronesia and Tuvalu for livestock production. Materials for agricultural production were procured and distributed to nine selected communities in Solomon Islands, and field demonstrations and training in the improved production of selected crops were organized. An analysis was made of the import risks involving ASF, and a preparedness and response plan was completed for the Federated States of Micronesia and Tuvalu. A lack of local capacity prevented the Federated States of Micronesia from participating in the planned activities regarding agricultural production.

IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK PLAN AND BUDGET

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, international procurement was delayed and the international consultant was unable to fulfil missions to provide technical support as a result of travel restrictions. Unpredictable weather in some countries in the Melanesian group also delayed the shipping of materials to some of the affected outer islands. This led to extended delays in the implementation of the project and the granting of two no-cost extensions, in June 2022 and December 2022, respectively, to allow the work plan to be completed.

With regard to risk management, the risk rating of the project was assessed as low.

FOLLOW-UP FOR GOVERNMENT ATTENTION

It is recommended that the findings of the project be integrated into broader pipeline policies that respond to the COVID-19 pandemic at national and regional level.

SUSTAINABILITY

1. Capacity development

All project activities were aligned with the current Pacific Multicountry Programming Framework. The implementing partners will share responsibilities for the conduct of further training and other follow-up activities. In addition, the project has aligned its activities and results with ongoing government initiatives in order to ensure that continued support is provided to the project beneficiaries.

2. Gender equality

Men and women shared responsibilities with regard to the conduct of activities, as stipulated in the Project Document. They are expected to continue to do so during follow-up activities.

3. Environmental sustainability

The project had a minimum to low rating in terms of impact on the environment.

4. Human Rights-based Approach (HRBA) – in particular Right to Food and Decent Work

As stipulated in the Project Document, the target beneficiaries of project activities were farmers, both women and men, and households.

5. Technological sustainability

The technology introduced has strengthened the skills of farmers with regard to increasing supply and improving market access. The project's activities with regard to enhancing technical knowledge and skills increased the capacity of government staff, farmers and household members to be self-sustainable. The capacity of all stakeholders was improved by their participation in project activities and by the hands-on training conducted under all aspects of the project.

6. Economic sustainability

The funding programme of the Global Environment Facility in the participating countries will be able to support the activities initiated under the project. In addition, farmers will benefit in terms of income generation and increased production.

DOCUMENTS AND OUTREACH PRODUCTS

- ❑ **FAO.** *The Pacific Island Countries and Territories: Key Food Security Highlights - Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic.*
- ❑ **FAO.** 2022. *A Risk Assessment for the Introduction of African Swine Fever into Tuvalu.* Massey University, New Zealand.
- ❑ **FAO.** 2023. *Feasibility of Anticipatory Action in the Pacific Islands Region.* University of Technology, Sydney. July 2023.



ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS - LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Expected Impact	Efforts to end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture are sustained in light of the COVID-19 pandemic		
Outcome	Pacific Island Governments and food producers have increased capacity to respond to the COVID-19 impact on food systems, food security and nutrition		
	Indicator	Number of countries with evidence-based COVID-19 response measures formulated, and improved fisheries, agriculture and livestock practices implemented in support of food security.	
	Baseline	None	
	End Target	At least seven Pacific Island Countries with evidence-based response measures formulated and/or improved fisheries, agriculture and/or livestock practices implemented by targeted groups.	
Comments and follow-up action to be taken	A number of regional and national level assessments, reports and capacity-building activities from the project provided Pacific countries with the means to further strengthen their responses to the impact of COVID-19 on national level food systems, food security and nutrition.		
Output 1	Regional and national information and coordination mechanisms strengthened to analyse and respond to the effects of COVID-19 on agrifood systems, food insecurity and nutrition		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	Number of national COVID-19 food security and nutrition assessments conducted and disseminated.	At least seven country assessments conducted with recommendations produced and disseminated at the national and regional levels by June 2021.	Yes
Baseline	None		
Comments	Support was provided under this project to strengthen analysis and coordination efforts in the region to better respond to the effects of COVID-19 on agrifood systems, food insecurity and nutrition. This was accomplished through the development of two comprehensive reports from secondary data , one of which was published and disseminated for the use of partners and countries, while the other was being edited and reviewed at the time this report was drafted.		
Activity 1.1	Participate in South Pacific Community (SPC)/World Bank (WB)/United Nations High-frequency Phone Monitoring (UN COVID-HFPM) surveys of households to monitor the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the socioeconomic situation, coping strategies and the effectiveness of response measures (SPC/WB/UN COVID-HFPM surveys) in four selected countries		
	Achieved	Yes	
Comments	<p>During project formulation, there was a great need within the region for data and related analysis on the impacts of COVID-19 on the status and development of agrifood systems within the Pacific region. Initially there were plans for FAO to collaborate with the World Bank and SPC to initiate high-frequency phone monitoring surveys of households to monitor the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the socioeconomic situation, coping strategies and the effectiveness of response measures. However, delays with the high frequency phone monitoring (HFPM) survey were experienced, in part because of issues arising from surveys conducted by WB in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. When it became obvious that the FAO portion of the work was no longer needed, WB proceeded to complete this work by itself. Funding for this activity was used to conduct an Anticipatory Action (AA) scoping study instead.</p> <p>A study for the 'Feasibility of Anticipatory Action in the Pacific Islands Region' was developed as there are no formal anticipatory action plans for any Pacific small island developing state, and only limited studies into the potential of anticipatory action for the Pacific Island Countries region. The gap for linking AA with Pacific Islands' expertise in managing disasters is clear and one with immense potential to advance knowledge and support future development investments. The report provides a summary of regional and selected national contexts and approaches to the building blocks of AA in the Pacific Island Countries region. Through a combination of workshops and interviews with international NGOs, regional governance and science agencies, multilateral groups and country-based participants, the report provided a synthesized context for AA in the region. The report includes a case study section which presents the AA context for Fiji, Palau and Solomon Islands, and delves into discussion and conclusions that indicate the feasibility of advancing AA and the broad governance that will need to be facilitated to formalize such actions. The report continues to inform FAO's programmes in the region on AA work.</p>		

Activity 1.2	Collect and analyse additional primary and secondary data to provide information on changes in household activities and sources of income to support the development of policy briefs with recommended actions in eleven selected countries	
	Achieved	Yes
	Comments	<p>An analysis of numerous regional and country level assessments and studies on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security, nutrition and agriculture in the 14 Pacific Islands Countries and Territories (PICTs) was conducted between 2020 and 2021. This led to the development of a regional report as reported under Activity 1.3. Further analysis was carried out as part of the United Nations system's efforts to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on food systems, focusing on examining the challenges posed by COVID-19 more deeply, with a view to defining the key actions needed to respond to impacts, inform recovery planning and better prepare for future crises. This analysis informed the development of the joint publication by FAO, the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) on 'Reinforcing Pacific Food Systems for COVID-19 Recovery'.</p> <p>Under this activity resources were redirected to support an agriculture impact assessment to focus recovery interventions in the Kingdom of Tonga, in the context of the response to the Hunga-Tonga Hunga-Ha'apai undersea volcanic eruption in 2022. At least 852 household surveys took place in 56 communities of 'Eua, Ha'apai and Tongatapu divisions in Tonga, completed through a digital data collection process, conducted under a Letter of Agreement with the Mainstreaming of Rural Development Innovation Tonga Trust. The data were provided to the Government of Tonga, FAO officers and partners to inform their recovery actions and plans.</p>
Activity 1.3	Develop policy briefs with recommended actions and disseminate to key policy makers	
	Achieved	Yes
	Comments	<p>Under this activity, a draft regional report on 'The Pacific Island Countries and Territories: Key Food Security Highlights - Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic' was developed and consolidated from 100 regional and country-level assessments and studies conducted between 2020 and late 2021, undertaken under Activity 1.2. The draft report aimed to provide a better understanding of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security, nutrition and agriculture in the 14 PICTs. The synthesis was developed as follow-up documentation of an analysis based on the evidence gap conducted earlier as a pre-condition. The primary intention was to support more informed, focused and targeted programming and policies to enable the 14 PICTs to have resilient food security, nutrition and agriculture ecosystems. At the time this report was drafted the draft regional report was being edited and revised.</p> <p>From the additional analysis work carried out under Activity 1.2, an updated report on 'Reinforcing Pacific Food Systems for COVID-19 Recovery' was co-developed and published by FAO, WFP, IFAD and UNICEF. The report offers a consolidated analysis of food security and nutrition challenges and how they are impacted by COVID-19, as well as opportunities and needs to build a more resilient and sustainable food system in the Pacific. The report contributes to the continuing dialogue and collaborative efforts among cluster members, who together play a key role in sharing updated analysis and advocacy on the impacts of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition in the Pacific.</p>

Activity 1.4	Provide technical support for the coordination of regional and national food security coordination mechanisms		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	<p>The project supported the deployment of a regional Pacific Food Security Cluster Coordinator who followed up on the food security component of the Pacific Humanitarian Team's COVID-19 Humanitarian Response Plan, conducted related narrative reporting, facilitated cluster meetings and liaised with food security partners across the region on key matters, including building the capacities of national-level food security clusters. With other partners, the Cluster Coordinator provided support to active national food security clusters across the Pacific, including Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Although the support method was largely remote as a result of COVID-19 travel restrictions, several notable achievements were realized. These included supporting the revision of the Vanuatu Food Security and Agriculture Cluster Standard Operating Procedures and developing the La Niña 2021 Anticipatory Action Advisory for food security and livelihoods together with the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (https://fscluster.org/pacific/document/anticipatory-action-advisory-pacific-0). Furthermore, the coordinator actively participated in inter-cluster coordination mechanisms and shared pertinent information on disaster responses and COVID-19 impacts with regional and national partners to inform and guide interventions. Support was also provided in 2022 to the Samoa Food Security Cluster for training in developing attractive online dashboards and infographics to display pertinent food security and agriculture information. Through discussions with the Regional Pacific Food Security Cluster Information Management Officer, a basic training course on PowerBi software was agreed on. Eight Samoa Food Security Cluster members were trained and received certificates from trainers based in Australia.</p>	
Output 2	Fisheries-dependent households supported and fisheries and aquaculture supply chains maintained in selected countries		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of targeted countries where small-scale fishers have access to and knowledge of new fish aggregating devices and fishing techniques, safety at sea practices and/or market and supply information in response to COVID-19. - Number of countries with information and guidance on aquaculture accessible to address COVID-19 related needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At least three countries with small-scale fishers having access to and knowledge of new FADs and fishing techniques, safety at sea practices and/or market and supply information by project end. - Two countries with information and guidance on aquaculture accessible to address COVID-19 related needs by project end. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes - Yes
Baseline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None - None 		
Comments	Fisheries-dependent households were supported in three countries through capacity building and inputs distribution for small-scale fishers. New technical innovations were provided through capacity building in the three countries.		
Activity 2.1	Support sustainable programming for nearshore fisheries on FADs in two selected countries		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	<p>Cook Islands and Solomon Islands were identified for this activity. The procurement of FAD materials was initiated. Materials for Cook Islands and Solomon Islands were delivered to the national counterparts for distribution and training. Technical training for the materials provided to Cook Islands was not possible due to travel and movement restrictions at the time and government agreed to take on the necessary distribution and training.</p> <p>Related FAD training was provided in Solomon Islands under GCP/SAP/002/JPN FishFAD. However, because of ticketing issues, the training for Tonga could not proceed and the government agreed to provide the necessary training using inputs provided.</p>	
Activity 2.2	Provide technical support to improve safety at sea for small-scale fishers in two selected countries		
	Achieved	No	
	Comments	This activity was covered under the GCP/SAP/002/JPN FishFAD project, funded by the Government of Japan, with a comprehensive regional sea safety programme being implemented by FISH Safety Foundation in New Zealand.	

Activity 2.3	Provide technical support to strengthen access to market and supply information for small-scale fishers in two selected countries		
	Achieved	No	
	Comments	This activity was not realized owing to the lack of interest from potential countries.	
Activity 2.4	Provide technical advice to support small-scale aquaculture production under COVID-19 restrictions in two selected countries		
	Achieved	Partially	
	Comments	Support was provided to the government of Cook Islands to train locals to become competent pearl technicians and, to provide an emergency pearl harvest, technical services were supplied to farmers with overdue and ready-to-harvest seeded shells. The Cook Islands pearling industry currently has a severe shortage of experienced pearl technicians operating in Manihiki (Island of Pearls). This important initiative provided four pearl farmers with training from experienced pearl technicians to address the shortage of experienced pearl technicians in the next year or two with a focus on enhancing the quality of pearls to maximize earnings. The objective of the training was to enhance pearl technician experience to provide a service for farmers and the community to ensure that the pearling industry will slowly recover from the impact of COVID. However, because of other national areas of commitment and prioritization (including the earthquake and tsunami and COVID restrictions) the technical support planned for Tonga did not materialize.	
Output 3	Agriculture and livestock production systems enhanced in selected countries for food security and nutrition		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	Number of targeted countries where agriculture staff and local farmers have received support on agriculture and livestock production to address COVID-19 related needs.	Three countries with agriculture staff and local farmers (including women) supported through training and/or knowledge products on agriculture and/or livestock production by project end.	Yes
Baseline	None		
Comments	Three countries participated in this output: Solomon Islands and Nauru under the agriculture production component and the Federated States of Micronesia and Tuvalu under the livestock production component.		
Activity 3.1	Identify vulnerable groups, relevant crops and training needs for established and new farmers in selected countries		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	The Federated States of Micronesia and Solomon Islands were identified as the two participating countries. The Federated States of Micronesia participated in the initial stage of planned activities. However, as a result of the lack of local capacity in the country and competing national priorities, the planned activities were not realized and the Federated States of Micronesia was unable to continue to participate in the project. Instead, identification work was initiated in Solomon Islands, and nine communities in the Shortland Islands Western Border region of Solomon Islands were identified for project implementation. Inputs and training needs were pre-identified, such as seed sowing, nursery management, seedling pricking and transplanting out in the field, for specific crops such as assorted vegetables, yam, pana, taro, cassava, sweet potato and peanuts.	

Activity 3.2	Procure and distribute materials for agriculture production in two selected countries	
	Achieved	Partially
Activity 3.2	Comments	<p>The procurement and distribution of materials for agriculture production to the nine selected communities in the Shortland Islands were completed only for Solomon Islands. The inputs provided included materials for the construction of nine nurseries and planting materials for greater yam, lesser yam, taro suckers, cassava stalks, sweet vines and assorted vegetable types.</p> <p>Work did not progress in the Federated States of Micronesia because of other priorities. However, Nauru requested support with piggery inputs owing to global high prices and the cost of living crisis for the population caused by the prices of imported food compounded by the impacts of COVID-19. The purpose of inputs was to enhance households' income by improving animal husbandry through the provision of direct support and training to pig rearing households to improve pigsties, allowing for better animal waste management and valuation, ultimately reducing the negative impact on the environment. The activity also aimed to promote dry litter pens consisting of an 8'x8' pen covered by a roof. The pigs were provided with a bedding of compostable material such as yard trimmings, crop residues or shredded municipal green-waste from tree trimming. The bedding helped to absorb pig waste liquids, while the action of the pigs' hooves and rooting helped to break down the solid pig waste and mix it with the bedding.</p>
	Conduct training in improved production of selected crops for resource persons and identified recipients	
Activity 3.3	Achieved	Yes
	Comments	<p>Field demonstrations and training in the improved production of selected crops were completed for each of the nine sites in Solomon Islands. Training topics covered included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vegetable demonstration training covering: soil sterilization, site selection, seed sowing, seedling pricking, nursery management, seedling transplanting/field planting and vegetable management (watering, weed control, pest and disease management); - Model farm covering: farm layout /design, plot design, crop allocation, yam propagation technique (African yam), planting technique, spacing and field management. <p>A total of 218 individuals (84 males and 134 females) from nine sites received training. Of these, 42 were categorized as young people.</p>
Activity 3.4	Provide technical support on transboundary animal disease awareness and surveillance in selected countries	
	Achieved	Yes
Activity 3.4	Comments	<p>An African Swine Fever Import risk analysis, preparedness and response plan was completed for the two selected countries: the Federated States of Micronesia and Tuvalu. Under a Letter of Agreement with Massey University, individual analysis reports for the two countries were developed, focused on evaluating the risk of the African Swine Fever (ASF) virus breaching biosecurity for the Federated States of Micronesia and Tuvalu. Proposed recommendations were made specific to the two countries' context and situation to enable professionals, communities and key stakeholders to implement prevention and mitigation measures to reduce the impacts of any ASF incursion.</p>

Partnerships and Outreach

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