

RAPID ASSESSMENT OF THE SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS OF THE GLOBAL COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Ministry of Health, Social Welfare & Gender Affairs



The global COVID-19 pandemic is a crisis unlike any other in recent history that has impacts beyond health with ramifications on our economy and our social life.

On 20 March 2020, the Government of Tuvalu declared the State of Emergency to prevent an outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Talaaliki is a legislation with preventive measures aiming to protect the people of Tuvalu from the COVID-19 pandemic and is was part of the broader Tuvalu nationwide policy advice, response and program interventions.

This report presents the findings of the rapid assessment of the socioeconomic impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic in Funafuti. It is based on a recent data collection initiative of the Gender Affairs Department done in three different residential areas of Funafuti, inclusive of the islets of Fongafale, Funafala and Papaelise.

The State of Emergency generates considerable insecurity in the population due to food rationing, te increased prices of food items, threat of food shortage and building materials, and closing of schools.

All people are affected by and must adapt to the impacts of global COVID-19 pandemic. Preparations and preventive measures taken by governments have persistent and far-reaching impacts, especially on vulnerable people. For instance, actions taken have exposed many women and children to more hardship. Families are facing

heightened stress under the lockdown with many experiencing financial insecurity. Children are missing out on education. Many women and children may face increasing threats to their safety and wellbeing because of possible increasing domestic violence, but also because services that prevent and respond to domestic violence, abuse and neglect are disrupted.

The Talaaliki Plan is the government response plan – the Tuvalu COVID-19 blueprint for action in case food, fuel, and other essential imported goods become unavailable, or/and if there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in the country. The plan addresses five major areas:

- 1) The government structures and systems contingency plan outlines how central government and local governments will continue to function if COVID-19 unfolds.
- 2) The health contingency plan outlines how to contain the virus in case there are confirmed cases in Tuvalu.
- 3) The food security contingency plan outlines plan to prepare Tuvalu in case of disruption to supply chains affecting food and fuel imports.
- 4) Fuel contingency plan outlines plan for rationing power and fuel in case of disruption of fuel supplies.
- 5) The Education contingency plan outlines how education will continue should schools remain closed.

This rapid assessment on the impacts of the

COVID-19 pandemic and the State of Emergency was done to find out if Tuvaluans were experiencing similar issues. The assessment was conducted from 6 April to 7 May 2020 and 38 business owners and 104 people from 50 households were interviewed.

The report provides information on some of the issues people are experiencing during the State of Emergency. The data collected were analysed through a gender lens and provide insights into the

impacts of the State of Emergency on people's depending on small incomes generating activities in the informal sector in Funafuti. The assessment also looked at the implications of the relocation of families from Funafuti to the islets. The issues of safety and the risk of domestic violence was also analysed. The findings of the rapid assessment are critical at the moment when policies and programs are being designed to respond and adapt to the impacts of the global pandemic.

Methodology

The data for the rapid socioeconomic assessment was collected through two surveys. One survey assessed the impacts of the State of Emergency on the small businesses in Fongafale for which 38 business owners (16 men and 22 women) – representing 12 per cent of registered business owners¹ in Funafuti – were interviewed. 81 people (47 women and 34 men) from 50 households from Fongafale, Funafala and Papaelise, were interviewed to assess the experience of relocation from Funafuti to the islets. The assessment was conducted from 6 April to 7 May 2020.

The survey was administered through a simple random sampling. Ethical considerations and informed consent were applied with all respondents. A total of 104 people participated in the survey.

Lastly, a situation analysis of domestic violence prevalence was done using data provided by the Police Force on reported domestic violence incidents. The analysis was done using data on incidences of domestic violence from January to May 2020 compared with data for the same period in 2019. Questions related to domestic violence were not included in the interviews at this stage.

Limitation of the survey

The coverage of the assessment focused on Funafuti only where more than 60% of the total population of Tuvalu reside. The findings do not reflect the reality of the population living in the outer islands.



Women sell necklaces at the airport - Funafuti

Findings

The Impacts of the State of Emergency on Business

Interviews to assess the impacts of the State of Emergency on small businesses were conducted with 38 business owners (22 women and 16 men).

The table below provide sex-disaggregated information on the respondents of the two surveys. Less than half of women-owned business and 37% of men-owned business were formal businesses.

Table 1: Number of respondents to the business survey by sex and type of business

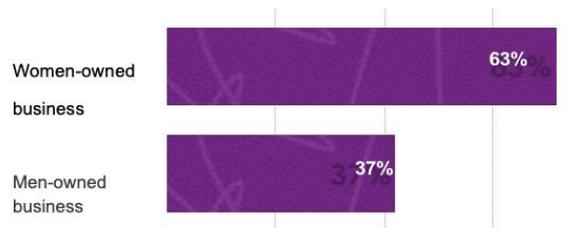
Types of activity	Led by men	Led by women	Total number of people interviewed
Tourism and Accommodation	0	4	4
Motorbike rental	4	1	5
Bakery	4	5	9
Handicraft production/selling	8	12	20
Total number of people interviewed	16	22	38

Among the people interviewed, 63% of the women business owners and 37% of the men business owners interviewed asserted that their businesses were affected by the closing of borders and the cancellation of flights. In addition, 80% of affected small businesses owners still managed to continue operating while 20% looked for other means to keep operating.

Income-generating activities depending on tourism and handicraft selling (that are mostly led by women) were the most affected, while motorbike-rental businesses (mostly owned by men) were

not affected as the demand for the renting motorbikes remained the same.

Figure 1: Percentage of business owned by women and by men affected by the closing of the borders.



Women’s groups, who usually sell seashell jewelleryes at the airport generating more than \$200 fortnightly, lost their sources of income when the flights were cancelled.

Bakery businesses (led by women) have been affected by the quota on flour sold to the public imposed by the State of Emergency to avoid future shortage. Men involved in small income-generating activities in the informal sector also experienced the same fate and changed to meet the local market demand for fishing nets.

Women who lead formal business, often in hospitality and tourism, no longer have guests since the closing of the borders but still generated small income from their bars. However, they had to lay off workers, mostly women, to keep their business afloat.

67% of business owners have other income from family members who contributed to meet their needs while **33% have no other income**.



Women clearing the new residential site - Funafala

The Socioeconomic Impacts of the Relocation

To assess the socioeconomic impacts of the relocation, 81 people were interviewed (47 women and 34 men) from 50 households.

The interviews with the respondents from Funafala and Papaelise were conducted by the staff of the Gender Affairs Department (Ministry of Health, Social Welfare & Gender Affairs) during the Funafuti Community Public Holiday 'Bomb Day' on 23 April 2020, when communities took part to a special program of visiting Funafala to inspect the work in progress of clearing the land for the relocation of the Funafuti community.

The relocation was proposed by the Government first as a preventive measure to limit the spread of the COVID-19 if there would be cases. The measure was also adopted to support food security so people could grow a garden on their land – opportunity more limited in the main island of Funafuti – and mitigate food shortage because of the closing of the borders.

Approximately **10% of 6,146 the resident population on Funafuti returned to their home islands** while the Funafuti community and others were encouraged to relocate to the islets. Before the relocation, less than 10 families resided on the islets of Funafala and Papaelise and one family on Mulitefala.

Table 2: Number of respondents to the relocation survey by sex and location

Location	Number households	Men	Women	Number respondents
Fongafale	20	8	12	20
Funafala	16	6	10	16
Papaelise	13	20	25	45
Total interviews	49	34	47	81

The respondents who planned to relocate had lands or were members of the Kaitasi where they will be building their shelter on the islets. A quarter of the respondents did not plan to relocate because they do not own lands or are not interested in relocating. Nearly 50 per cent of people interviewed were in the process of building their own shelter or temporary house on the islets, and 4 per cent plan to stay with relatives if the need arises to relocate if there would be a COVID-19 case.

All of those relocating from Fongafale to the islets refers to their relocation as a preventive measure against COVID-19. More than half of all respondents who planned to relocate stated that they will return to Fongafale as soon as the pandemic is under control while the other half were not sure and stated that may stay on the islet if they like the new environment.

Of those interviewed, 46% planned to move to the islets, 28% already reside on the islets, while 26% had no intention of relocating. The reasons provided by the people who do not intend to relocate include the cost of relocation considered too high, wanting to remain in their home (they considered it more comfortable), and wanting to or having to stay near the only hospital in Tuvalu for health reasons.

Of all the women interviewed, about 80% expressed their concern about **food security**. They stated that most of the family incomes had been spent on the relocation to cover expenses like transportation and buying building materials, and little was left for food supplies. Women also pointed out that, with the increase number of people relocating, **natural resources** such as coconuts, germinating nuts and fish around the islets could soon run out. Women shared about the considerable time it takes in preserving food such as fresh fish due to constant breakdown of the generator.

Nearly all men expressed concerns related to the difficulties in **transporting building materials** to the islets and the high cost involved.

The **lack of basic infrastructure and services** were also mentioned as major issues such as transportation, trails to access land, the absence of electricity, community hall and limited medical supplies and clinic. **Accessing drinking water** was one of the most important needs raised by nearly all the respondents as they are struggling to buy the desirable size of water tank (1000 gallons) that costs approximately AUD3,000. The absence of proper dumping site and the presence of flies were also mentioned.

Besides economic struggles, worries about social tensions arising from the relocation were expressed by the respondents. Many women reported the issue of populated households with too many people living under the same roof. Both women and men have shared their concerns about social tensions also potentially emerging over land issues.

Nevertheless, moving on the islets also brought **positive changes**. The respondents generally commented that the State of Emergency has brought back the traditions of sharing and caring. Respondents stated that the shifting of many families to Papaelise has “brought out the best in good people and the worst in other people”. For instance, families already on the islet accommodated others who were trying to build their homes. They shared fish and other local food. They helped build homes of others and shared their water tanks and available machineries, tools and equipment.

On the other hand, it was reported that some men used the opportunity to drink kava, laze around while others argue over land and minor issues.

The respondents from Funafala also confirmed that work was done on communal grounds especially the clearing of roads. The Funafuti Women Community organisation voluntary

prepared meals while the Kaupule provide food supplies for the men who are working at Funafala Community Project in building 55 houses for the Funafuti Community.



Women preparing food to feed men building houses - Funafala

The Impacts of the State of Emergency on the Incidence of Domestic Violence

Reports from around the world, including from Pacific Island countries, confirmed increased incidences of domestic violence since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some countries are reporting a three-fold increase in domestic violence related calls,ⁱ in locations where COVID-19 policies require people to self-isolate and restrict their movement. This increase is consistent with international evidence that during a disaster situation, violence against women escalates by 50% to 400%.ⁱⁱ

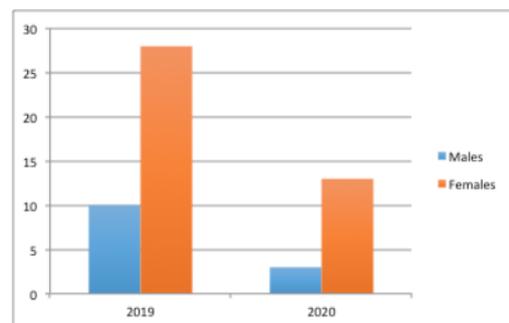
It is too early to know the situation in Tuvalu due to the absence of services besides the police and healthcare. However, we know that approximately 40% of women in Tuvalu have experienced domestic violence in their lifetime, usually perpetrated by a husband or partner.ⁱⁱⁱ

The issues of domestic violence were not included in the interviews because of their high sensitivity and the necessity to protect the victims. Research on domestic violence required time, carefully crafted methodology and trained enumerators which are requirements the rapid assessment could not meet. Therefore, only the analysis of data from the Police was done to try to assess the situation.

The number of times the police had to intervene in cases of domestic violence has been compiled for Funafuti for the period of January to May 2019 and 2020. The analysis shows that the incidence was higher in 2019. There were 28 women who experienced physical violence from January to May 2019 compared to 13 during the same period

in 2020, while 10 men in 2019 and 3 men in 2020 had experienced physical violence.

Figure 2: Number of victims of physical abuses in Funafuti January to May 2019 and 2020



The figures provided do not necessarily reflect the real number of people experiencing domestic violence as very few people, women or men, will file a police complaint.

Evidence around the world and in the region show that for one woman who file a complaint of domestic violence to the police, there are at least ten more victims who will not. In Tuvalu, strong social norms prevent most people to even talk about domestic violence. In addition, relocation may have prevented people to seek help. Therefore, it is critical for the Police and the Medical staff to remain vigilant and ready to adapt to possible increase of cases of domestic violence, and for the government to support communities in protecting and supporting women and children living in violent situations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The rapid assessment of the socioeconomic impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic was conducted in Funafuti from 6 April to 7 May and 104 people were interviewed. It focused on the impacts of the measures taken by the government of Tuvalu to contain the spread of COVID-19, including by closing the borders and encouraging people to relocate to their home islands or Funafuti islets. The assessment examined the impacts of those measures on women and men to find out if they were differently affected.

The assessment revealed that women and men are indeed affected differently by the State of Emergency. Because of the nature of women's incomes generating activities (many depending on hospitality, restaurants and on handicraft selling), more women experienced loss of incomes. It is important to highlight that 30 percent of people interviewed – both women and men equally – who lost their source of incomes, had no other source of incomes for the family.

The assessment also uncovered the different experiences and concerns of women and men related to the relocation. Both women and men expressed concerns about the lack of basic infrastructure, especially for accessing drinking water. However, women show more concern about food security because most of the household financial resources were used to buy building material and moving to the islets. They are also preoccupied by the pressure of overpopulation on the islets' natural resources. Men, on the other hand, are preoccupied by the lack of transportation and the high cost of transporting building material to the islets.

There was no evidence found to show if women are more exposed to domestic violence since the beginning of the pandemic and the State of Emergency. However, the diminution of number of complaints filed to the police does not necessarily mean there are fewer cases or that women experience less violence. Rather, they may have less opportunity to leave the house or seek help. The first responders must be aware of the higher vulnerability of women and children to domestic violence and remain vigilant and ready to intervene.

Recommendations

These recommendations to respond to the negative socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and support the resilience of Tuvaluan families are based on the analysis of the rapid assessment and good practices to respond to crises and disasters in general, as well as the lessons learned so far from the response to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Take into account the perspectives of women and men and address gender inequality in the response and adaptation measures.

1. Monitor the social and economic impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken in the State of Emergency on the segments of the population that are more vulnerable, such as people with disability, women, children, and elders, who are disproportionately affected.
2. Use gender analysis and social assessments across all sectors to inform the response and adaptation to the global pandemic.
3. Make sure that the experiences and concerns of both women and men are taken into account and their respective needs addressed throughout all aspects of the response and adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic – in healthcare, in prevention measures, in relocation, in economic recovery, in food security, etc.
4. Make sure that gender inequality issues such as domestic violence, the more limited access to productive resources by women and the vulnerability of their sources of incomes to the impacts of the pandemic, and the increase workload related to unpaid care work are also addressed through COVID-19 response and adaptation by all sectors.

Support families' resilience to the economic impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic and provide support to small businesses and families depending on incomes generating activities affected by the State of Emergency.

5. Provide minimum incomes to support laid-off workers.
6. Provide financial aid to affected businesses such as in tourism and handicraft production, including for producers involved in the informal sector.

7. Freeze loan interest and loan repayments for small business owners affected by the State of Emergency.
8. Consider increasing the quota/vouchers for food items to licensed bakery businesses to support the business owners and meet the demand.
9. Adjust social protection programs, especially for women and men living in hardship, to make sure that all people have the necessary resources to be resilient to go through this crisis and that no one is left behind.

Create favourable conditions for relocation that empower people and communities and build their resilience.

10. Improve basic infrastructure (water, sanitation, energy, transport, communication) in the islets to support basic living standards for all women and men.
11. Subsidise the cost of transport to and from the islets to alleviate the financial burden of relocated families.
12. Organise regular visits to the islets by mobile medical clinics.
13. Ensure women and children vulnerable to domestic violence are not isolated and have access to mobile phone and transports in case of emergency.

Make the homes a safe place for all.

14. Support ongoing awareness raising for the prevention and the elimination of domestic violence, including through information about the COVID-19 pandemic.
15. Allocate resources for the full implementation of the Family Protection Act and the coordination of first responders.

16. Establish a 24-hour domestic violence hotline.
17. Support the establishment of counselling services available to all islands and populated islets.
18. Establish a safe house in Funafuti and safe spaces in the islands for victims of domestic violence.
19. Ensure the first responders and service providers (Police, healthcare professionals, Social Welfare Department, Gender Affairs Department, Ministry of Education) have the capacity to effectively protect and support the victims of domestic violence.

Involve women, side-by-side with men, in the design and implementation of the response and adaptation to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Women's rich experiences and knowledge in all areas of life is as critical as men's experiences and knowledge.

The interviews conducted with women and men relocating to the islets demonstrated well how their life experience shape their views and bring different perspectives that are all important considerations.

Women expressed their concerns about food security and the capacity of their environment to sustain their families while men expressed more concerns about housing and transport. Both perspectives are important to build respond to a crisis.

20. Make provisions to ensure the participation of both women and men in decision-making in all aspects of the response and adaptation to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

ⁱ The Guardian, March 2020, Lockdowns around the world bring rise in domestic violence: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/28/lockdowns-world-rise-domestic-violence>

ⁱⁱ Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub, 2013, The hidden disaster: domestic violence in the aftermath of natural disaster. <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-apr-2013-the-hidden-disaster-domestic-violence-in-the-aftermath-of-natural-disaster/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Tuvalu 2007 Demographic and Health Survey. https://sdd.spc.int/digital_library/tuvalu-demographic-and-health-survey-dhs-report-2007