

COVID-19 IMPACTS ON FISHING AND COASTAL COMMUNITIES



Update #4: Papua New Guinea

16 July 2020

Summary

Forty-six respondents were interviewed from fourteen villages in Central and New Ireland provinces in Papua New Guinea to investigate the associated effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on coastal and island communities. Results from the surveys have indicated that:

- There is little evidence of increased migration to the surveyed communities in Central and New Ireland provinces;
- Food security is a recurrent issue during the dry season and because of land issues. The pandemic has coincided with a drier than normal period and issues with food security have increased leading to an increase in fishing and farming activities;
- Restrictions on movement due to the State of Emergency have reduced availability of store supplies and opportunities for market selling;
- Prices of staple foods are not reported to have changed by around half of respondents, whilst a third of respondents have noticed increases in both the prices of rice and tinned fish,
- Pre-existing food security safety nets are used during COVID19. About a quarter of the respondents engage in sago production, and a quarter of respondents continue to barter with other communities;
- Proactive marine management efforts are reported by most respondents from New Ireland Province within their communities through village elder leadership and marine management committees. Most village committees have been actively promoting marine management practices from before the pandemic;
- All respondents from Central Province indicated the need for food supplies and the provision of basic services.



Introduction

Papua New Guinea (PNG), the largest of the Pacific island nations (population 8.9 million), has not been spared from the COVID-19 pandemic. There are 21 active cases, 8 patients have fully recovered and there has been one death as of 23 July¹. The government declared a State of Emergency in March, closing off international borders and suspending domestic air travel. Schools were closed, non-essential workers requested to stay at home, and travel between provinces limited to cargo, medicine and security personnel. The general population has been significantly affected and documenting these effects can assist in determining the best way forward for coastal communities in rural PNG.

What did we do?

A rapid response survey questionnaire was designed to investigate the initial effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on coastal and island communities. Staff from the Papua New Guinea Centre for Locally Managed Areas (PNG CLMA) in Central Province (popn. 270,000) and the Wildlife Conservation Society Papua New Guinea program (WCS PNG) in New Ireland Province (popn. 194,000) conducted interviews with male, female and youth key informants to gather more information on impacts that may be associated factors arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Forty in person interviews and six phone surveys from two districts and fourteen villages were conducted from 21 May to 6 June 2020. From Central Province, all respondents were from Kairuku District: Delena Village (n = 3), Nikura (n = 2), and Poukama (n = 1). From New Ireland Province, all respondents were from Kavieng District: Tugalop Village (n = 4), Salapiu (n = 4), Limanak (n = 4), Kulibang (n = 4), Kavitongong (n = 4), Sosson (n = 4), Mamion (n = 4), Ungalabu (n = 2), and Bangatan (n = 2).

Key adult informants, including youths, were interviewed as well as both men (n = 25) and women (n = 21).

Our Findings

Major events

When asked about major events affecting the village, less than half the respondents (46%) mention COVID-19 and/or the State of Emergency (SOE) imposed by the government.

Event	Female (F)	Male (M)	Total
COVID-19	12	9	21
None	9	16	25
Total	21	25	46

There was little evidence of mass migration in to the villages. Over half the respondents (59%) believe that population numbers stayed the same, twelve (26%) indicated that slight migration had occurred into the villages, and seven (15%) that slight migration had occurred out of their villages.

There was one case of noticeable migration to a village, attributed to tribal conflicts on the mainland, and not COVID-19. In another case the community leaders barred any outsiders from entering the village during the SOE.

Food Security

A majority of respondents (65%) felt there was not enough food available in the villages, while only four informants (9%) indicated that there was more than enough food available. According to the PNG National Weather Service, Kavieng District in New Ireland Province has had below normal rainfall the past dry season², and existing food security issues are exacerbated by this, the SOE, and COVID-19 pandemic.

¹<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries>

²http://www.pngmet.gov.pg/Climate_Division/

Food avail. in village	F	M	Tot.	%
Big problem	0	1	1	2%
Not enough	10	19	29	63%
Enough	8	4	12	26%
More than enough	3	1	4	9%
Lots	0	0	0	0%
Total	21	25	46	100%

Most respondents (63%) reported an increase in both fishing and farming activities; seven (15%) indicated an increase in only farming activities, and eight (17%) respondents indicated an increase in only fishing.

It is worth noting that ten (22%) respondents mentioned also being affected by land issues, namely, insufficient amount of land for all villagers to be able to garden, infertile land, or a poor harvest because of the dry season.

“Most of these villages at this time of the year it is dry season so they rely on store goods. But due to the SOE lockdown, the transport of goods into the villages has been limited.”

Eleven (24%) respondents mentioned that due to the movement restrictions from COVID-19, individuals were unable to get to market to sell their produce and seafood, and local stores were unable to restock their supplies.

The surveys suggested that some Papua New Guinean communities in Central and New Ireland provinces may have additional safety nets for their food security issues from sago production and bartering with inland and mainland villages. Twelve respondents (26%) from both provinces mentioned bartering with outside villages, and another twelve (26%) from New Ireland Province specifically mentioned sago production.

“We get sago from nearby islands, we trade fish with nearby mainland communities, or we get food from our relatives there.”

The majority of respondents did not notice any drastic changes in the prices of staple foods: 54% stated that there was no change in the

price of rice, and 48% of respondents stated that there was no change in the price of tinned fish. About a third of respondents indicated increases in the prices of rice (33%) and tinned fish (39%).

Price of rice	Resp.	Price of tinned fish	Resp.
Increased	15	Increased	18
Decreased	6	Decreased	2
No change in price	25	No change in price	22
No answer	0	No answer	4
Total	46	Total	46

Fishing Pressure

A third of respondents thought that fishing pressure had decreased (32%), predominantly male respondents. About half thought that fishing pressure had increased (55%); these were predominantly females.

No. of people fishing now	F	M	Total	%
A lot less	1	0	1	2%
Less	4	10	14	30%
Same	4	2	6	13%
More	10	8	18	39%
A lot more	2	5	7	16%
Total	21	25	46	100%

Resource Management

The majority of informants (83%) felt that fisheries management rules were being broken but this may not have increased; half of the respondents believed that less people than before were breaking the rules.

No. of people breaking mgmt. rules	Total	%
None	2	4%
Less people than before	23	50%
Same	4	9%
More than before	11	24%
No answer	6	13%
Total	46	100%

The main management rules perceived to be ignored were: fishing in closed areas (50% of respondents); catching undersized organisms (13%); using banned equipment like small mesh sized gill nets (13%); the use of poison (Derris root) (13%); and fishing during spawning periods (13%).

“It (resource management) is helping the community but the problem is the outsiders coming in to steal within the management areas.”

The majority of respondents (78% of New Ireland respondents) mention a number of forms of proactive management ongoing in their communities; e.g. marine management committee makes announcements at village meetings, community members are encouraged to follow the rules, illegal fishers are removed from closed areas, some are taken to village court, and advice is readily shared concerning various fishing restrictions on equipment, species, and catch sizes. Central Province respondents did not reply to this question.

Potential Support Required

All respondents from Central Province mentioned the need for basic services and food supplies. Other support needed include water tanks and assistance with commercial activities. NIP respondents did not reply to this question.

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Conclusion

At the time of this survey, the results from Papua New Guinea have indicated:

- The majority of respondents did not note the COVID-19 pandemic or associated government restrictions as a major disturbance affecting their villages.
- Overall there was no sign of net migration.
- Food availability is a challenge during the dry season, exacerbated by responses to the pandemic.
- There has been an increase in both farming and fishing activities.
- A quarter of the respondents engage in sago production and bartering with other communities.
- Prices of staple foods have increased in a minority of cases.
- Fishing pressure has increased in the view of most women respondents but male respondents believed fishing pressure has decreased.
- Increased and proactive marine management was reported by most respondents from New Ireland Province
- The most common marine management rule perceived to be broken was fishing in closed areas.
- Support through food supplies and basic services was suggested by respondents from Central Province.

