



How communities in PNG responded  
to COVID induced lockdowns in 2020

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# Methods

- Study conducted by Dr Mike Bourke assisted by Brendan Jinks
- Several cases studies provided by NGOs
- Interviews with 30 informants (10 female)
- Phone interviews with 22 people in 12 provinces
- Social media and PNG press reports
- 27 case studies (23 women, 4 men)





Photo: Brendan Jinks



# Travel Restrictions and Lockdowns

- First case of COVID announced on 20 March 2020
- State of Emergency 26 Mar to mid-Aug 2020
- Betel nut and alcohol ban
- Closure of markets, schools, hospitals
- Domestic / international border restrictions
- Curfews in Port Moresby





Photo: Brendan Jinks



# Impacts of lockdowns

- Disruption to food markets
- Increased price of food, disruption to transport
- Betel nut ban
- Impacts on women, especially market sellers
- Limited impact on agricultural export commodities
- Other parts of informal economy
- Transport availability and costs
- Inconsistent enforcement, police harassment
- New markets established outside urban areas





Photo: Tim Sharp



# Shipments of fresh food from Lae to Port Moresby (January to May 2020)

Month	Volume Shipped (tonnes per week)
January	1,220
February	1,208
March	406
April	120
May	150

Source: Fresh Produce Development Agency (FPDA), Goroka



# Price of fresh food in Lae, before and after lockdowns

Crop	Price before lockdowns	Price after lockdowns
Banana, cooking	K2 for 12	K2 for 6
Cassava (tapiok)	50 t – K1 each	No change
Sweet potato	K5 for 5 – 6 large	K5 for 3 – 4 large
Taro tru	K10 for 10 corms	K10 for 6 corms
Taro kongkong	K1 for 3 cormels	No change
Yam, African	K1 for 3 tubers	No change
Sugarcane	K1 for long one	No change
Sago	K5 for large container	K7 for large container



Photo: Brendan Jinks





# Community response to lockdowns

- Setting up roadside markets outside urban centres
- Moving goods around (or through) road blocks
- Risking fines and confrontations with police
- Driving to new markets out of town
- New markets outside many towns
- Innovative selling of fish in East Sepik
- Breakdown of social cohesion (gambling, fighting)
- Roadblocks and charging pedestrians a road tax
- Rise in stealing from food gardens





Photo: Brendan Jinks





Photo: Brendan Jinks





Photo: Brendan Jinks



# Impact on women and girls

- Major impact on market vendors, often women
- Much more housework for women
- Sexual crimes not dealt with by police
- Harassment by police (also directed at men)
- Breakdown of social cohesion
- Limited health services



# Conclusions

1. Severe impacts on livelihoods across the country, especially market vendors and betel nut traders
2. Urban – rural links: money for rural farmers, and cheap nutritious food for urban areas
3. Most disadvantaged members of communities suffered the most
4. Disproportionate impact on women and children
5. Breakdown in social cohesion
6. Underlying vulnerabilities exposed
7. Highlighted what works well



## Further information and acknowledgements

Report available here:

<https://www.aciar.gov.au/publication/covid19>

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