

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

Ministry of Health, Social Welfare & Gender Affairs



Summary

On March 2020, the Government of Tuvalu announced the state of emergency due to the global COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. Although there were no case of COVID-19 in Tuvalu when the rapid assessment was conducted, the pandemic did have an impact on people's life. The development of Talaaliki, a specific legislation with preventive measures to protect the people of Tuvalu from the global COVID-19 pandemic was part of the broader Tuvalu nationwide policy advice, response and program interventions.

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. Globally, there is evidence that women and men experience the social and economic impacts of the pandemic differently. A majority of women have seen their work in the home increasing significantly due to the closing of schools and limited mobility of household members. More women than men have lost their source of incomes and are experiencing economic insecurity. The instruction to stay home is exposing many women and girls to domestic violence and abuse.

This rapid assessment on the impacts of the State of Emergency adopted to prevent the spread and respond to the global COVID-19 pandemic was done to find out if Tuvaluan women were experiencing the similar issues. The assessment showed that families were struggling, and many women were experiencing hardship. Some have lost their incomes and most women had seen their work at home increasing since the schools are closed.

The rapid assessment of the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic was conducted in Funafuti from the 6 of April to 7 of May 2020. 104 people were interviewed. It focused on the impacts of the measures taken by the government of Tuvalu to contain the spread of the global COVID-19 pandemic, 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 income-generating activities – many depending on hospitality, restaurants and handicraft selling – more women experienced loss of incomes. It is important to highlight that 30% of people interviewed who have lost their income had no other source of income for the family.

The assessment also uncovered the different experiences and concerns of women and men related to the relocation. Both expressed concerns about the lack of basic infrastructure, especially about accessing drinking water. However, women showed more concern about food security because most of the household financial resources were used to buy building material and move to the islets. They are also preoccupied by the pressure of overpopulation on the limited natural resources of the islets. 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 were 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, women 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

The 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, good practices to respond to crisis and disasters in general, and 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 increased 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 transports 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 the victims of domestic violence.
19. Ensure the first responders and service providers (Police, healthcare professionals, Social Welfare Department, Gender Affairs Departments, 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.