



Photo: UN Women/Elle van Baaren

## ACTION BRIEF



# GUIDANCE FOR ACTION: ADAPTING MARKETS FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE - SAFEGUARDING WOMEN MARKET VENDORS' LIVELIHOODS

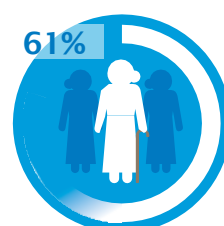
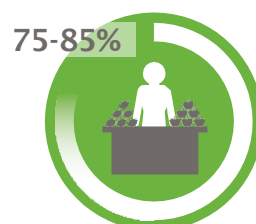
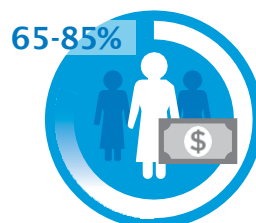
*This Action Brief is based on a set of Standard Operating Procedures provided to local government in 2020 as part of the COVID-19 crisis response.*

## BACKGROUND

The World Health Organization (WHO) first characterized the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) as a pandemic on 11 March 2020. By mid-April more than 2 million cases of COVID-19 were confirmed across the world, and over 100,000 people had lost their lives. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of people were fighting for their lives in hospitals. This was not just a public health crisis; it was a crisis that would touch every sector – so every sector and every individual must be involved in containing the outbreak.

Markets are the cornerstone of food security in the Pacific and an all-important informal safety net. Many rural people depend on markets both for food and income. The Pacific has a high dependence on imported foods and, with global food supply chains disrupted, markets were more important than ever. With an uncertain global outlook, countries needed to take steps to ensure domestic food security in case international food supply chains were disrupted due to COVID-19.

Countries need to continue to have plans in place to respond to COVID-19, given the risk of further waves of infections as citizens are repatriated and borders open; and to respond to the longer lasting economic impacts of the pandemic.



1. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-suva/documents/publication/wcms\\_553880.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-suva/documents/publication/wcms_553880.pdf) p6.  
2. AKVO 2019 UN Women.



Photo: UN Women/Kasanita Isimeli

For the majority of women market vendors in the Pacific, vending is their only source of income. They are dependent on this weekly to cover business expenses and household basics. There are no safety nets or entitlements for vendors, including no leave, insurance or pensions.

Most women farmers and vendors access to credit is low with few commercial loans given due to their informal status. As a result, vendors that find themselves cash-strapped often look to payday lenders or other accessible sources of finance, often with significant interest payments, increasing women's vulnerability. Like many other business operators, towards the end of March 2020 many women market vendors reported experiencing a significant downturn in business activity and reduction in income.

The immediate impact of COVID-19 on women market vendors was significant, including:

- Elevated health risks (particularly given age range of most vendors and farmers puts them in a high-risk category), coupled with no entitlements that cover them for sick leave;
- Reduced income due to a range of factors, including possible price controls (coupled with higher input and supply chain costs), reduced hours, reduction in customer demand (due to lockdowns or other factors);

- Supply chain disruption and dislocation impacting participation and business, particularly movement of people and products;
- Possibility of rural vendors becoming stranded in some areas if lockdowns are introduced, requiring accommodation options;
- Lack of social or legal protections;
- Limited savings, pension contributions and other safety nets;
- Lack of access to credit or finance for working capital/basic needs;
- High levels of economic vulnerability and exposure to other risks, including violence.

The women market vendors, while in a precarious situation, are the cornerstone to food security across the East Asia and Pacific, particularly with disruption to global food supply chains. Ensuring that they are incentivized to continue producing and vending, even through a potential downturn, is imperative both for them and the country.

3. Particularly those that have not registered their businesses.

4. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/445821/women-business-pacific.pdf>, p. 39.

5. This has been articulated to UN Women when checking in with vendors in various locations.

6. Some report this due to supply chain issues but more often vendors are reporting much less customers.



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

### For National Governments

Governments should ensure there are targeted interventions to protect women farmers and market vendors, including:

- **Offset the risk to farmers and vendors by providing them with free inputs:** business will likely be very volatile. There will likely be reduced customers at points coupled with spikes in the demand for food at other points, particularly as import channels may be impacted by the slow-down in the global supply chain. Despite the volatility, where possible, encourage vendors to increase supply as soon as possible to meet increased demand.
- **Promote safety nets for vendors and farmers.** Vendors' livelihoods are likely to be impacted by supply chain issues, supply/demand issues, price controls or vendor schedules. Where this happens, consider options to ensure vendors have adequate income. This could be to provide subsidies if price controls are introduced or cash transfers if vendors are required to work fewer days or to miss work due to sickness. Any cash transfer or subsidy must be accessible to those in the informal sector that may not be working for a formally registered business.
- **Work with banks to relax credit requirements to ensure people in the informal sector, such as vendors and farmers, can access small amounts of finance.** This may require a government guarantee. If these measures are not an option, local government and market management should consider measures to meet basic needs, such as the provision of food, accommodation and other necessities.
- **Plan for supply chain disruptions.** It is important to have plans around logistics and supply chain disruptions. This may include vendors being cut off from farmers or being unable to travel home. Local government and market management should ensure there is adequate provision of emergency accommodation for vendors. If farm areas go into lockdown, it is important to designate border areas where farmers can sell their produce to vendors. It is likely that some areas may experience produce shortages, while others may have an abundance, so being able to work with farmers to allocate and move produce will be important. Food supply chain logistics are likely to be impacted, so the plan should ensure continued market operations, reduce the risk that vendors would be unable to sell, prevent price hikes and avoid a lack of produce.



Photo: UN Women/Murray Lloyd

- **Provide guidance to market management on developing of a plan (if community transmission is detected in country) for ways to limit vendor contact with people at the market and ensure social distancing.** Ways to limit contact include developing a business partnership with taxi drivers who can deliver products for a premium, limiting the number of people in market spaces at a given time, staggering shifts for marketing services and extending the market space into outside areas (by setting up tents, for example). Rosters for vendors or for customers would also help with spacing. Boxes of fruit and vegetables can be prepared inside and sold per box or bag to people waiting outside. The market could provide drive through service, and there may be many other plans that would limit number of people in the market at any given time without interrupting business greatly.
- **Provide timely updates to market management and market vendors' association** from local public health authorities.
- **Local public health authorities should work with market management to ensure that systems are in place to identify indicators of illness** arising in the local population or market vendors, such as increases in the number of people experiencing symptoms or a rise in the use of proprietary medicines. Surveillance systems should be linked to risk assessments, so that any abnormal signal in the surveillance systems triggers an immediate revision of the risk assessment.

## For Market Management in Coordination with Local Government

Research suggests that COVID-19 virus can survive for long periods of time on different surfaces and can remain viable for up to 72 hours on plastic and stainless steel, up to four hours on copper, and up to 24 hours on cardboard. While this research was conducted under laboratory conditions and the survival time may differ in the real-life environment – it highlights the challenges of preventing the transmission of COVID-19 in marketspaces.<sup>7</sup>

The local government and market management should currently be developing plans to ensure that vendors and the public are protected in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak in-country. The following recommendations for action are related to produce-based markets<sup>8</sup>, and it is adapted from the advice of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)/WHO for public events, combined with lessons learned from countries that have implemented COVID-19 prevention plans in markets. As advice is frequently changing, it is important to constantly update planning processes.

### Risk Assessments and Planning

- **Review the existing emergency operations plans for your markets and ensure there are measures in place:** A comprehensive risk assessment should be completed at the beginning of the planning phase, reviewed regularly during planning and updated immediately prior to the handover to the operational phase. The risk assessment should include input from the public health authority and should take into account the security assessment. In relation to COVID-19, the risk assessment should include consulting updated technical guidance from WHO.
- Ensure the risk assessment includes input from the public health authority and takes into account the security assessment. The risk assessment should include consulting WHO's updated technical guidance.

**Specific information that is necessary for the risk assessment includes:** a) the global COVID-19 situation report as provided by WHO b) the national COVID-19 situation report. C) The risk assessment for COVID-19 disease should consider both general features and specific features. D) General features of COVID-19 disease E) Transmission dynamics (in particular consider issues such as vendor transport to market, number of vendors in market, number of customers in the market) F) future likely spread of the epidemic G) clinical severity (can be very severe in some cases) H) treatment options I) potential for prevention.

#### Specific features that should be considered include:

- A. crowd density;
- B. the nature of contact between vendors/customers;
- C. whether the market will be attended by those that are COVID-19 positive;
- D. the profession of the participants and their possible previous exposure;
- E. the age of participants; because elderly people who have co-morbid conditions appear to be more seriously affected (in particular, please consider most vendors are in older age groups and may have existing co-morbidities – it is probably wise to encourage younger family members of vendors to stand-in),
- F. the type or purpose of market;
- G. the duration and mode of travel of participants (please consider issues around transmission and public transport or how vendors would be transported to the market);
- H. Whether market has animal products and management of this aspect;
- I. Food security considerations (please consider how you can push up supply of produce now to meet expected increased demand);
- J. Have plans in place for rural vendors who may get stranded or need isolation away from home. Ensure accommodation options are in place;
- K. Have plans in place to buy produce from farmers if somehow supply chain disruptions occur (for example restricted movement to areas or outlying islands or areas being quarantine).

7. [www.who.int/publications-detail/covid-19-and-food-safety-guidance-for-food-businesses](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/covid-19-and-food-safety-guidance-for-food-businesses).

8. This advice does not cover slaughtering of live animals.



### Readiness mode: no cases, no community transmission

- **Establish relationships with key community partners and stakeholders**, include relevant partners such as the local public health department, community leaders, media outlets, vendors, suppliers, hospitals, taxis and transport companies, and law enforcement. Clearly identify each partner's role, responsibilities, and decision-making authority. Contact your local public health department for a copy of their outbreak response and mitigation plan for your community.
- **Promote the practice of everyday preventive actions, including through using public address systems**. Use health messages and materials developed by credible public health sources, such as WHO, to advocate good personal health habits.
- Market management should **produce written guidance for vendors on reporting COVID-19 symptoms** and should discourage workers who have symptoms from attendance at work.
- **Provide COVID-19 prevention supplies at your markets**. Plan to have extra supplies on hand, including handwashing stations with soap, enough cleaning supplies to regularly disinfect and clean the market (many times a day), thermometers, hand sanitizers, tissues, and other materials. Develop an enhanced cleaning roster for the market.
- **Plan for absences**. Develop flexible attendance and sick-leave policies for market staff. Market staff and vendors need to stay home when they are sick, or they may need to stay home to care for a sick household member or care for their children in the event of school closures.
- **If possible, identify a space that can be used to isolate staff or vendors who become ill at the market**. Designate a space for staff and participants who may become sick and cannot leave the market immediately.
- **Develop flexible refund policies for vendors**. Create refund policies that permit vendors to stay home when they are sick, when they need to care for sick household members, or are at high risk for complications from COVID-19.
- **Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating information about COVID-19 to market staff and participants**. Information should be easily understood by everyone buying or selling at the market.



### Containment: where there is evidence of cases and/or community transmission

- **Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation**. Seek out frequent updates about local COVID-19 activity from public health officials.
- **Update key community partners, vendors and stakeholders regularly**. Share information about the response to COVID-19, including updates from the emergency operations coordinator or planning team.
- **Provide COVID-19 prevention supplies to vendors and staff**. Ensure that your markets have supplies for vendors and customers, such as hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, tissues, trash baskets, and cleaners and disinfectants. Frequently touched surfaces and objects, especially surfaces that are visibly dirty, must be cleaned often, first with detergent and water and then with disinfectant. Ensure there is a sterile thermometer/first-aid kit on site.
- **Consider alternatives for vendors and customers who are at high risk for complications from COVID-19**. Encourage vendors in high-risk categories to ask family members to cover for them. Consider providing fee refunds to vendors who are unable to attend because they are at high risk and/or provide information on alternative options.
- **Separate those who become sick at your market from those who are well**. Establish procedures to help sick people leave the market as soon as possible. If any staff member or customer becomes sick at the market, separate them from others as soon as possible. Provide them with clean masks to wear, if available. Work with the local public health department and nearby hospitals to care for those who become sick.
- **Reduce the number of people interacting in one space**: for example, through: opening markets for short periods with queues of people that are 1.5 metres apart, setting out 2 metre spaces marked by masking tape on the ground in the market, asking vendors to fulfil orders while customers wait outside, consider a drive-through section of the market where people can buy a bag or box of produce without hopping out of the car, creating a roster to split vendors into different shifts.

## For Market Vendors

**Slow the spread of COVID-19 through everyday preventive actions**, which include the following:

- Those who are sick should not leave their home, except to get medical care.
- Everyone should cover their coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Handwash with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.
- Practice social distancing by staying 2 metres apart.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects very often (the virus can stay alive on surfaces for up to five days so extra cleaning with bleach etc. is very important).
- Regularly update your processes and systems with latest technical guidance from WHO including guidance on masks and gloves.

**Learn to recognize the symptoms early** so that they can seek appropriate medical care, and minimize the risk of infecting fellow workers. Common symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- fever (high temperature – 37.5°C or above);
- cough - this can be any kind of cough, not just dry;
- shortness of breath;
- difficulty breathing;
- fatigue.

**People in high-risk groups should consult with their health-care provider about attending markets, and consider asking family members to cover for them.** People considered at high risk are:

- older adults (60 and above);
- people with disabilities;
- people who have serious chronic medical conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, lung disease, cancer, or other major significant underlying health conditions.



### Advice on gloves

Gloves may be used by vendors but must be changed frequently and hands must be washed between glove changes and when gloves are removed. Gloves must be changed after carrying out non-food related activities, such as opening/ closing doors by hand, and emptying bins. Gloves should never replace frequent hand-washing.