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WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE IN TIMOR-LESTE: State of Emergency and COVID impacts

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This report presents findings on the impact of COVID-19 and the associated State of Emergency from March – June 2020 on women in agriculture in Timor-Leste. The findings were gathered from interviews with 266 vulnerable women in agriculture and agribusiness from six municipalities in Timor-Leste: Ermera, Dili, Liquica, Aileu, Baucau, and Manatuto. Participants included women with disabilities, widowed women and older women.

The assessment's key findings are that:


1. Women's financial security has been affected by COVID-19: Before the State of Emergency, 66.2 percent of informants earned less than USD50 a month. During the State of Emergency, this group increased to 97.7 percent.

66% of informants earned less than USD 50 per month before the State of Emergency

98% of informants earned less than USD 50 per month during the State of Emergency

2. Women experienced limited access to markets during the State of Emergency: 75.2 percent of informants had difficulty accessing the market,

of which 21.4 percent cited lack of transportation as the main reason.

 **75%** of informants had difficulty accessing markets

3. Early warning signs of food insecurity were evident. The percentage of informants who consumed 3 meals a day dropped by 33.1 during the State of Emergency, while the percentage of informants who consumed only 1 and 2 meals a day increased by 15.8 percent and 42.5 percent respectively.

 **31%** Informants who consumed 3 meals a day dropped by 33.1 during the State of Emergency

4. Food security has been affected by different shocks, and exacerbated in the months of COVID-19: 45.5 percent of informants reported restrictions related to COVID-19 as the main reason for food shortages, 14.3 reported climate


change, and only 1.9 percent believed animal disease and crop pests were the main reasons for food shortages.

46% of informants reported restrictions related to COVID-19 as the main reason for food shortages


5. Many women were able to consume local produce during the State of Emergency however 27.4 percent of informants could not grow their crops as usual.

 **27%** of informants could not grow their crops as usual

6. Women in agriculture reported an increasing workload of domestic care work during COVID-19 State of Emergency: 44 percent of informants mentioned that domestic care work increased during lockdown. 66.2 percent of informants said that they were burdened with more than two kinds of domestic work at home.


 **44%** of informants mentioned that domestic care work increased during lockdown.

7. Most women had access to information: 84.6 percent of informants had means to receive information about COVID-19. Television and mobile phone were the most common sources of information about COVID-19.

 **85%** of informants had means to receive information about COVID-19

8. Most women were aware of COVID-19 prevention measures: 89.4 percent of informants had knowledge on how to prevent COVID-19 through washing hands with soap and/or wearing masks, social distancing, and following requirements set

out by the Ministry of Health and World Health Organization.

 **89%** of informants had knowledge on how to prevent COVID-19

9. Current COVID-19 prevention measures might not be effective for some women due to lack of access to water, sanitation, and hygiene: 17.3 percent of the informants lacked access to water and sanitation.

 **17%** Of informants lacked access to water and sanitation

These findings show that women in agriculture and agribusiness have experienced food and financial insecurity as well as other challenges in the time of the COVID-19 State of Emergency. The government of Timor-Leste has made an effective response to COVID which has maintained low numbers of cases and infections managed through strict border and quarantine controls. This is in the interests of well-being for all people in Timor-Leste. These responses will be strengthened by a gender analysis looking at the impacts of policy and program responses to COVID-19 on women's livelihoods, wellbeing, financial and food security, in order to develop approaches that reduce, rather than exacerbate, gender inequalities, discrimination.

This report concludes with four policy recommendations that will enhance COVID-19 prevention and response, and reduce gender inequalities in Timor-Leste:

- Share more and better gender disaggregated data.
- Put gender as a central issue for policy preparedness, response, and implementation.
- Target access to information and WASH services to women.
- Build women's economic resilience in Timor-Leste by investing better in the agriculture sector.