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

Li Li Chen

OXFAM

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Researcher
Li Li Chen

Junior Researchers:

Joaninha, Angelina, Noviana, Julia, Irenia, Bernardete Teodosio, Tiago, Lázaro, Abilio, Zebedeo, Rivaldo, Leonia, Fernando, Liliana, Eduardo, Fidelis, Abilio, Nelson, Noberto, Isaac, Jonatho, Diogo, Tito

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C OVID-19 and the state of emergency provides us with an opportunity to reflect on and redress women's experiences of challenges and inequalities. In the process of writing this report, I received help from many people. Firstly I would like to thank Timorese women who trusted the research team and kindly shared their experiences and stories with us. The challenges these women face as well as their strength, resilience and determination are not only inspiring, but also provide important sources of information and insights from women's' perspectives. I want to extend my thanks to Fernando da Costa, Salina Hanjan Corbafo, Annie Sloman, Kathy Richards and Zeca Nunes from Oxfam in Timor-Leste for their useful and constructive feedback to this report. Thanks to their support, patience, and offering suggestions and comments, this report could be finalized. I am also grateful to receive financial support from Oxfam to be able to conduct interviews in six municipalities. I am particularly grateful for being able to work with 24 committed student researchers from the Faculty of Social Sciences, Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e. This report is not possible without them spending hours riding motorbikes under bad road conditions and talking to people in communities as well as documenting interview data. I truly appreciate the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Professor Camilo A. Ximenes, and the director of the Peace Center, Professor Antero B. da Silva, for encouraging a vigorous research environment on campus as well as fully supporting me throughout the research process. I am most grateful to my families in Timor-Leste and Taiwan who never stop loving and believing in me.

Li Li Chen, Universidade Nacional Timor-Lorosae (UNTL)

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Women and children in Oecuse / Kate Bensen / Oxfam in Timor-Leste

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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 form 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 then USD 50 per month before the State of Emergency

98%
of informants earned less then 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 the market

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.

Abelita Gomes, Farmer, Hera, Dili / Oxfam in Timor-Leste

INTRODUCTION

In March 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic[1]. At the time of writing, it has caused more than 18 million infections and over 720,000 deaths world wide.[2] The first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Timor-Leste on the 21 March 2020. The Government took a rapid response to contain the spread of COVID-19 by enforcing a State of Emergency that was extended twice, running in sequence from 28 March until 26 June 2020. Safety measures were enforced including border closures.

Evidence shows COVID-19 has socio-economic impacts particular to women, with women facing economic and food insecurity, unequal access to reproductive and sexual care, threats of health, and intimate partner violence in health crises.[3] Responses to prevent a spread of COVID-19 could further these impacts on women and girls. Disruption of market and food systems by COVID-19 are likely to reinforce women's greater vulnerability to hunger and malnutrition.[4] Women are likely to carry workload burdens with increased care work due to school shutdowns and stay-at-home orders.[5] Risks of gender based violence during lockdowns could increase, yet during times of closed services, access to reproductive healthcare and services may be more challenging.

In the 2019 UN Gender Inequality Index, Timor-Leste ranked at 131 out of 189 countries, with a high rate of gender inequality.[6] Gender based violence is extensive: 59 percent of ever partnered women have experiences of intmate partner violence.[7] Access to quality health facilities and services are limited due to lack of infrastructure, facilities and human resources[8] and 50 percent of health facilities have no access to piped water[9].

1   WHO. "WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks at The Media Briefing On COVID-19 - 11 March 2020." Last modified March 11, 2020. https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020

2   Worldmeters. Last modified 16 July 2020. https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/

3   Haneef, Christina and Anushka Kalyanpur. Global Rapid Gender Analysis on COVID-19. Care and IRC, 2020. https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/4676/globalrgacovidrdm33120final.pdf

4   WFP. "The Power of Gender Equality for Food Security." WFP, April 14, 2020. https://www.wfp.org/publications/power-gender-equality-food-security?utm_source=link_newsv9&utm_campaign=item_309503&utm_medium=copy

5   UN Women. "Womens-Needs-And-Leadership-In-Covid-19-Response." Last modified March 2020. https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/03/news-womens-needs-and-leadership-in-covid-19-response

6   UNDP. Human Development Report. UNDP, 2018. http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-5-gender-inequality-index-gii

7   The Asia Foundation. Understanding Violence against Women and Children in Timor-Leste: Findings from the Nabilan Baseline Study – Main Report. The Asia Foundation, May 2016. https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Nabilan-summary-report-03-06-2016.pdf

8   Noumea. "COVID-19: Pacific Community Updates." Last modified July 14, 2020. https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/2020/03/spc-update-covid-19

9   UNICEF. "Child Survival and Development". Last modified 2018. https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/child-survival-and-development

Joana Carceres, vendor in Taibesi / Oxfam in Timor-Leste

Specific groups of women also face intersectional barriers and increased risks. Women with disabilities are less likely to have access to adequate health service and education, and more likely to be living in poverty. This increases their risk of experiencing food insecurity or loss of income during a situation such as a State of Emergency. Due to having close physical contact with a person providing care or assistance, women with disabilities and older women may also be exposed to higher risks of contracting COVID-19. Widowed women might face increasing financial strain on income to support their families during a crisis.[10]

Women in Timor-Leste's agricultural sector are vital to maintain local food supplies. Almost 70 percent of Timor-Leste's population are small scale farmers, who support 80 percent of the local food supply.[11] Of employed women in Timor-Leste 56 percent work in the agricultural sector.[12]

Restriction of movement could limit women in agriculture from being able to sell produce. If women farmers and vendors can not maintain their farming, selling and buying activities, they would likely face future income and food shortages.

A Rapid Food Security Assessment report published by Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in June 2020 found 81 percent of surveyed households were experiencing food and income loss, and 40 percent were already adopting a coping strategy of decreased food intake. This is an alarming early warning sign of food insecurity at a time of year that should offer families their highest food security.[13]

The objective of this assessment was to learn about the impacts of COVID-19 and State of Emergency for different women working in agriculture. This sharing of information on the gender impacts of COVID-19 and Government responses to prevent the virus spreading aims to help inform future policies regarding economic recovery and relief packages, and preparedness, response and prevention of disasters and shocks.

10   Care. Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-19 Timor-Leste. April 27, 2020. https://reliefweb.int/report/timor-leste/care-rapid-gender-analysis-covid-19-timor-leste-27-april-2020

11   Ramos, Reginald. "Inclusive Voices for Economic Diversification in Timor-Leste" Oxfam (blog). Oct 23, 2019. https://asia.oxfam.org/latest/blogs/diverse-voices-economic-diversification-timor-leste; Cummins, Deborah et al. Towards Economic Diversification in Timor-Leste. Oxfam, 2019. https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/towards-economic-diversification-in-timor-leste-620887

12   GDs, FAO and UNFPA. Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2015: Analytical Report on Gender Dimensions. GDs, FAO and UNFPA, 2018. https://timor-leste.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2015%20Census%20Gender%20Dimensions%20Analytical%20Report.pdf

13   Freach, J and Katherine Dobson. Rapid Food Security Assessment 2020: Full Report. MAF, 2020.
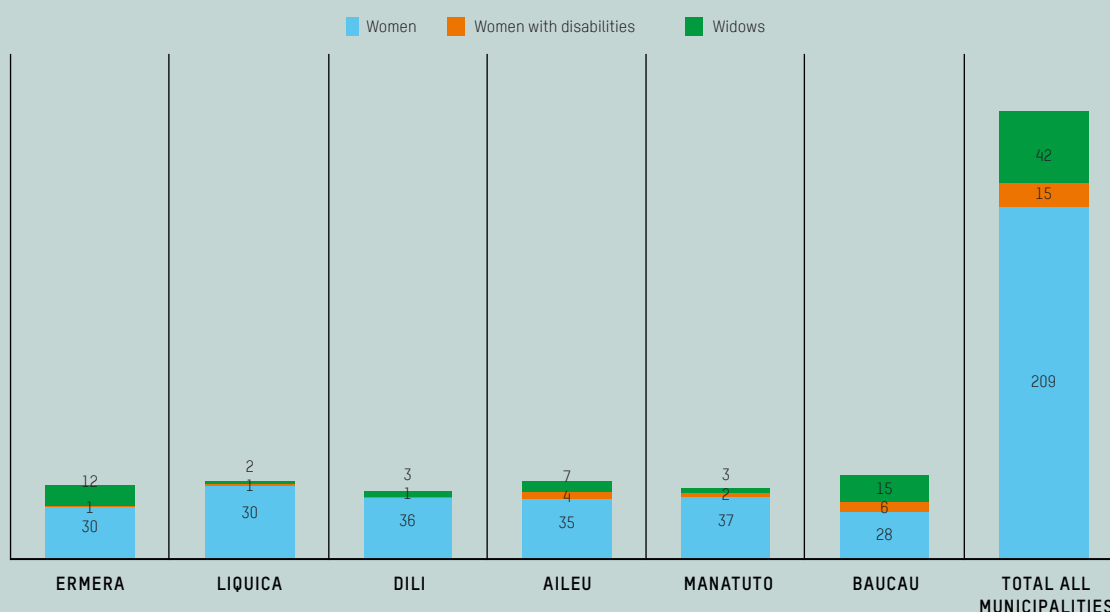
METHODOLOGY

This assessment was conducted by a research team of professors and students from the Department of Political Science and the Institute of Peace Study and Social Conflict, Faculty of Social Sciences, Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e (UNTL).

The assessment used qualitative face-to-face and semi-structured interview methods to understand the experiences of women in agricultural sectors in Dili, Liquica, Ermera, Baucau, Aileu and Manatuto municipalities. The informants were selected through 'snowball sampling'[14], a non-probability sampling, which has the benefits of identifying and recruiting the subjects among their acquaintances. Since informants are not selected through random sampling, the selected informants may not be able to represent the whole population in 13 municipalities of Timor-Leste and to achieve generalizations of the whole population.

From six targeted municipalities, sucos and aldeias were selected based on an ethnographic understanding of the areas by the researchers. Within each municipality, households from 4 to 7 different sucos were selected (except Manatuto, which covered 2 suco). 40-50 informants were recruited on the basis of being small scale subsistence farmers or agricultural business owners. According to the 2015 Census 3.3 percent of the population is people with disabilities. Informants include 15 women with disabilities (5.6 percent). More than half of informants are aged 21-40 and over 30 percent were aged above 50.

In total, 266 women informants were interviewed. Some women were from the same household.

Table 1: Number of Women interviewed in each municipality

Legend: Women (light blue), Women with disabilities (orange), Widows (green)

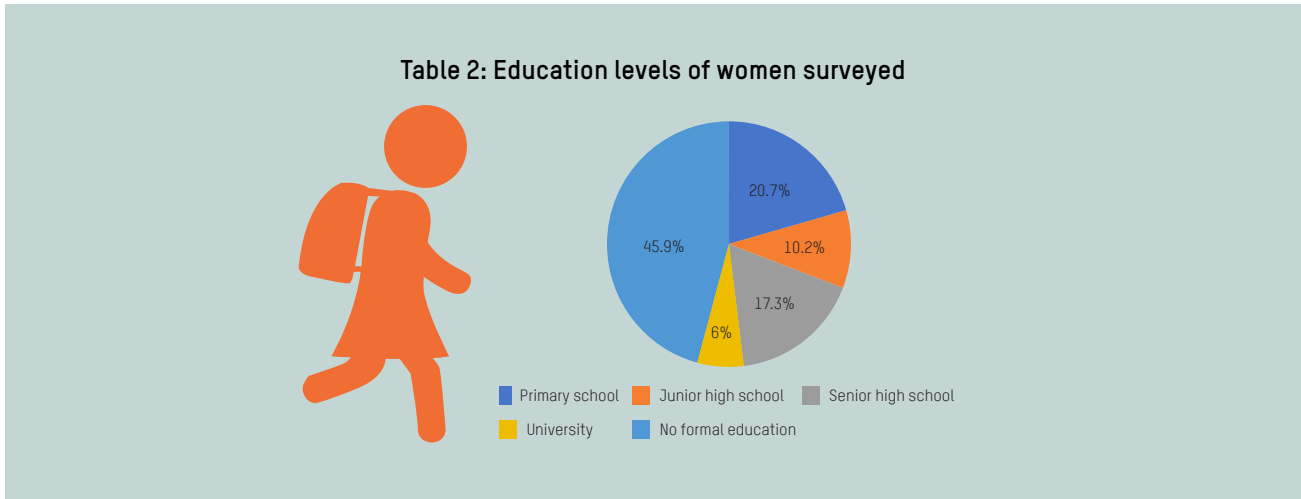| Municipality	Women	Women with disabilities	Widows
ERMERA	30	1	12
LIQUICA	30	1	2
DILI	36	1	3
AILEU	35	4	7
MANATUTO	37	2	3
BAUCAU	28	6	15
TOTAL ALL MUNICIPALITIES	209	15	42

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14 Naderfar, M. et al., "Snowball Sampling: A Purposeful Method of Sampling in Qualitative Research." Strides Dev Med Edu 14, No.3 (2017): 1-4. https://dx.doi.org/10.5812/sdme.67670

ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Educational level

Among all the informants, 45.9 percent have never completed formal education. 20.7 percent of informants went to primary school. Only 6 percent of informants went to university.

Table 2: Education levels of women surveyed

20.7%
10.2%
45.9%
17.3%
6%

■ Primary school   ■ Junior high school   ■ Senior high school
■ University   ■ No formal education

Family

According to the 2015 Census, the average number of family members is 6. This assessment concurred with this; the largest group (54.9 percent) of informants live in a household of more than 5 family members.

Table 3: Family size of respondents

■ Table 3: Family size of respondents Number of family members
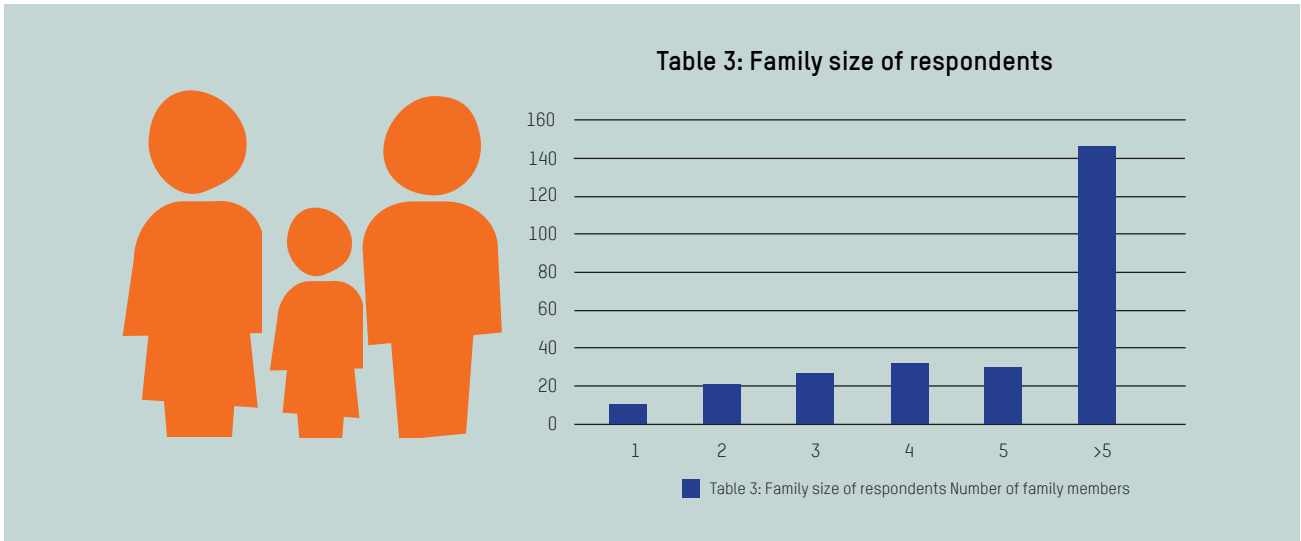
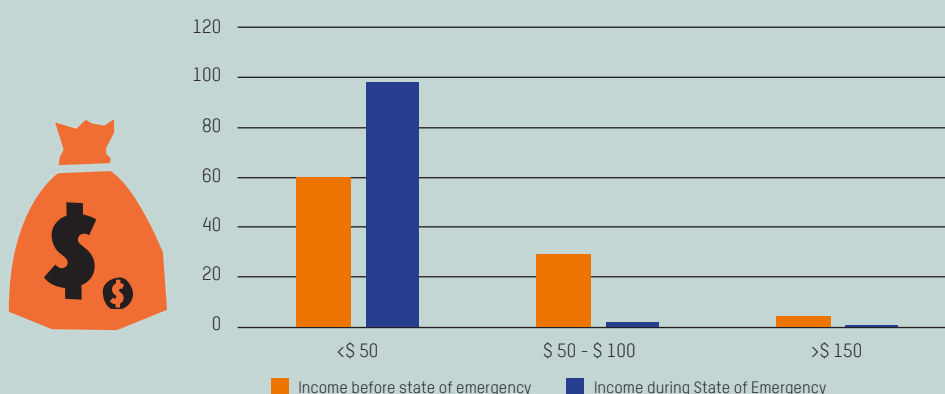## Income Before and During the State of Emergency

Income prior to the global pandemic was surveyed. More than 60 percent of informants reported they earned less than USD50 a month, 29.3 percent reported a monthly income of between USD50-USD100. Only 4.5 percent of informants earned more than USD100 a month before COVID-19. Informants were then asked "How much did you earn during the state of emergency/lockdown?" 97.7 percent earned less than USD50 a month in the agricultural sector during the State of Emergency. When compared to their income before, the number of informants who earn less than USD50 a month increased by 31.5 percent during the State of Emergency. Informants who earned more than $100 dropped to almost zero. During the State of Emergency, all municipalities except Baucau showed this reduced income.

Table 4: Respondents income before and during the State of Emergency

■ Income before state of emergency   ■ Income during State of Emergency

Livelihoods

Most informant's livelihoods or income depend on farming and selling produce. During the State of Emergency, 72.2 percent of informants could grow crops as usual while 27.4 percent could not. Reasons why informants could not grow crops were COVID-19 regulations/Rules of State of Emergency (44.9%), illness (non-COVID-19 disease) (17.9%), bad road or bridge conditions (3.8%), and other reasons (33.3%).

**Reasons of inability to grow crops during the State of Emergency**

Rules of state of emergency	44.90%
Illness	17.90%
Bad condition of roads or bridges	3.80%
Other reasons	33.30%
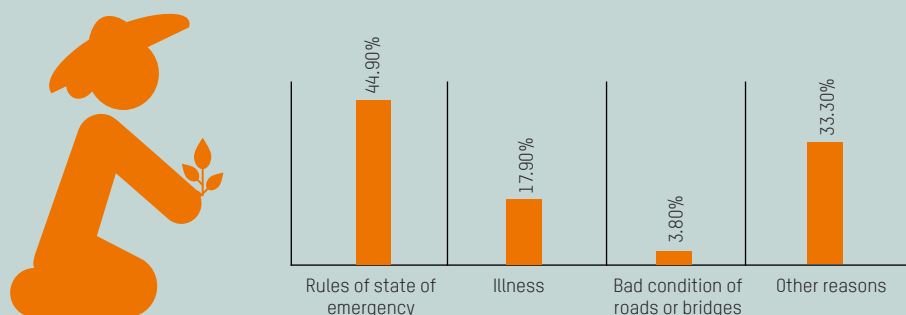
Food security

During times of crises, women and girls tend to experience reduction of their food intake in both quality and in quantity.[15] Before the State of Emergency, 4.1 percent of informants consumed 1 meal a day, 21.1 percent consumed 2 meals a day, and the majority, 72.2 percent, consumed 3 meals a day. However the result show intersectional barriers affected women with disabilities before COVID-19: Most informants who were women with disabilities consumed 1 meal a day before the State of Emergency began, citing their dependency on families, neighbors, or communities to support food and necessities.

Reducing the number of meals is a common coping strategy adopted in lean seasons. The State of Emergency occurred between March and June, when the first maize harvest ended 2-4 months earlier and rice harvest is in process. Although April and May should be months with the highest level of food security in a year[16], informants from across the six municipalities adopted coping strategies in response to reduced income and food. During the State of Emergency, only 39.1 percent of informants consumed 3 meals a day. The percentage of informants who consumed 3 meals a day before the State of Emergency dropped by 33.1 percent, while the percentage of informants who consumed 1 and 2 meals a day increased by 15.8 percent and 42.5 percent respectively.

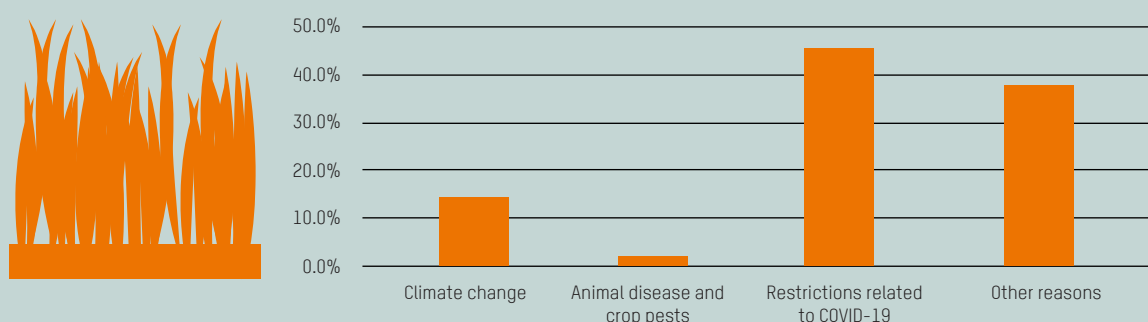**Table 6: Frequency of meals consumed before and during the State of Emergency by percentage of respondents**
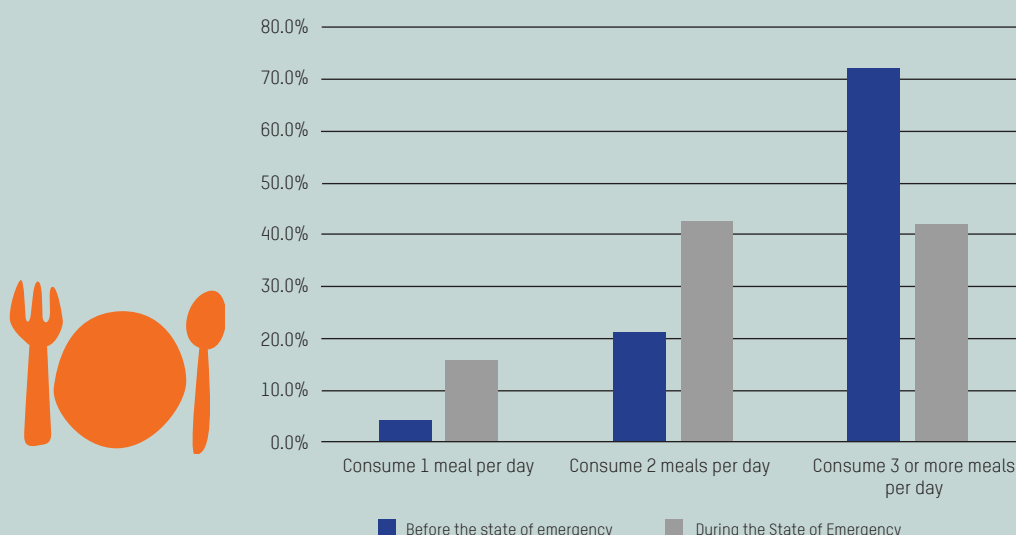
In all municipalities, compared to before the State of Emergency, percentage of informants who consumed just 1 meal per day increased. In particular, Baucau had the highest increased percentage of informants who consumed just 1 meal per day (8.2% increased to 36.7%). Aileu and Dili showed a serious drop of percentage in the category of consuming 3 meals per day: Aileu, dropped from 89.1 percent to 15.2 percent, while in Dili, the percentage of consuming meals 3 times a day dropped from 77.5 percent to 35 percent.

Informants were asked why food was reduced during the State of Emergency: 45.5 percent of informants considered restrictions related to COVID-19 as the main reasons of reduced food, while 14.3 percent reported climate change and 1.9 percent reported animal disease and crop pests as the main reason. Note that 38 percent of informants chose "other reason(s)".

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15 Oxfam. "Ten Years after the Global Food Crisis, Rural Women still Bear the Brunt of Poverty and Hunger." 2019. https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/research-publications/ten-years-after-global-food-price-crisis/

16   GDs, FAO and UNFPA. Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2015: Analytical Report on Agriculture and Fisheries. GDs, FAO and UNFPA, 2018. http://www.statistics.gov.tl/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2015-Census-Agriculture-and-Fisheries-report.pdf

Table 7: Reasons outlined for food insecurity

In each municipality, informants were asked to clarify how, in their experience, COVID-19 restrictions caused food insecurity. Informants who relied on selling their produce to support themselves and their families identified the number of their customers as well as the market price of their produce dropped. Some informants also replied that the restriction on movement impeded them from selling their produce at market.

Not all the informants experienced food insecurity, and women noted coping strategies of eating fruit and the local produce they grew, such as corns, beans, cassava, and vegetables, instead of rice and other food which needed to be purchased.

Access to Markets

During the State of Emergency, 75.2 percent of informants had difficulty accessing markets compared to normal times. 21.4 percent of informants reported no transportation available as the main reason. 51.1 percent of informants had more than one reason which caused them to be unable to access to market as usual (no transportation, following the rules of the state of emergency, markets closure, fewer buyers, bad conditions of road).

75%
Of informants
had difficualty accessing markets

21%
Of informants
**reported no transportation available as the main reason**

Woman with disabilities, Dili.

'Our life is very vulnerable. Therefore, the bigger the impact of the state of emergency and COVID-19 the more our life becomes more vulnerable: there are many food and local produce, but because of COVID-19 and the state of emergency people can not access the market due to the problem of transportation. Sometimes there is transportation but bringing the produce to the market means we cannot get a good price. As a result, sometimes people do not go (to market) because the situation is the same, and sometimes they even lose more because the cost of transportation is expensive, and selling their produce can not get a good payment, which is not enough to pay for transportation. Therefore, they just leave their produce.'

Access to medical care and services

Among all informants, almost 60 percent of informants could access hospitals and clinics during the State of Emergency while 39.8 percent could not. According to informants who could not access the clinic and hospital, reasons why included lack of healthcare providers, long distance, fear of contracting COVID-19 and the regulations of COVID-19 (for example, not being able to enter hospital without wearing masks). The results showed that the context of COVID-19 likely changed women's practices and reduced the number of women who sought access to hospitals and clinics.

60%
Of informants

could access hospitals and clinics

40%
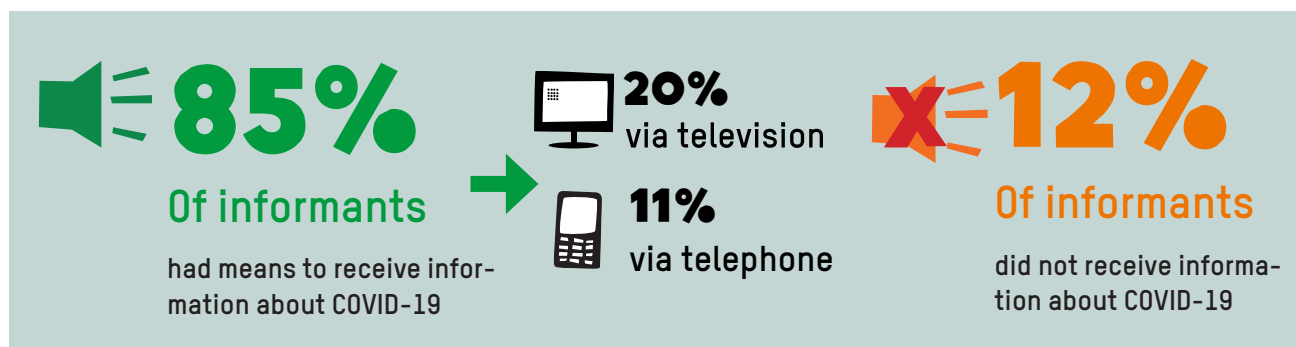Of informants

could not access hospitals and clinics
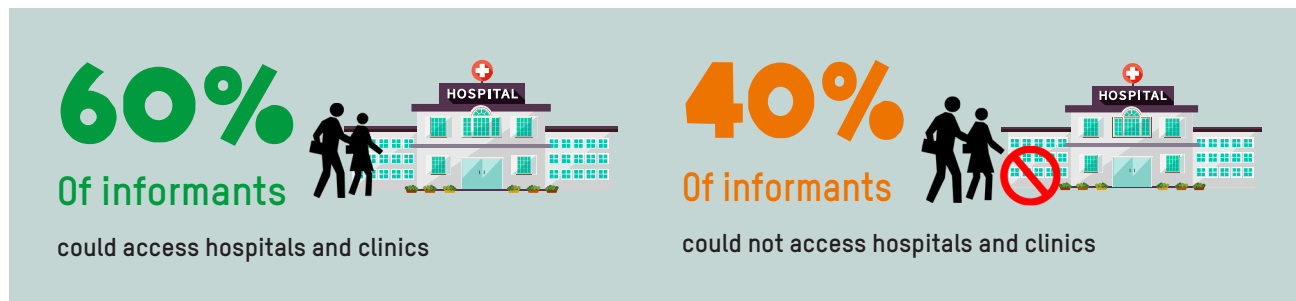
Workload of domestic care work

In the Asia and Pacific region, women spend 4.1 times more time than men on unpaid care work, such as caring for family members, cooking, cleaning and fetching water[17]. Informants were asked "What kind of domestic work did they do at home during the State of Emergency?". While more than 20 percent of informants answered "grow crops" and "take care of families", 66.2 percent of informants answered that they had to do more than two kinds of domestic work at home. Informants were asked "Do you feel that housework becomes heavier/increased during the state of emergency?" - 44 percent of informants answered "yes". Informants who are women with disabilities and widows felt pressured to keep up with their care work at home during the state of emergency.

44%
Of informants

Felt their housework increased during the state of emergency
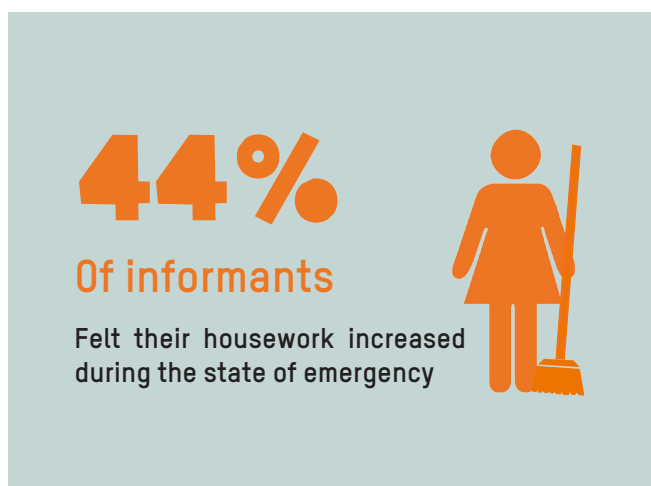
Access to information

Among all the informants, 84.6 percent had means to receive information about COVID-19 while 12.4 percent did not. Information came from a variety of sources, most often via television (19.9 percent) and telephone (11.3 percent). Other methods of accessing information about COVID-19 included newspaper, radio, and hearing from others.

85%
Of informants

had means to receive information about COVID-19

20% via television

11% via telephone

12%
Of informants

did not receive information about COVID-19

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17   Noumea. "COVID-19: Pacific Community Updates." Last modified July 14, 2020. https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/2020/03/spc-update-covid-19

## Knowledge about preventing COVID-19

Informants were asked "How did you prevent COVID-19?" Most informants showed basic knowledge regarding how to prevent COVID-19 in general, such as: wash hands with soap, using masks, and social distancing.

Table 8: Knowledge about preventing COVID-19
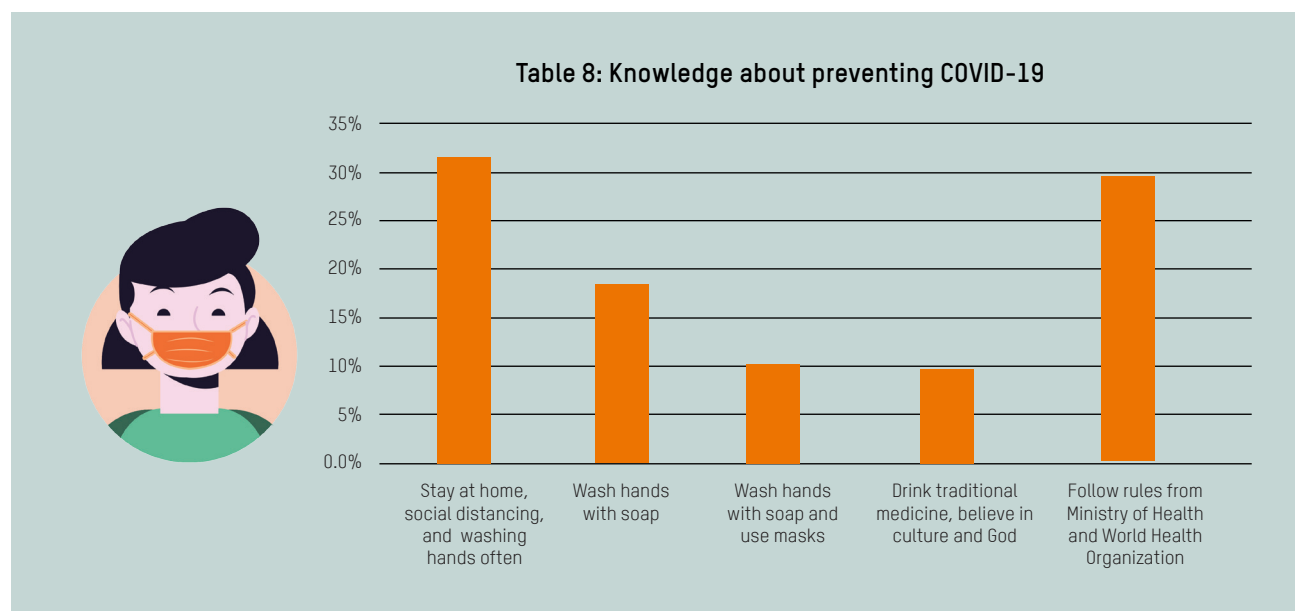
Access to water, sanitation, and hygiene

In Timor-Leste, 79 percent of households have access to an improved sources of drinking water, while 50 percent of households have access to improved sanitation facilities, according to the Demographic and Health Survey 2016[18]. Among all informants, 82.7 percent of informants were able to access water, sanitation, and hygiene, while 17.3 percent of informants could not. Among 17.3 percent of informants who lack access to water, sanitation, and hygiene, lack of help from local authorities, lack of water resources or distance from water resources, lack of money to buy necessary goods, and lack of information were the most common reasons impeding them to access water, sanitation, and hygiene services.

Of all the municipalities, Ermera has the highest proportion of women interviewed who did not have access to water, sanitation, and hygiene services (34.9 percent), while Manatuto had the lowest proportion (4.8 percent).

83%
Of informants
were able to access water, sanitation, and hygiene

17%
Of informants
were not able to access water, sanitation, and hygiene

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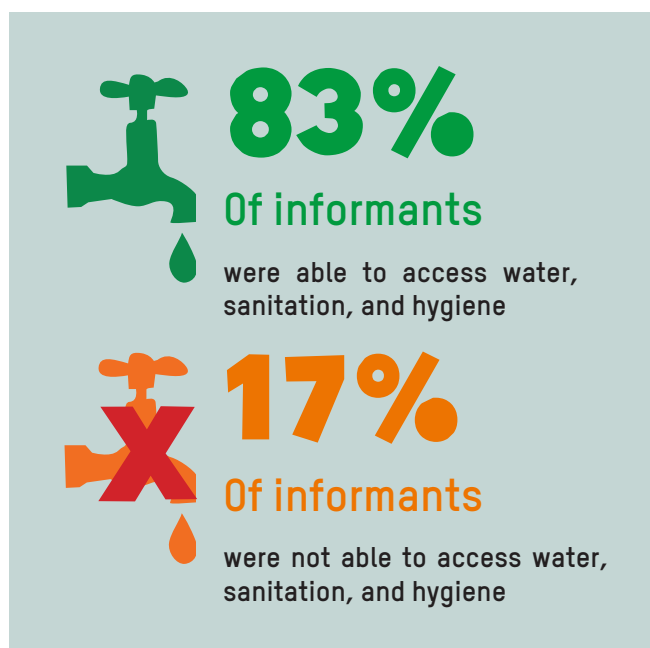
18   GDS and DHS. Timor-Leste Demographic and Health Survey 2016. GDS and DHS, 2018.
      https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR329/FR329.pdf

Assistance from the government or others

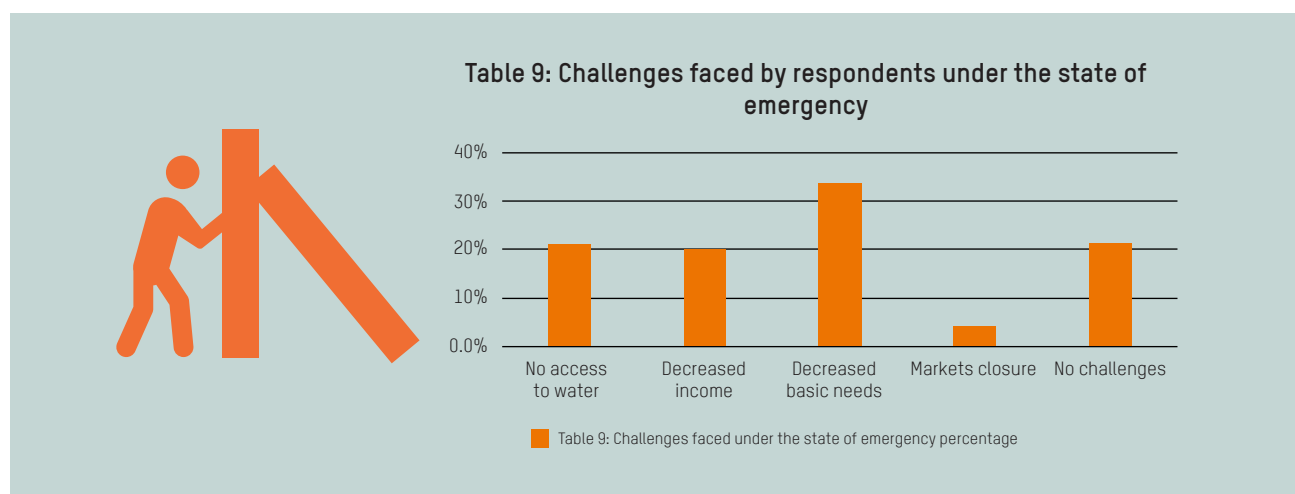Informants were asked "whether you received help from the government or other actors?" 82.7 percent of informants received help from the government (subsidies of $200 for a household whose monthly income less than $500 and the electricity credit of $15 a month) or other groups, such as church, Xanana Gusmao, veterans' groups, NGOs, or businesses/companies.

83%

Of informants

Received help from the government or other groups, church, leaders, NGO's or business

Government included help →

$200
Household payment for households whose income is less than $500 per month

$15
Electricity credit per month
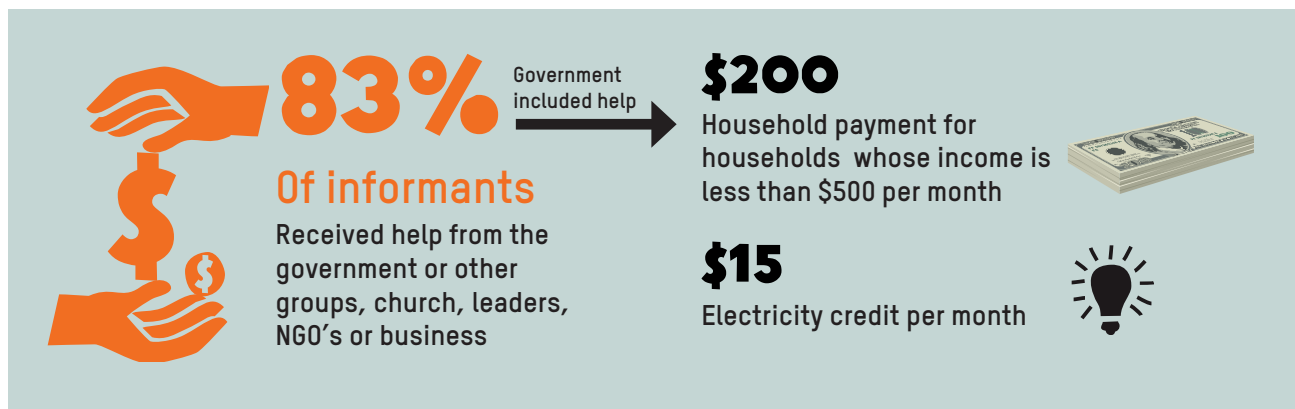
Challenges faced under the State of Emergency

Informants were asked an open-ended question: "When the State of Emergency was in place, what kind of challenges did you experience?" More than 53 percent of informants highlighted decreased income and basic necessities. 21.1 percent of informants mentioned that lack of access to water has challenging for them, and 4.1 percent of informants found the closure of markets challenging. In contrast, 21.4 percent of the informants did not face any challenges under the state of emergency.

Table 9: Challenges faced by respondents under the state of emergency

Challenge	Percentage
No access to water	~21%
Decreased income	~20%
Decreased basic needs	~34%
Markets closure	~4%
No challenges	~21%

Table 9: Challenges faced under the state of emergency percentage

Sonia da Silva, farmer, Hera / Oxfam in Timor-Leste

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These findings reflect that women in agriculture experienced food and financial insecurity as well as other challenges during the COVID-19 State of Emergency in Timor-Leste.

Early and timely interventions can prevent or mitigate financial and food insecurities for women in rural areas of Timor-Leste, as well as preventing existing gender inequalities, discrimination, and violence against women from worsening. The following recommendations will improve gender responsive approaches:

- Share more and better gender disaggregated data: Continually develop gender and age disaggregated data as the crisis continues and make it accessible and available to the public. This data helps Government and the public to ask gender-sensitive questions, and integrate them into policy-making and responses. This data will also help Government and the public have a clearer understanding in terms of how COVID-19 and policy decisions impact differently on women and men.

- Put gender as a central issue for policy preparedness, response, and implementation: Ensure that the needs of women, girls, older persons, people with disabilities, women headed households and widows are a central issue in all stages of policy preparation, response, and implementation related to COVID-19. This will create policies reflective of the needs and concerns of different vulnerable groups without exacerbating existing gender inequalities during crises.

- Target access to information and WASH services to women. Ensure that COVID-19 related information and WASH services and facilities are accessible for women and girls, including women with disabilities, especially those who live in remote and isolated rural areas.

- Build women's economic resilience in Timor-Leste by investing better in the agriculture sector. Develop policies addressing food security and the economic shocks of the COVID-19 outbreak and recovery measures. Provide support in cash and food in the short term, ensure greater investment in agricultural inputs during cropping seasons as well as transportation during harvesting seasons in the midterm term, and improve basic infrastructure (road, bridges, and WASH facilities) in the long term.