

# **Gendered food insecurity study informs recovery and preparedness in the Indo-Pacific**

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Academics from the Griffith Asia Institute (GAI) collaborated with researchers from the Indo-Pacific to examine the risks related to economic hardship and food insecurity that women in the region experienced during the first and second years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Australian Center for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) funded project focused on [low-income women](#) working in small-scale agriculture businesses to gain insights from their diverse experiences and understand how they had been affected by public health interventions and the pandemic itself.

Professor Sara Davies and Associate Professor Robin E Roberts assembled an all-female team of in-country researchers who had [strong connections](#) with [local communities](#) in Myanmar, The Philippines, and Papua New Guinea.

"Local [women](#) networks are crucial for conducting this type of research," Professor Davies said.

"Awareness of gendered experiences during a crisis is vital to identifying the barriers. The local women farmers and vendors wanted to share their stories and provide suggestions for their own recovery and resilience."

Findings revealed a more significant increase in insecurity levels for women than men throughout the course of the pandemic.

Many participants reported the lack of consistent information on the spread of the virus, on the health measures required, and the welfare schemes available as their biggest barriers to food and income security. Women market vendors were particularly disadvantaged as they also faced restrictions in trading hours, the cost of personal protection equipment, and increased incidences of violence, theft, and bribery.

Additionally, as women were typically in charge of managing the household, they often put themselves at higher health, safety, or financial risk than men, to achieve food or income security for their families.

"The differences in [food insecurity](#) experiences between women and men were linked to structural inequalities rather than socio-economic or demographic variables," Associate Professor Roberts said.

"Reproductive labor roles such as cooking, cleaning, and caregiving had a larger impact on insecurity gaps than age, education, or location.

"The women's unpaid labor and caring responsibilities increased which reduced their earning capacity, and their high representation in informal or self-employment meant that they were particularly vulnerable to the economic affects of the pandemic. The need for rapid financing placed them in high-risk financial situations and inconsistent lockdown information heightened physical insecurity.

"Government support was available, but women didn't know if they were eligible and they weren't willing to stand in welfare lines and expose themselves to the virus, so they often went without."

The [final report](#) identifies further research opportunities for women in the Indo-Pacific region and suggests actions for recovery and preparedness, should a similar event occur in the future.

ACIAR will be issuing the findings as a Technical Publication and Associate Professor Roberts will be presenting the key outputs at the Australian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society (AARES) conference in Christchurch in February 2023.

Provided by Griffith University

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