

Live & Learn COVID-19 Response

Case Study



When the World Health Organisation officially declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic on 11 March 2020, the scale and intensity of coronavirus was only just beginning to put enormous strain on vulnerable communities worldwide. Since then, COVID-19 has been overwhelming health infrastructure, disrupting economic activity, increasing food insecurity and impacting livelihoods on a global scale, adding to the existing impacts of climate change.

Eleven countries in the Pacific have reported cases since the first outbreak of COVID-19 as infections have surged in many places across the region. Live & Learn's response to the COVID-19 crisis has been a natural extension of our strong history of implementing water, sanitation and hygiene projects across the Pacific. Live & Learn has worked alongside communities that have been affected by the pandemic, supporting and expanding national health efforts in the response to COVID-19.

Achievement Snapshot

Live & Learn has:

- Created and disseminated localized COVID-19 awareness messages.
- Distributed seedlings, food rations, and hygiene kits to hundreds of vulnerable communities.
- Conducted training which focused on economic recovery, soap-making, and sewing face masks.
- Constructed handwashing facilities in schools and communities, along with providing demonstrations and materials.



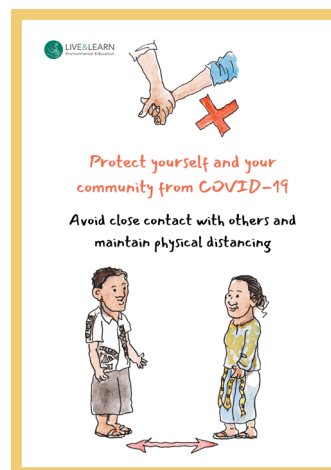
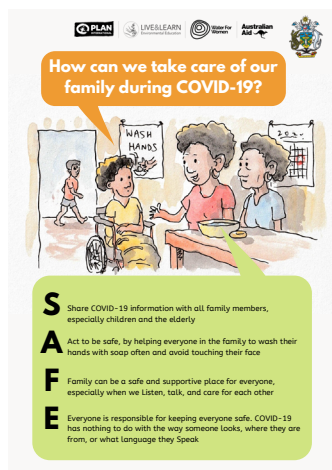
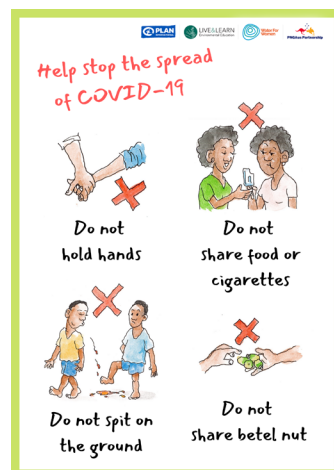
Resource Development and Distribution



The development and swift distribution of awareness messages formed a core aspect of the Live & Learn network's COVID-19 response. Resources took the form of posters, banners, billboards, stickers, brochures and social media posts. After the initial outbreak of COVID-19 in the Pacific in March 2020 the themes of these resources focused on promoting the World Health Organization's principles for preventing the spread of COVID-19. This included essential precautions such as frequent handwashing with soap, social distancing, coughing into the bend of your elbow and avoiding touching your face.

Localised messages, created through collaboration with individual Live & Learn field offices, quickly followed. These were created to suit specific contexts surrounding cultural practices and behaviours, like sharing kava, chewing betelnut, spitting, sharing food or holding hands. These resources depicted a wide range of Polynesian and Melanesian audiences and included messages targeting children, families, the elderly and people with disabilities.

Live & Learn staff actively circulated these resources across rural and urban communities in Tonga, Tuvalu, Cambodia, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea, translating them into local languages. Communities displayed posters, stickers and billboards in local town centres and schools. These resources were also shared online, on Facebook and Instagram, by network offices and the Live & Learn office in Australia. In Papua New Guinea the Live & Learn Facebook page reached more than 14,000 people with COVID-19 messages.



Fiji

Fiji avoided the worst of COVID-19 at the start of the pandemic, but an outbreak in April 2021 saw infections climb over the ensuing months. The second wave of COVID-19 has continued to grow, putting huge strain on communities and health services. Live & Learn Fiji has provided much needed assistance to vulnerable communities in lockdown in the form of food rations. The food packs, containing rice, biscuits, tea, flour, oil, milk powder, split peas and tinned fish were joyful sights for those unable to leave their homes.



Photo Credit: Ministry of Agriculture, Fiji

Hygiene kits were also provided, including menstrual pads, handwashing soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, laundry soap, dish soap, sponges, and antiseptic cleaners. With the support of the Ministry of Health and funding from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Live & Learn Fiji team has distributed food rations to 345 households, and hygiene kits to 322 households within the Lami, Nausori and Suva corridors.



In the first phase of the response Live & Learn Fiji supplied communities and schools with 3-month supplies of handwashing soap and arranged soap-making workshops to ensure a sustainable soap supply. Eighteen male and female participants from the three districts of Yawe, Yale and Nabukelevu-i-ra in Kadavu and Vatulele attended the two-day workshop, which taught them the basic skills needed to make soap and pass their knowledge onto others.



Proper handwashing has been encouraged by students through the installation of new handwashing stations in schools in Kadavu and Vatulele. Hygiene facilities have been upgraded and students have received training on the importance of handwashing with soap and water to minimise the spread of disease. By improving hygiene practices in schools, students will be able to share their knowledge with their families and communities to build resilience to COVID-19. This work was conducted as part of the WASH in Schools programme, funded by USAID through the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance. Over 500 students will be positively impacted and become agents of change in their communities.

Cambodia

After confirming the first case of COVID-19 in the country, Live & Learn Cambodia quickly mobilised its Gender Task Force. Initially designed to spread awareness about family violence, the task force began addressing the risk of family violence being exacerbated by COVID-19.



The Gender Task Force Group conducted a series of workshops with target communities, discussing gender related issues with men and women. Topics in these workshops included sexual abuse, substance abuse, gambling, and lack of trust within families. These workshops were of particular importance for those poorest households, who are most vulnerable to family violence. While visiting communities, the Gender Task Force also distributed posters and awareness material about the importance of good hygiene and sanitation to prevent the spread of the virus.



Photo Credit:
The Island Sun News, Solomon Islands

The food security training involves basic gardening skills as well as the supply of tools and seeds to encourage home gardening. Training is conducted in partnership with Kastom Gaden, an organisation with 25 years of experience in the Solomon Islands. This will ensure access to healthy and nutritious foods regardless of impacts caused by the pandemic.

“We are also training communities to revert to the old way of gardening for climate resilience. Traditional knowledge and a traditional way of living is how we survived before times changed. We are addressing COVID-19 but also thinking long term,” says Maria Afu, COVID-19 Active Response program staff.

Solomon Islands

There have been 20 confirmed cases of COVID-19 but no deaths in the Solomon Islands since the pandemic began. Under the COVID-19 Active Response program, Live & Learn Solomon Islands is focusing on four key outcomes: food security and livelihood; COVID-19 protection; gender and social inclusion and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Supported by the Australian Humanitarian Partnership, Live & Learn Solomon Islands has been working with vulnerable communities based in and around the capital of Honiara.

With funding from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, program staff have worked with 200 women, 13 schools and 11 communities on food security training and water, sanitation and hygiene. This includes the installation of rainwater tanks that can not only be used for handwashing, but also drinking and cooking. A partnership with Kaleko Stei-Free has continued to support positive hygiene practices, including menstrual health management, in the community. As a result, 2,000 hygiene kits are currently in production for at-risk women, communities and school-aged girls.



Photo Credit:
Ernest Talasi Oxfam

Tuvalu

The Government of Tuvalu declared a State of Health Emergency, effective on 20 March 2020, for the whole of Tuvalu due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The swift border closure has prevented any cases of COVID-19 from entering the country, but there remains a growing concern among the population that it is only a matter of time.

As part of the COVID-19 Mitigation and Preparedness in the Pacific program, a team from Live & Learn Tuvalu was mobilised to travel to the islands of Vaitupu, Nukufetau and Nui. This journey was possible with the support of the USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and in partnership with CARE Australia. During their visit the team called on households to deliver supplies and promote hygiene awareness. Their mission was to visit every household and provide them with soap, a portable handwashing station and education materials. The handwashing stations take the form of 15-litre refillable buckets. The team reached 445 households across all three islands.



“It’s all about preparation...Water, sanitation and hygiene is now really strong in our minds; everybody is well prepared and will know what to do.” Itaia Lausaveve, Chief Technical Advisor from Live & Learn Tuvalu

Papua New Guinea

One of the hardest hit Pacific countries from the beginning of the pandemic, Papua New Guinea saw cases of COVID-19 rising out of control from March 2021 onwards. Women in Papua New Guinea commonly make a living by selling food at roadside stalls, but they have been unable to keep up the work due to COVID-19 restrictions. This has severely interrupted their income streams and created financial insecurity.

Workshops were conducted with women in 20 wards to teach the skills needed to make soap, face masks and menstrual pads. Community interest in the sessions saw an unexpected increase in attendance, with some 3231 people expected to have been reached across 30 villages. These workshops have been made possible through the Water for Women Project and the Australian Humanitarian Partnership, in partnership with Plan International and funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

“Women are the direct beneficiaries of the training activities, while the introduction of new skills into rural communities will also benefit the broader community by improving access to hygiene materials produced and sold, improving the local economy,” said staff from Live & Learn Papua New Guinea.



Moving Forward

Since the pandemic began, the Live & Learn network has continued to promote a culture of prevention through safe COVID-19 hygiene practices. Adapting to and embracing new challenges while progressing other project activities has been essential to project staff and volunteers across the Pacific, whose hard work and dedication has been invaluable. Responding to COVID-19 is an ongoing process, but Live & Learn will continue supplying communities with the skills and information they need to maintain resilience throughout this crisis.