

CONCEPT NOTE ON STRENGTHENING COORDINATION AND GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENT OF COVID-19 PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE & RECOVERY

Country Context

Solomon Islands has a population above 650, 000 with over 85% of the people living in rural areas scattered across over 90 inhabitable islands. It is administratively divided into nine provinces, and the capital city of Honiara. Solomon Islands shares maritime borders with Papua New Guinea, Australia and Vanuatu. It is among the 10 most disaster-prone countries in the world according to Global Risk Index.

While there are currently no officially confirmed COVID-19 cases, potential for importation of COVID-19 disease into Solomon Islands has been high since the outbreak with regular flights to and from Australia, Fiji, Nauru, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, which provided transit connections to some of the most affected countries in Asia, Europe and North America. Although almost all commercial air traffic has been suspended (as of 27 March), the two seaports are still open to receiving and sending international shipment of cargo and personnel.

Travel between the capital city of Honiara and the nine provinces by air and sea transport is also open. It poses potential high risk of further COVID-19 transmission to rural communities in remote provinces, which lack any response and healthcare capacity.

On 21 March 2020 the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands Manasseh Sogovare announced the measures taken by the country to prepare for the imminent threat of COVID-19. These measures included movement of large number of Honiara based population back to the provinces of their origin. The measure is expected to further stretch limited local resources and overwhelm the provincial level institutions. With challenges in the national health system as well as communal lifestyle of people in Solomon Islands, the spread of COVID- 19 will be rapid, unless containment measures, awareness, and crisis response and coordination capacity are put in place at the provincial level.

Further, the devastating impact of COVID-19 on social and economic sectors especially on small- scale farmers and businesses are likely to cause major setbacks in national development and will hinder the achievement of the SDGs.

Given the past conflict history, remaining security concerns around the frustrations among public over lack of access to basic services, disrupted livelihoods, and loss of jobs (e.g. closure of several markets in Honiara) has huge risk potential as citizens struggle to meet their daily needs.

On 25 March, the government declared the State of Public Emergency, which will result in further restrictive measures as the country prepares for the COVID-19 crisis.

Preparedness and Response Coordination in Solomon Islands

According to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services risk assessment, there is a high possibility of importation of COVID-19, which will have high impact on Honiara and the provinces. So far, the Government has introduced urgent measures and inter-institutional coordination mechanisms to protect the country from the virus and manage the whole of government response efforts. These include:

- A COVID19 Oversight Committee chaired by the Secretary to Cabinet to provide strategic direction in planning for multi- sectoral COVID-19 response and recovery.
- The National Disaster Management Operations Committee (N-DOC) with responsibility for developing and implementing a multi-sectoral COVID19 Preparedness and Response Plan (PRP). The N-DOC comprises of six sector committees: Camp Management, Education, Health, Infrastructure, Livelihood and Protection. Coordination and Safety and Security are also included in COVID-19 PRP as critical service in minimizing loss of lives.
- Activated the National Emergency Operations Center (NEOC), to be coordinated by the National Disaster Management Office.

Given the limited human capacity and financial resources within the Government, even before the COVID-19 outbreak, it is evident that significant support is urgently required for disaster preparedness response and coordination amongst the institutions. Importantly, time is of the essence to undertake outreach, public awareness and build provincial crisis response capacity.

Except the Health and Education sectors, which are being supported by WHO and UNICEF as well as bilateral partners such as Australia and New Zealand, the remaining sectors are largely unprepared to cope with possible COVID-19 crisis.

The NDMO – the main institutions coordinating the preparedness efforts- has been leading the preparedness and response preparations across the Government, under the leadership of the N-DOC Chair (Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Disaster Management), but its capacity is over-stretched, with staff operating almost 24/7 shifts. UNDP is a member of N-DOC and plays a coordinator role amongst the development partners. UNDP is directly supporting NDMO through a joint project with UN-OCHA, by availing expertise of a Humanitarian Coordination Officer. This expertise is critical but not enough to cope with the increased demand for support by the Government as it builds up its own COVID-19 response capacity.

Technical Proposal

In line with the UN-wide Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP) led by WHO, UNDP can play an important role in fostering better inter-ministerial coordination and integrated crisis response efforts, taking a whole of the Government approach. Specific support is needed for:

- a) Strengthen multi-sector coordination role of N-DOC at National with linkages to international community to support further resource mobilization.
- b) Enable functioning of national and provincial emergency centres through streamlined provincial level governance arrangements.
- c) Support coordination of recovery efforts, led by the Recovery Coordination Committee, under the Ministry of National Planning and Development Coordination.
- d) Provide procurement support to institutions within and outside health-sector in dire need of PPEs.

Component 1: Strengthening of Multi-sectoral Coordination at National Level

- There are three main committees in place to support different aspect of coordination at the strategic, tactical and operational levels. Each of those committees are led by different government entities at the national and provincial level. This poses a challenge in flow of information to support decision- making at both levels. Working with those committees to identify areas where they interface is critical to avoid gaps and overlaps in implementing preparedness, response and recovery efforts of COVID-19.
- There are four emergency operations centres identified to support field level operation. These facilities are equipped to varying degrees depending on the location. Members of the National Emergency Response Team (NERT) will be posted on a 14-day rotation to support each EOC at the national and provincial level. The role of the NERT is to support information management to strengthen decision making at both of those levels.
- Additional personnel, training and some essential equipment (phone, laptop, radios) are urgently required to facilitate Muliti-sectoral coordination across Solomon Islands.

In line with strategic area two of UNDP support to COVID-19 in Asia Pacific, TRAC2 funds will be used to support the above-mentioned areas to strengthen multi- sectoral coordination at national level.

Component 2: Strengthening Provincial Level Governance Arrangements

So far, COVID-19 preparedness measures are mostly focused at the Honiara level. However, with movement of population back to the provinces, the risks increase. Ensuring that targeted provincial governments are supported in coordinating the multi- sectoral response to containing and minimizing spread of COVID-19 is critical for safety of the rural population.

The TRAC2 funding will be used to work with selected Provincial Administration in bringing together key stakeholders to support the preparedness and response efforts. This may involve support to NDMO staff to work with these provincial administrations in developing basic protocols of working with various frontline response teams and delivering basic training on crisis management to newly recruited staff.

Component 3: Strengthening Recovery related Assessment and Planning

Recovery planning and analysis of the social and economic impact of COVID19 on the country and its people must begin without delay. The National Disaster Management Plan 2018 establishes the Recovery Coordination Committee to coordinate and provide oversight for recovery and construction work following a disaster. The RCC is chaired by the Ministry of National Planning and Development Coordination – the key counterpart of UNDP.

TRAC2 funding will be used to support activation of RCC to conduct appropriate assessments to initiate multi-sectoral recovery planning and identify strategic intervention areas to be prioritized by the Government and development partners. UNDP will avail the existing methodologies and analytical tools to support the MNPDC in carrying out its role within the N-DOC.

Component 4: Procurement of Personal Protective Equipment and basic supplies for Non- Health Sector

Health supplies such as gloves, masks and personal protective equipment as well as hand sanitizers are in short supply in Honiara. (e.g. there are only 50 PPEs available to Health facilities in Honiara). Non- health sector (Ports, Provincial response teams) will require protective equipment when responding to crises situations at Points of Entry, Quarantine Sites, and other containment facilities. Other institutions at provincial level also lack basic means of protection from COVID-19. The Solomon Islands Government through the National Disaster Management Office has limited funding to procure PPE for specific activities of multi- sectoral response; however, it lacks dedicated procurement capacity to attend to this important matter.

In line with strategic focus one, TRAC2 funding will be used as co-financing for procurement of additional supplies of PPEs on behalf of NDMO and other institutions outside Health sector.

Tentative Budget

Key Activities	Budget Description	Budget (USD)
Component 1: Strengthening of national level multi- sectoral coordination		
	Training of NDMO teams	5, 000
	NERT ICT Equipment	7,000
	Development of Protocols	8, 000
Component 2: Strengthening of Provincial Level Governance Arrangements		
	Development of Protocols and SOPs for response	5, 000
	Travel to provinces for NDMO;	8, 000
	Recruitment and Training of crisis response capacity (2 local staff x 4 months)	12,000
Component 3: Recovery Planning and Analysis		
	Support to Ministry of Planning and Development Coordination led analysis	5,000
	Recovery and economic needs assessment – home-based consultancy	20,000
Component 4	Purchase of PPE, hand-sanitizers, COVID-19 awareness material;	30, 000
Total Proposal		100,000