

Impact of Covid-19 in the Pacific and Sustainable Methods of Mitigation

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Abstract

The Pacific Island countries are underdeveloped countries on earth with different traditional backgrounds and thus yet to adapt to western cultures. For the past few months, the Pacific island countries have been hard hit by the second wave of COVID-19 where people who were considered above 45 years have been vulnerable and susceptible to death. This was happening on our very eyes and confounded and scary because such as never experienced before. From the first wave of coronavirus, it has been treated and considered spineless ineffective disease which the people of the Pacific islands countries were naturally immune including Papua New Guinea until the second wave hit the hardest. The countries in the Pacific islands are completely and totally vulnerable to death due to lowest economy, poor health systems, and unreliable public service and most importantly underdeveloped. Economies were crippling at the steady rate when government considered lockdown and people have suffered greatly thus implications are of very severe. The Pacific countries are considered most crippling nations by COVID-19 because the size and magnitude of our economy, health facilities and the people's lifestyles have profoundly affected and contributed towards the escalating trend of COVID-19 pandemic. The issues faced now is to mitigate spread and combat sustainably from the pandemic.

Keywords

Coronavirus, Economy, Health, Sustainability, Mitigate

Introduction

Coronavirus has recently hard hit in the Pacific by its second wave after the first wave has been eased. People in the Pacific countries have entirely depend on their traditional ways for survival and gather food, fishing and other occasions which do not comply to restrictions. As people continue to survive in their old fashion, the COVID-19 have threatened the lives which the people in the Pacific are vulnerable to death especially 45 years and above.

People are dying unlike the first wave that hit the Pacific. This includes Papua New Guinea where there are many people dying every day concurrently with limited mitigation strategy to combat the issues by sustainably preserving the lives of people above 50 years old. The Pacific island countries are vulnerable and are not able to withstand the second wave because their lifestyles are completely different as that from the western world. People gather in public places in thousands including stores and anywhere. This includes unhygienic ways of cooking, eating and sleeping or building homes as it's part of life. As such, Pacific islands people have found it very difficult to adapt to new normal or wearing facemask and keeping distance when talking or walking as imposed lately as health rules (Authorities et al. 2020). However, due to complacency and ignorant and governments lack of sustainable policy, people are dying due to failure to comply with health rules and take vaccinations as majority of the population do not agree with the COVID-19 vaccine.

The business houses are about to close and if proposed to shut-down the country one more time would mean Pacific island countries economy will collapse (Zhang 2020). This is evident and is happening as international boundaries are closed and no longer allowing people entry and thus foreign currencies will be insufficient thus ways of controlling and mitigating the virus would be complicated. Health of the people especially elders are in

total danger because their weak immune systems do not vigorously counter attack covid-19 virus and as a result, people suffocate and die.



Figure 1. Crowds lining up for medical treatment.

Sustainable Health Practice to Mitigate COVID19

The health of the people in the Pacific are fragile, weak and vulnerable especially people with underlying disease or above 45 years to effectively mitigate spread of the disease. The continuous unhealthy living which has been inherent from the past have been a norm where the COVID-19 pandemic cannot even strike and inflict panic which may force the people to adapt to new ways of mitigating the disease. The people continue to gather and have normal business and allow for local trades where it feels there is nothing like a pandemic or threat faced throughout the world.

Most people in the Pacific thought during the first wave of the COVID-19 that Pacific islanders' lifestyle has strengthened and sealed our body's defence or immune systems which can counter attack and vigorously fight COVID-19 and other diseases. Due to the unhealthy living and persistent use of unclean hands while eating without washing the entire body for almost a month have trained the immune systems to fight back coronavirus (Jarvis, 2021). The magnitude of COVID-19 has not suppressed and oppressed Pacific countries' immune until the second wave which is much more dangerous than the first wave.

The second wave of the virus has totally taken down many lives in the Pacific and realized the importance of new styles of living and washing hands or sanitizing when in contact with foreign materials or people. The people who are into their old ages are vigorously attacked by the second wave of the virus and is one of the great concerns where they cannot sustainably protect from the disease. The Pacific countries start to signal and send out alarm more loud and clear of the people dying and have requested for possible help from other countries (Remeo et al. 2020). People start to realize that the sick is no joke and illusions anymore and thus have keened to comply with regulations and other necessary protocols to mitigate spread or avoid infected or contracting. The people also have courage, stood tall and advocated about the vaccine which at first were reluctant, thinking that the vaccines were produced in less time and have sent to tests on us like guinea pigs.

Table 1 shows the recent survey in which the contraction of COVID-19 escalation in the Pacific countries. The survey has been conducted by BBC on the recent pandemic in the Pacific island countries as it vigorously affects the business and other important activities which left people to suffer and ultimately die.

Table 1. Survey on the condition and rate of virus contraction in the Pacific countries and ways to mitigate the spread of disease. Source bbc.com

PNG	Vanuatu	Solomon Islands	Pacific Countries
Pre-COVID 19 head Count (27%)	Pre-COVID 19 head Count (13%)	Pre-COVID 19 head Count (24%)	Pre-COVID 19 head Count (26%)
5% Contraction (30%)	5% Contraction (16%)	5% Contraction (26%)	5% Contraction (31%)
10% Contraction (33%)	10% Contraction (17%)	10% Contraction (28%)	10% Contraction (35%)
20% Contraction (37%)	20% Contraction (25%)	20% Contraction (41)	20% Contraction (41%)

People infected in the Pacific Island Countries

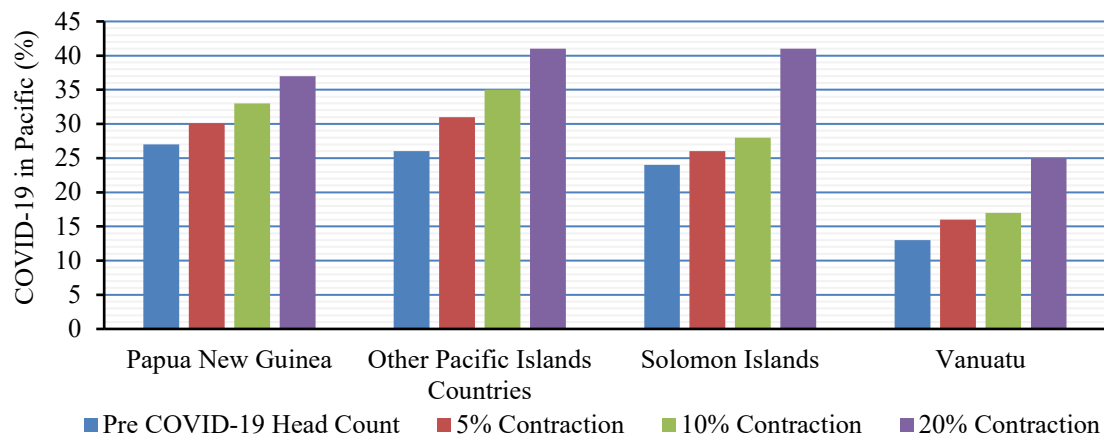


Figure 2. Contraction by COVID-19 in the Pacific. Source bbc.com.

As noted from figure 2, the magnitude of impact by the covid-19 has been considered minor from the first virus outbreak. However, it has skyrocketed in the second wave when people dying everywhere and the government is in the verge of imposing another lockdown which the consequence will be unsustainable and have devastating effect on the economy. This will add more headache to the community, businesses and country at large when people will actually die of both hunger and virus and weakening mitigation measures as also experienced in the first lockdown. The have been profoundly infected people thus went beyond repair and the second lockdown will be a disaster. Government is doing what it can to keep its people alive and safe but the virus is really prevalent and pandemic.

The Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea and leaders of other pacific islands countries have genuinely offer themselves to be vaccinated and people started to get the vaccines. Vulnerable people and medical professionals received first and are on priority list while second in line to receive vaccine are young and energetic for the effective sustainability of their lives. Pacific countries have been hard hit by the second wave of covid-19 delta variant. The people’s health has been in extreme danger and thus worried that everyone in the pacific would be wiped out by the second or third wave if there is any. Leaders of the pacific countries have started to have dialogue on how to counter attach the virus and made various resolutions but the people are dying while leaders making plans and regulations to mitigate the disease (Bank 2020). The health and wellbeing of the people are at stake and people themselves also have been considered to be carless when signals and death rates are increasing at alarming rates.



Figure 3. Papua New Guinea PM receiving vaccination when first hit the shores of PNG and the Pacific.

Economies in the Pacific Countries.

The magnitude of impact imposed to the Pacific country's economy has been considered beyond repair in 10 to 20 years' time with rare or no sustainable economic recovery policies. The covid-19 impact will leave a scare in the countries' economies where all business made great loss and government have tried various means to adapt to the new normal with countries still opened but do not eventuated. The impact is so severe that the only lockdown of countries has saved lives of the vulnerable few and reduced the rates of death with little progress in mitigation methodology. Economies and business in the growing pacific islands countries have been profoundly affected where our economy is not strong enough. Pacific islands countries economy is sinking into the blue ocean together with the sinking islands due to global warming. It is very important that people, state and global partners need to address the issue in conjunction with united nations general assembly meeting last month. This will not only benefit the Pacific countries but will also help other countries to contain and mitigate the problems (Jawanji 2020).

According Pacific Trade Invest Australia (PTI) on its recent survey throughout the Pacific Islands countries including Micronesian Islands on the recent covid-19 pandemic and to assess how small to medium business including bigger economies are surviving, the report revealed negative outlook. Although the world is in the same struggle, the pacific country's business has been failed and having great loss and capsized in the blue pacific. More than 10 companies established in each country have shed adequate information's with evidences that companies have made a lot of losses due to restrictions and companies lockdown. The money is brought from outside the province or overseas and when lockdown is imposed, there are no way to make business and companies are not functioning (Commonwealth Secretariat 2021). This is one of the greatest nightmare of all times to all companies operating not only in the pacific but across the world.

Table 1. Number of confirmed cases in 2021. Source bbc.com

PNG	INDIA	FIJI
50	60	401
45	47	370
35	35	350
25	10	250
3	5	67
2	2	34
0	0	0

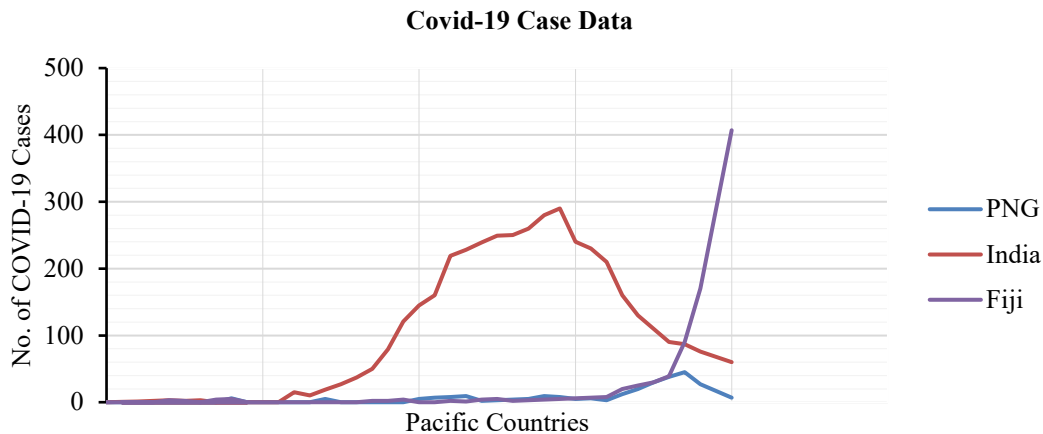


Figure 4. The results of COVID-19 cases in the Pacific

As a result, the country’s economy is profoundly affected as companies do not pay tax. The countries in the Pacific had really hard time tackling the pandemic and in the process, people are dying as the virus do not stop moving when country is under lockdown. The government have tried possible means to bail out the business without effective sustainable measures to both economy and the population, thus lockdown is imminent because the virus is moving like wildfire. People are dying and government has already afraid of mass death and thus prepare to shut down the countries in the Pacific. This is true for Papua New Guinea because the virus is current killing hundreds of people every day in the highlands and costal parts of the country (Government 2021).

Papua New Guinea is one of the Pacific Islands countries and is rich in biodiversity of both land and sea. The country is recently known for its successful hosting of the Asia Pacific Economic Corporation (APEC) meeting conducted for the first time in the history of the Pacific and country’s minerals production and Liquefied Natural Gas. The country is recently going into lockdown due to the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and as a result, the country’s economy including its GDP as gone far below. The second wave has totally triggered another lockdown which the government is really keened but the oppositions argue to have the country open and try look for other possible means to mitigate and contain the virus. As the countries in the Pacific goes into lock down, their economy will be as bad as world war 2 and thus will sink into the blue Pacific together with the sinking islands.

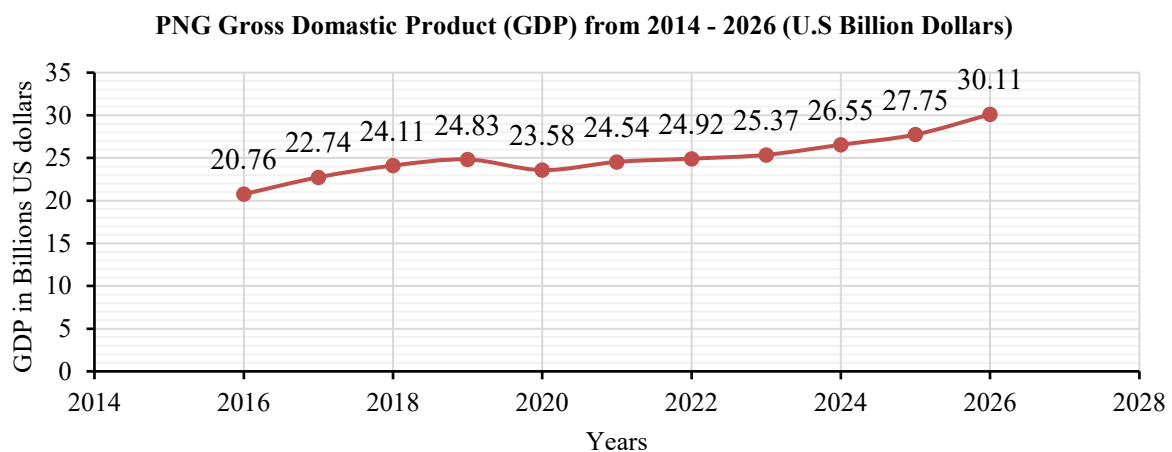


Figure 5. PNG’s gross domestic product (GDP) from 2016 to 2026.

From figure 5, Papua New Guinea’s Gross Domestic Product is still ascending which signals bad state of the economy where PNGs current state of economy cannot be able to buy the product worth more on country’s GDP (Pacific & Virtual, 2020). The country’s shutdown will further escalate complete downturn in PNG’s economy.

Conclusion

Due to covid-19 outbreak, Pacific islands countries like PNG, Fiji, Vanuatu and rest of the other pacific countries will be vulnerable to both health and economic threats due to lack of sustainable economic recovery plan. Developing countries in likes of economic and technology including infrastructure with minimal strength in currency will surely fall when more lockdown of these countries are imminent. It is more advisable and encouraging to allow the country to operate on stringent government regulations and sustainable policies that will also mitigate and effectively bail out dying economy. This will surely assist to ensure our economy is maintained at a certain limit without deterioration.

Health and hygiene of the people are in the pacific countries are norm to traditional ways of survival though moved into twenty-first century in this changing globe. People are dying due to lack of knowledge and ignorance and failure to comply with certain rules like taking vaccines and other health protocols. The importance of having health protocols are merely taken as ordinary rules which is the main reasons why people are dying in this second wave of the covid-19. Furthermore, people are complacent within their own ways and have faith in their sustainable immune systems which is also one of the reasons people started contract this disease. If people continue to live carelessly and do not pay attention to the health protocols including get vaccinated, pacific island will be another evil place to live when all will be gradually queued up for grave. This is imminent and already happening because it's bad for the country and thus effective sustainable policy to mitigate virus spread is paramount.

Notes:

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Author contributions

NM collected, analysed and interpreted all the data related to this study and writing the manuscript and AM performed a major contribution in recommending for editing and guiding NM for better manuscript. All the authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest

The authors declare of having no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval

This study requires no ethical approvals.

Informed consent

Informed consent after explaining the nature of investigation was obtained from each participant in this study.

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