

Review of the
Markets, Economic Recovery, and Inclusion Program
(Phase One)

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Acronyms

AHC	Australian High Commission
AUD	Australian Dollar
DCP	Decentralisation and Community Participation Partnership (implemented by Abt Associates as part of the Papua New Guinea-Australia Governance Partnership)
DD	Design document (for MERI Program, Phase 1)
DfCDR	Department for Community Development and Religion
DIRD	Department for Implementation and Rural Development
DPLGA	Department for Provincial and Local Government Affairs
DPMNEC	Department of Prime Minister and National Executive Council
ENB	East New Britain
EOIO	End of investments outcome
GEDSI	Gender equality, disability, and social inclusion
LLG	Local-Level Government
LPIT	Local Project Implementation Team
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MERI	Markets, Economic Recovery, and Inclusion Program
MPTF	MERI Program Task Force
PGK	Papua New Guinea Kina
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PWD	People with disabilities
SBC	Social and behaviour change
SIP	Services improvement program
SNA	Sub-National Adviser
SOE	State of Emergency
TOR	Terms of reference
WASH	Water, sanitation, and hygiene

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Executive summary

The Markets, Economic Recovery, and Inclusion (MERI) Program was developed as an COVID-19 emergency response to a request from the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Prime Minister Marape to ensure the ongoing safe operation of major fresh food markets in PNG. MERI covered 12 markets across PNG, of which 11 were supported through the provision of minor infrastructure upgrades to combat the transmission risk from the COVID-19 virus and personal protective equipment (PPE), and capacity development of market stakeholders, particularly market managers and women vendors, to strengthen governance in markets and improve market-based livelihood opportunities.

Project implementation started in June 2020 with an initial implementation period of 6 months that was subsequently extended to 12 months. MERI was funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) at a total cost of AUD6,418,676. The project was managed under the DCP, which is implemented by Abt Associates as part of the Papua New Guinea-Australia Governance Partnership, with Planpac acting as an implementing partner for the physical works. Through a direct grant provided by DFAT, UN Women acted as the implementing partner responsible for the governance components of the project. Catalpa was hired to implement a complementary initiative designed to enhance the monitoring and accountability of services improvement program (SIP) funds.

This review of MERI Phase One is organised around the following five main evaluation questions included in the TOR.

1. To what extent was MERI an appropriate and relevant response to mitigate risks associated with COVID-19 in PNG markets?

MERI constituted a highly relevant project as a response to the rapidly evolving COVID-19 crisis that was emerging within PNG and globally in early 2020. Building on established global knowledge about the nature of COVID-19 risks, the design correctly focussed on a range of COVID-19-related risks that required urgent attention in the targeted markets. MERI Phase One also highlighted the importance of markets to the local economy, especially the impact on local food supply and livelihood. Food markets are increasingly understood as essential services that need to continue to operate during periods of lockdown or other health containment measures. The project design included a strong focus on gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) which is also considered highly appropriate given the context of markets in PNG.

The risk of transmitting COVID-19 still exists in markets. Markets are also vectors for the transmission of other communicable diseases, especially water-borne, so continuing efforts to reduce COVID-19 risks as part of the on-going global health crisis are also likely to have broader pay-off in reducing the transmission of other communicable diseases.

To ensure future support for markets remains responsive to needs it will be important to continue to engage stakeholders at a national and local level, especially through inclusive institutional structures (i.e., those that build on Local Project Implementing Teams (LPITs) to discuss appropriate strategies and interventions to reduce risks that are achievable, monitorable, and responsive.

There were initial misunderstandings in some markets about the scope of financial and technical support that MERI would provide. During interviews with some market managers, there was also confusion about which development partner was the provider of MERI—some assumed MERI was a project of UN Women. Given the multi-levelled nature of project engagement, it is important stakeholders at both national and sub-national level have a clear understanding of the project's scope and ownership.

Phase One of the MERI program has demonstrated the highly interconnected nature of development issues in markets. MERI sought to focus specifically on activities related to COVID-19 risks, but deeper structural constraints to market operations have undermined the progress made to date. A more ambitious and consistent program of support will likely be needed to achieve sustained change over

time. Such a program need not involve large investments in physical infrastructure, as this funding could and should increasingly be provided through public investment funding. More important would be to support strengthening the institutional arrangements governing markets, including estimation and allocation of the resources needed to adequately fund operation and maintenance costs, especially for core facilities such as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), and continuing to expand the participation of women vendors and other marginalised groups in decision making.

To make future efforts designed to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 more appropriate and relevant it is recommended to:

1. Consider developing MERI as a long-term program which includes continued support for infrastructure investments to reduce COVID-19 and other health risks, capacity development for market management, and livelihood opportunities for women and other underrepresented groups.
2. Elicit regular feedback from key stakeholders at the national and local levels, providing periodic updates to project managers which maintain and improve information flows.

2. What impact did MERI have on reducing COVID-19 risks in targeted markets?

Based on a rapid assessment and the preparation of plans in each market, Planpac was able to deliver a range of physical upgrades in the 11 markets supported, though with some potentially avoidable delays. Support to larger markets in Port Moresby and Lae comprised mostly PPE supplies intended to meet short-term emergency needs, some communications equipment and storage facilities. Support to smaller markets and the strategic markets of Mount Hagen (which received the largest allocation of funds of more than PGK500,000) and Goroka included equipment to improve the availability of water and basins for hand washing, fencing, drainage, and other minor works.

Though not based on a complete assessment of all investments provided by MERI, there is evidence from some markets that the physical investments made have already deteriorated to a point where they are no longer serving their intended purpose. PPE supplies provided were not able to make a significant contribution to the overall level of supplies need to reduce COVID-19 risks, nor to catalyse change in the purchasing priorities of market managers, although the provision of PPE could be viewed as being a necessary “entry cost” of opening an important dialogue without which the project would have struggled to find traction.

Despite these limitations, within a short space of time, MERI was able to catalyse change from both the local and national levels. Mindful that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to institutional change, the project has been able to foster change across diverse markets that illustrate some of the pathways of change that a project such as MERI can effectively support. For example, MERI played an instrumental role in raising awareness, demonstrating solutions, and catalysing policy change relating to WASH in markets, despite the limited coverage of WASH-specific issues in the design document (DD). However, inherent challenges associated with achieving behaviour change within the project’s 12-month implementation period and ensuring adequate and consistent enforcement of COVID-19 protocols by market management, reduced the sustainability of some MERI investments.

To enhance future efforts designed to reduce the risks of COVID-19 in markets it is recommended to:

3. Clarify the specific starting point for support in each market to provide a stronger basis for determining program activities and the definition and measurement of progress over time.
4. Conduct integrated assessments of the physical infrastructure and governance arrangements, including the political, institutional, and financial context.
5. Continue to engage MERI-supported markets develop the collective capacity of market managers and stakeholders to (i) ensure critical infrastructure services (especially water and power) are available in markets, (ii) improve the availability of public information related to COVID-19 and potentially other communicable diseases, and (iii) reinvigorate the enforcement of COVID-19 protocols in markets.
6. Refine and strengthen the M&E system building on the knowledge acquired during Phase 1 of MERI with a more detailed plan for formal evaluation.

7. Ensure a clear, single line of accountability for project performance and reporting.

3. How effective and efficient was the governance mechanisms—local project implementation teams (LPITs) and the MERI Program Task Force (MPTF)—within MERI?

4. How has MERI contributed to policy reform related to PNG Markets?

The MPTF and LPITs established in supported markets played fundamental roles as core governance mechanisms of the project. The MPTF provided a venue for high-level, multi-agency discussions of key issues affecting market operations, especially regarding WASH. LPITs provided a foundation for enhancing women's voice in market decision making as well as improving coordination across local agencies involved in providing services in markets.

The MPTF, co-chaired by the Secretary, Department for Community Development and Religion (DfCDR) and DFAT Minister Counsellor with other government representatives, provided a very good forum to discuss key strategic policy issues for markets, especially for WASH where the experience of MERI has served to advance the potential for adopting additional guidelines as part of the national WASH policy. Other prospects for policy engagement include on the informal economy—a policy agenda that is particularly relevant for women vendors.

With support from DCP's Sub-National Advisers and local interlocutors hired by UN Women, multi-stakeholder LPITs were formed in each market which acted as focal points for coordinating activities. LPITs enabled the active participation of women vendors in decision making about markets. Formation of LPITs was especially valuable in locations where there were no formal structures in place for stakeholder engagement, i.e., in smaller markets such as Daru and Vanimo. Representatives of people with disabilities (PWD) were also included as members of LPITs. In Lae market PWD were allocated their own selling space in the market because of their participation in the LPIT.

MERI's support for the national MPTF on markets and formation and operation of LPITs has served to articulate and open up important pathways for change. Continued engagement on policy reform is needed at both level for the change pathways to achieve their potential. MERI phase 2 is continuing to advocate for the adoption of minimum standards for WASH in markets, which would constitute a fundamental achievement in defining a specific national standard for markets. As a result of their cross-cutting nature and economic and social hubs, markets offer a venue for coordination across multiple policy agendas. UN Women are already supporting efforts that integrate market-based activities towards improving informal economy prospects into MERI Phase 2. Other policy areas recommended for exploration include social protection, where women vendors could be part of efforts to target child nutrition grants, and also efforts to counter gender-based violence in support of the already issued national policy. In addition, although the MERI review did not include assessment of the third outcome area relating to SIP, there is also an opportunity through engagement with the Department for Implementation and Rural Development to highlight and promote the inclusion of markets as legitimate targets for SIP funding.

At the individual market level, MERI has helped catalyse discussions about formalising the institutional arrangements governing markets. While it is not clear that every location requires the establishment of a statutory authority—and in any case such a process is likely to take time as it requires national legislation—future support should continue to prioritize the establishment of institutional mechanisms that not only formalize the participation of vendors in markets structures (through market vendor associations) but also bring together representatives from other government agencies, community-based organisations, and the private sector to create a clear vision for the development of local markets.

To enhance the contribution of future market support programs to policy reform it is recommended to:

8. Continue the process of engagement relating to policy agendas that have the potential to reduce COVID-19 transmission risks (WASH), promote increased investment in markets (Services Improvement Program funding), and enhance livelihood opportunities for vendors, especially women (informal economy policy).

9. Ensure a sufficiently long period of implementation based on each market context to institutionalise participatory decision-making structures at the local level and prepare case studies from different markets to promote knowledge sharing of good practice.

5. To what extent have gender and social inclusion principles been incorporated into the design and delivery of this program?

MERI adopted the improvement of GEDSI outcomes as a core objective of the project. Evidence of MERI's commitment to GEDSI is reflected in its design and designation as a gender "principal" project—the first such project for DCP; the selection of UN Women as an implementing partner; and the adoption of the LPIT structure as a primary instrument for promoting participation of women and other underrepresented groups.

MERI represented a continuation of DFAT's support for improving the functioning and safety of markets in PNG and across the Pacific through its partnership with UN Women. For MERI, activities were specifically designed to meet women's needs in markets, increase the space for women's voice in the governance of markets, and promote women's economic empowerment through training courses and other livelihood-related services, such as access to financial services.

To enhance the gender and social inclusion principles in future market support programs, it is recommended to:

10. Improve the M&E framework to included GEDSI-specific indicators that can be tracked over time.

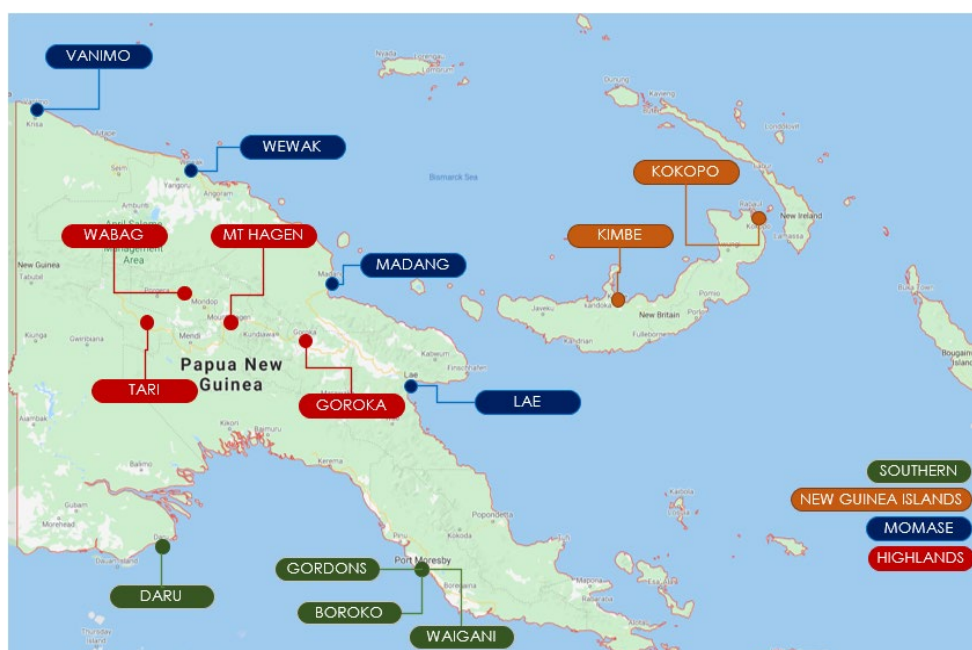
I. Program description

In early 2020 surging COVID-19 infections that were sweeping much of the world posed a major health challenge to Papua New Guinea (PNG) where knowledge, awareness, and preparedness to respond to the pandemic remained under-developed. Markets were identified as a primary venue where people intermingled that could result in a rapid spread of the disease throughout the population. At the same time, there was concern about the significant economic impact that would result from prolonged market closure following the issuance of a State of Emergency in April 2020 which mandated the closure of all markets for a 14-day period. In response to the health and economic risks posed from closing markets, DPMNEC with written endorsement from Prime Minister Marape submitted a concept note to DFAT for two-phase assistance to reduce the transmission risk of COVID-19 and build capacity in markets.

The request resulted in the development of the first phase of MERI as a COVID-19 emergency response initiative with the objective of achieving safer, better governed, and inclusive markets with increased transparency and accountability. The project played an important role as part Australia's aid program pivot towards supporting COVID-19 response and recovery¹ coupled with a long-standing interest in improving governance of markets.

Eleven markets were selected for final inclusion in the MERI program. MERI initially identified 14 markets for support (Figure 1); however, Tari market was not included in the final set of markets due to disputes over the land where the market is intended to be located, and markets in Kimbe and Wabag were also not included as they were already being supported through another DFAT program.

Figure 1: Location of markets supported by the MERI project



The project started in June 2020 with an initial implementation period of 6 months that was subsequently extended to 12 months. MERI was funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) at a total cost of AUD6,418,676.² The project was managed under the DCP which is implemented by Abt Associates as part of the Papua New Guinea-Australia Governance

¹ DFAT. Undated. *Partnerships for Recovery – Australia's COVID-19 Development Response*. Canberra.

² A grant of AUD2,500,000 was made directly to UN Women; the remaining AUD3,918,676 was allocated to Abt of which AUD2,200,000 was sub-contracted to Planpac and AUD1,100,000 to Catalpa, with the remaining amount (AUD618,676) retained by Abt to cover costs for overall management, additional staffing, and other operational costs.

Partnership, with Planpac acting as an implementing partner. In parallel, UN Women also acted as an implementing partner through a direct grant provided by DFAT. DCP provided secretariat functions to ensure implementation was coordinated at both national and local levels with the two implementing partners (Planpac and UN Women) being responsible for delivering their respective outputs and outcomes. Catalpa was hired to implement a complementary initiative designed to enhance the monitoring and accountability of SIP funds. A follow-on second phase of the MERI program is now being implemented by UN Women.

MERI established three end of investment outcomes (EOIOs), each linked to two intermediate outcomes:

- ❖ EOIO 1: Reduced market related COVID-19 risks for women, vendors, PWD and consumers
 - Safety and sanitation practices in major markets improved
 - COVID-19 risk reduction measures replicated in secondary markets
- ❖ EOIO 2: Market-based livelihood opportunities for women and PWD restored towards pre-COVID-19 levels
 - Capacity development and capability building of women vendors, PWD and other market actors
 - Open decision making and management processes that give voice to women vendors and PWD in market management structures and Provincial Administration decision making and spending on markets
- ❖ EOIO 3: Strengthened accountability and transparency of Service Improvement Program funding
 - National and Provincial program and information systems are functioning
 - SIP funding, project and acquittal information is remitted by relevant levels of government

II. Purpose, scope, and method

The overall purpose of this review is to evaluate the impact of the MERI program in reducing COVID-19 risks in the market and generate lessons for future investments.³ To assess the project's performance, the review focussed on the following five main evaluation questions that are specified in the terms of reference (TOR):

1. To what extent was MERI an appropriate and relevant response to mitigate risks associated with COVID-19 in PNG markets?
2. What impact did MERI have on reducing COVID-19 risks in targeted markets?
3. How effective and efficient was the governance mechanisms (LPITs and MPTF) within MERI?
4. How has MERI contributed to policy reform related to PNG Markets?
5. To what extent have gender and social inclusion principles been incorporated into the design and delivery of this program?

The method carried out for the review comprised:

- A review of project documents shared by the DCP team
- Interviews with key stakeholders involved in project activities including staff from DFAT, DCP, Planpac, UN Women, and members of LPITs (Annex 1)
- Analysis of data collected from surveys carried out in selected markets for the review – Daru, Goroka, Lae, Mount Hagen, Port Moresby (Boroko) – as well as other data provided by implementing partners (Annex 2)

To gain more localised insights of the project experience it was agreed with DFAT and DCP staff that the consultant would conduct in-depth interviews with a sample of specific markets supported by the project. Although it was not possible in the time allocated for the review to conduct in-depth reviews of

³ Following consultations with Abt and DFAT staff, it was agreed that the review will focus primarily on the first EOIO, and to some extent the second EOIO. The third EOIO was not included as it was subsequently separated from MERI and is being implemented as a stand-alone initiative.

all 11 markets where MERI provided support, detailed interviews were held with DCP Sub-National Advisers and market managers covering markets in Daru, Lae, Mount Hagen, Port Moresby, and Vanimo which represented a reasonable cross-section of smaller town markets (Daru and Vanimo) and larger markets in the major population centres. Women vendors/other community members were directly interviewed through follow up survey work undertaken as part of project completion activities by the DCP and UN Women teams.

All activities related to the review were carried out remotely. Interviews were conducted virtually with no in-country fieldwork possible due to on-going COVID-19 travel restrictions.

III. Findings

This section presents key findings in response to the five review questions highlighted in the TOR.

1. To what extent was MERI an appropriate and relevant response to mitigate risks associated with COVID-19 in PNG markets?

MERI constituted a highly relevant project as a response to the rapidly evolving COVID-19 crisis that was emerging within PNG and globally in early 2020.

The Government of PNG's *Niupela Pasin* policy document on COVID-19 response⁴ and the State of Emergency (SOE) protocols issued by the Emergency Controller⁵ highlighted the importance of keeping markets open to assist with food security and maintain income in rural areas. Mandatory guidelines were provided to reduce transmission risks in markets with an appeal for strict compliance.

Following issuance of the guidelines, the MERI Program was developed in response to a specific concept note and request for financial and technical support from DPMNEC to DFAT for two-phase support to ensure the ongoing safe operation of major fresh food markets. The request was made at a time when there were heightened concerns that COVID-19 transmission would overrun PNG's capacity to manage the pandemic. The two-week closure of markets in February 2020 had already demonstrated the negative impact on access to fresh food and a severe reduction in the incomes of market vendors, the majority of whom are women.

The guidelines on markets were based on a submission from DFAT drafted by DCP staff (and a WASH technical expert) and presented clear guidance on mandatory controls and recommended practices to reduce COVID-19 risks in markets that provided a strong foundation on which MERI based its design. In response to the guidelines, MERI incorporated specific efforts to tackle the key drivers of COVID-19 transmission risk in markets including crowd management especially at market entry and exit; hand and food washing with the associated need for water and soap; the consistent wearing of masks; social distancing, especially between selling stations of vendors; and the provision of adequate personal protective equipment (PPE). Following initial analysis undertaken it was agreed that MERI would support 11 markets across PNG.

As a program that supported both the response and recovery agendas associated with the pandemic, MERI represented a tangible, visible way through which the Australian aid program was able to provide direct support as part of DFAT's COVID-19 response strategy in PNG.⁶

MERI sought to leverage support for improving compliance with COVID-19 protocols to efforts to strengthen the overall management of markets, enhance participation in local decision making, and expand livelihood opportunities for women vendors and PWD.

⁴ Government of PNG. 2020. *Niupela Pasin: Guide to "New Normal" in the Time of Pandemic*. Version 3, May 2020. Port Moresby.

⁵ [Government of PNG. 2020. Controls and guidelines to support the safer operation of markets. Port Moresby.](#)

⁶ See footnote 1.

The design of MERI recognized that focussing only on direct measures to enforce COVID-19 guidelines was unlikely to achieve the desired reduction in transmission risks. A more holistic approach was required to engage key stakeholders to improve the physical conditions in markets, develop the capacity of market managers and their teams to enforce COVID-19 protocols, and expand opportunities for market vendors, especially women and PWD, to participate in decision making processes relating to markets and have access to training programs and other services to improve livelihood opportunities.

MERI represented a break from past efforts of donors to support markets that have tended to provide substantial funding for infrastructure, for example DFAT's support for the construction of Mount Hagen market, with much less support for non-infrastructure related activities. Instead, the need for action across multiple markets with a focus on activities aimed at directly reducing COVID-19 risks resulted in relatively modest funding being available for infrastructure upgrades in each market supported by MERI. In addition, the need for quick mobilisation led DFAT to draw on the capabilities of existing partnerships that were already in place including UN Women's experience of supporting markets in PNG and across the Pacific and DCP's flexibility to directly engage stakeholders at a local level through its established network of Sub-National Advisers (SNAs) and rapidly engage an engineering firm (Planpac) and other technical advisers to support implementation, notably for gender and WASH.

The four market managers interviewed for this review all expressed appreciation for the support provided by MERI; however, the relatively modest level of financial support provided to each market and the low level of awareness about MERI as a specific intervention reflected in subsequent interviews with market-goers makes it difficult to assess the level of community acceptability of MERI as an instrument for reducing COVID-19 risks.

Despite the project design being clear that MERI would only be able to support minor infrastructure works, the scale of upgrading needs presented in technical plans prepared by the project raised some expectations that MERI would finance a more substantial program of works. This led to some initial misunderstandings that were mentioned during interviews for markets in Mount Hagen and Daru. A clearer up-front briefing from DFAT and/or DCP staff as the main project proponent may have helped better manage expectations. The content of the letter from DFAT to provincial governors introducing the project—sent prior to implementation—was not able to provide specific detail on the scope of project activities and may have also contributed to heightened expectations.

There were initial misunderstandings in some markets about the scope of financial and technical support that MERI would provide. During interviews with some market managers, there was also confusion about which development partner was the provider of MERI—some assumed MERI was a project of UN Women. Given the multi-levelled nature of project engagement, it is important stakeholders at both national and sub-national level have a clear understanding of the project's scope and ownership.

Recommendations:

To make future efforts designed to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 more appropriate and relevant it is recommended to:

1. Consider developing MERI as a long-term program which includes continued support for infrastructure investments to reduce COVID-19 and other health risks, capacity development for market management, and livelihood opportunities for women and other underrepresented groups.
2. Elicit regular feedback from key stakeholders at the national and local levels, providing periodic updates to project managers which maintain and improve information flows.

2. What impact did MERI have on reducing COVID-19 risks in targeted markets?

To make informed decisions about the types of infrastructure upgrades needed and the potential options for improving governance, the project supported in-depth assessments of both the physical and institutional conditions existing at each market. Taken together, the assessments constitute a

valuable body of knowledge that not only informed the development of detailed plans and analysis for each of the markets supported by MERI but can also serve as templates for conducting similar assessments in other markets.

Planpac conducted a full set of detailed rapid assessments between June-September 2020 for the 11 markets included in the project. The assessments revealed the enormity of the challenge in the functioning and governance of many of the markets included in MERI. None of the markets were able to comply with the minimum standards set out in the SOE protocols.

The market assessments and profiles carried out by UN Women provided useful supplementary material on location and catchment area, market history, vendor profile, physical infrastructure, operational management, financial performance, initial response to COVID-19. The profiles also contained a needs assessment of various operational features that are expected to be functioning according to UN Women's own criteria for safe markets. These provide a useful checklist against which the operational standards of markets can be assessed.

For future assessments it would be better to have one integrated assessment process to incorporate both technical and institutional assessments. This would enable better leveraging of the collective knowledge of implementing partners. An integrated process would also help to maximize the potential for strengthening the link between infrastructure support and achieving social and behaviour change. In practice, there was effective collaboration between Planpac and UN Women during implementation including the development of costing models for upgrading WASH facilities in existing markets as part of the on-going discussions on WASH minimum standards

MERI also recognised the critical importance of understanding the political dynamics driving decision making in markets. A political economy analysis learning brief was prepared by DCP for Australian High Commission (AHC) staff in addition to an early team session led by a previous governance specialist from DFAT. The learning brief highlighted the history of Australian support for markets, broad categories of governance risks, and an analysis of specific local governance challenges in a subset of markets supported by MERI. UN Women also organised an initial workshop for their provincial interlocutors and DCP's Sub-National Advisers also played an important role in orienting UN Women interlocutors on the ground.

Following the conduct of assessments and preparation of plans for each market, Planpac mobilised to begin work. The requirement to establish an LPIT and seek endorsement before work was permitted to start created a dependency between the response and recovery elements of the project that delayed implementation of the planned infrastructure upgrades.

There was a mismatch in design between the emergency response and recovery objectives of MERI. As it took time to establish LPITs at a time when Planpac was ready to move ahead, linking approval of the infrastructure plans to formation of each LPIT delayed progress on implementation. Given that MERI was presented as an emergency response project, consultation and agreement with the existing market management would have been sufficient to ensure acceptability of the proposed minor works and enable faster implementation of physical works.

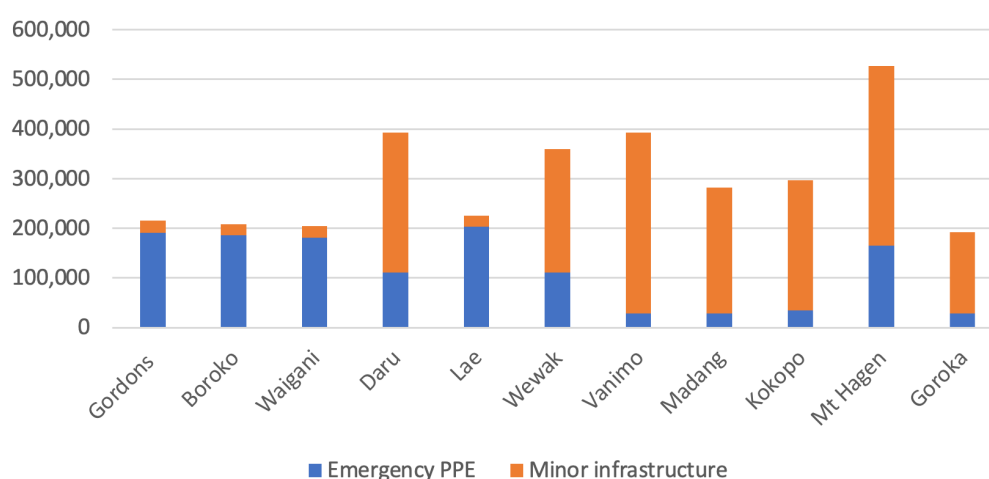
Separating the project's governance activities relating to LPIT establishment and preparatory engagement for expanding participation would have permitted a longer timeframe to build ownership and awareness among stakeholders about broader COVID-19 risks rather than requiring an up-front engagement to approve physical upgrading activities of which many LPIT members had little knowledge at that early stage of project implementation.

Planpac fortunately had sufficient flexibility to accommodate operational delays, but it impaired the efficient deployment of their resources which had cost implications.

Despite the start-up delays, Planpac successfully delivered the full package of minor infrastructure upgrades as contractually agreed, with all completed works being formally handed over to their respective market managers.⁷

Funding was allocated according to two types of expenditure – personal protective equipment (PPE) and minor infrastructure. The split between the two types varied and the overall allocation to each market varied from an average of around PGK200,000 per market in larger, more established markets (Port Moresby, Lae) with the bulk of expenditure allocated for PPE, to smaller markets (Daru, Vanimo, Wewak) with overall allocations were around PGK400,000 with the bulk of expenditures being allocated to physical upgrades. Mount Hagen was the exception as it received the single largest allocation of more than PGK500,000 (Figure 2).

Figure 2: MERI Project expenditures by type and market (PNG Kina)



PPE supplies provided by the project that were intended to demonstrate the use of various COVID-19-related products (such as hand sanitisers, alcohol, masks, and gloves) were quickly used up without provision being made for their continued purchase and use by authorities in markets supported.

Given the urgency of having COVID-19 risk-reducing supplies available, purchase of PPE materials for markets constituted a priority at the time the project was initiated. While the project was able to successfully distribute them to markets covered by the project, markets have subsequently been unable or unwilling to continue to purchase similar supplies at a level needed to consistently reduce COVID-19 risks. This gap reflects some of the more fundamental challenges that markets face both in terms of their managerial capabilities as well as being able to access adequate funding to finance critical operational costs.

From the project's perspective, on the one hand, as the PPE supplies provided were not able to make a significant contribution to the overall level of supplies need to reduce COVID-19 risks, nor to catalyse change in the purchasing priorities of market managers, the supplies provided could be considered as not representing value for money. On the other hand, the PPE supplies provided the most immediate and tangible way in which MERI could respond to COVID-19 risks and engage market management. In so doing they provided an entry point to establish a dialogue with market managers on the importance of making other improvements, reflected in the subsequent support provided for infrastructure upgrades and capacity development, to reduce COVID-19 risks—a dialogue that is continuing into the second phase of MERI. In this way the rapid provision of PPE supplies could be viewed as being a necessary "entry cost" of opening an important dialogue without which the project would have struggled to find traction.

⁷ The list of works implemented by Planpac in each market is detailed in Annex 3.

MERI played an instrumental role in raising awareness, demonstrating solutions, and catalysing policy change relating to WASH in markets, despite the limited coverage of WASH-specific issues in the design document (DD).

The DD highlighted the importance of WASH issues; however, few details were provided and a plan to ensure effective implementation of WASH activities was not clearly articulated. DCP did provide specialist inputs on WASH as indicated in the DD, but the WASH specialist was hired only after design had been completed. Given the importance of WASH highlighted in the DD, it would have been better to have included a WASH specialist as part of the design team and/or to have ensured there was a specific technical review by specialists with experience of WASH in markets in PNG. The proposal to leverage the capability of DFAT's existing INGO partners' experience of WASH (and gender) through subcontracting agreements with UN Women also did not happen. Furthermore, while the DD highlighted the potential relationship between improving market governance processes and sustaining WASH measures, the details of doing so were not articulated.

In practice, the WASH specialist hired by DCP was able to remedy many of the design limitations and motivate a substantial amount of attention and action on the WASH agenda by working especially with the Planpac team on the ground. Efforts during project implementation both at the individual market level and the national level through the MPTF have resulted in a clear opportunity to establish mandatory minimum standards for WASH in markets, even though WASH was not specifically included in the project's policy dialogue matrix. As a result, MERI not only raised awareness of the need to have acceptable WASH facilities in markets but also the extent of the challenge in meeting such standards.

Fundamental shortcomings of markets limited the impact of the incremental investments made by MERI on reducing COVID-19 risks, and in one or two cases have raised potential reputational risks for DFAT that will need to be carefully managed going forward.

The scale of the challenge confronting markets resulted in the investments supported by MERI being undermined by more fundamental problems, including lack of funding for operation and maintenance, inadequate and/or contested leadership, on-going challenges in securing adequate access to and funding to pay for water and power, and insufficient oversight of market operations. These issues affected smaller and larger markets in different ways.

In some smaller markets, LLGs responsible for market operations have not been able to open (Vanimo) or keep open (Daru) their markets. In Vanimo, MERI provided one of the highest levels of investment in market infrastructure based on an expectation that investments made would enable a new market, whose opening has been pending for more than 10 years due to various limitations, to be opened. However, the market remains closed as it seeks funds to pay an outstanding electricity bill (reportedly incurred by the Electoral Commission) and the opening of a newly planned block for small business owners. While the responsibility to open the market clearly rests with the LLG management, DFAT's support for a potentially unsustainable investment creates contingent risk that needs to be carefully managed. In Daru, the overriding inadequacy of the existing market has meant that though MERI provided a substantial investment, including fencing the market as a pre-requisite for controlling entrance and exit, market management has been unable to establish a basis for the market to re-open putting the investment made at risk. While the risks encountered in Vanimo and Daru lie outside the project's scope to resolve, they are illustrative of the types of risks that are likely to be encountered in lower capacity contexts. In such environments, more active engagement of senior staff in DFAT is needed to ensure a careful assessment of downside risks is undertaken.

Larger markets in cities such as Lae, Mount Hagen, and Port Moresby all have the necessary structures for market management in place, and in these cases, it is reasonable to expect that sufficient budget resources would be available to cover basic operation and maintenance costs as well as better capacity to ensure effective management of the day-to-day operations. However, except for markets where a statutory authority has been established (e.g., in Kokopo), which is authorised to retain revenues raised from market operations, in other cases revenues are channelled into the consolidated revenues of the responsible LLG or city authority. As a result, most markets receive an inadequate allocation of funds to provide for adequate operation and maintenance. This combined with challenges in managerial oversight has resulted in some MERI investments experiencing rapid depreciation with

chronic lack of water, non-functioning tap-stands that had to be removed, vandalised and/or broken foot mechanisms on tap-stands.

Inherent challenges associated with achieving behaviour change within the project's 12-month implementation period as well as ensuring adequate and consistent enforcement of COVID-19 protocols by market management appear to have resulted in some of MERI investments not being sustained.

Given the importance of realising social and behaviour change through MERI to comply with COVID-19 protocols, following a request from DfCDR as co-chair of the MPTF a communications working group was established led by DCP staff with members from Planpac and UN Women. The working group designed a range of public information materials and established channels to raise awareness and inform the public concerning COVID-19 safe behaviour, including the provision of signage, installation of TVs, and upgraded public address (PA) systems. However, it is clear from the deterioration of facilities and inconsistent use of TVs and PA systems observed during subsequent survey work that continued effort is needed to bring about the type of social and behaviour change necessary to achieve compliance with COVID-19 protocols.

The production of public information materials and effective installation represented a positive achievement in the context of the short implementation timeframe of MERI. However, similar to the contributions made by the project to meet infrastructure needs in markets, the public information activities supported through MERI represented a necessary but not sufficient response relative to the scope of the challenge of actually changing social norms and behaviours. Given the apparent inconsistency in implementation of COVID-19 protocols it would be important that phase 2 of MERI continue to support efforts to strengthen compliance with the protocols in parallel with capacity development efforts on livelihoods and life skills.

To assess the impacts of MERI on social and behaviour change (SBC), DCP M&E staff undertook two rounds of supplemental survey work which have raised questions about the continued sustainability of some of the investments made by MERI.

The first round involved interviews with around 50 market sellers and buyers in Boroko, Daru, Lae, and Mount Hagen. A range of questions were asked in relation to the access of market-goers to critical infrastructure and their own behaviour in terms of following COVID-19 guidance on hand washing, mask wearing, etc. Responses suggested a level of knowledge concerning COVID-19 protocols and an assertion by many that they were following such guidance (Annex 2). However, a second round observer-based survey conducted in the same markets suggested that there is a marked difference between what people say they do and what they do in practice, and that some of the investments supported by MERI in relation to facilities, water supply, and signage have been subject to rapid depreciation to the point where they are no longer functional (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Sample of photos provided by DCP M&E staff from selected market surveys



It is beyond the scope of this review to carry out a systematic review of investments provided across all markets. However, the evidence brought to light through the DCP surveys suggests efforts to bring about lasting SBC has not yet been successful. A more in-depth review is needed to assess the status of investments and provide a deeper understanding of the constraints faced by markets in providing adequate facilities to meet the hygiene-related needs of markets and to ensure more effective enforcement of COVID-19 protocols.

Reasons for why it has proved difficult to achieve compliance with COVID-19 health protocols may include a quid pro quo in the minds of market-goers that unless market facilities are substantially improved, people are not inclined to comply with market instructions; there is also a reluctance to enforce standards on the ground in markets due to a strong public resistance to following the protocols – partly due to the perceived inconvenience and also a lack of appreciation of the importance of the public health consequences of COVID; and widespread misinformation about the virus. All these factors suggest that more detailed research effort to analyse the drivers inhibiting change is needed to design and target specific efforts to bring about and sustain social and behaviour change.

The MERI design included an intention for the project to support secondary markets. However, the limited timeframe and resources allocated stretched implementation capacity making it difficult to expand to secondary markets.

As part of the on-going efforts to define minimum WASH standards, MERI is supporting efforts to better identify and define the characteristics of secondary markets which are often informal and located on land under communal ownership. In practice these uncertainties and operational limitations meant that the project was not able to extend its reach beyond priority primary markets.

As reflected in the ENBP market authority and plans in Goroka and Lae to establish their own market authorities, bringing a network of provincial markets under one authority offers important advantages in terms of the consistency of management oversight. Also, given the expanding size of urban areas in PNG, it will be important for future market expansion to go beyond existing central markets to reach secondary markets. The experience from the MERI project can provide valuable lessons and insights into the design of possible future support for secondary markets.

The dual channels of accountability between the DCP/Planpac and UN Women teams created some coordination challenges during implementation. In practice, as the various implementing parties shared a strong commitment to cooperate on project implementation these limitations did not prove a major constraint to implementation but rather represented a missed opportunity to leverage the joint capabilities of a fully integrated approach.

DCP was tasked by DFAT to provide overall managerial coordination for the project. This was straightforward for Planpac who were subcontracted under DCP, so their line of accountability was to Abt Associates as the managing contractor. In contrast UN Women received a grant from and were directly accountable to DFAT. A collegial attitude prevailed across the teams; however, the dual reporting channels created some friction in the smooth flow of information and some frustration was expressed on both sides due to the lack of clarity around the boundaries for managerial accountability.

The Planpac and UN Women teams on the ground in different markets were able to cooperate effectively; however, because of delays in the deployment of UN Women representatives the engagement between the two teams was not as strong as it could have been, which led to a lack of continuity within the LPIT to connect efforts designed to raise awareness about the need to take action to reduce COVID-19 risks in markets with the livelihood and life skills training conducted for women vendors.

The rapid design of MERI, integration of both physical and institutional components, and its implementation through multiple implementing partners made monitoring and evaluation challenging.

The speed at which the DD was prepared and the justifiable emphasis on moving to implementation as quickly as possible resulted in many sources of information indicated in the M&E framework were expected to be developed during implementation. A flexible, practical approach to M&E was adopted that enabled project managers to keep track of progress, with on-going monitoring reports provided by Planpac, UN Women, and DCP. A regular fortnightly management review meeting convened by DCP provided a useful venue to exchange information. For evaluation, DFAT and DCP agreed that this review would serve as the main instrument for assessing the project's impact.

Given the parallel channels of accountability the monitoring function was piecemeal and did not enable a consolidated assessment of overall progress. To provide a unified report to the MPTF, a prototype dashboard was designed which showed promise as an effective tool for visualising project progress. While not continued given resource constraints during implementation, the prototype could be developed further in future as a means of providing a consolidation of market operations across the country.

Beyond efforts of implementing partners, the initial design of MERI had a strong intention to draw on local capacities to improve M&E capabilities at the individual market level, but broader capacity limitations proved too much and the time constraints of the program too short to make headway on this agenda.

It was also not possible within the timeframe and resources allocated to design a formal baseline and endline survey that would have permitted a more in-depth assessment of and the factors associated with behavioural change. Findings from the ad hoc survey work carried out by DCP M&E staff highlighted the potential value of conducting deeper, more statistically robust surveys as part of future work in markets.

Baseline and end of project data on conditions in markets collected by UN Women provide evidence that conditions in some markets have improved significantly, while in others have improved only slightly. It is not possible to attribute the changes highlighted directly to MERI's interventions, but it is notable that in markets where MERI engagement is linked to important institutional changes (i.e., in Lae, Goroka, and Mount Hagen), there was significant improvement in self-assessed indicators.

Market officials rated performance in October 2020 and again in June 2021 against criteria covering hygiene, safety, women's participation, earning support and governance. These criteria are informed by the SOE guidelines for Safe Market Operations as well as UN Women's recommendations for best practice for markets (Table 1).

Table 1: Self-assessed scores by market officials (Point score out of 225)^a

	Oct 2020	June 2021	% change
Boroko, NCD	112	121	8%

Gordons, NCD	157	159	1%
Waigani, NCD	114	116	2%
Daru, Southern*	2	6	n/a
Lae, Momase	84	185	120%
Madang, Momase	99	104	5%
Wewak, Momase	90	106	18%
Vanimo, Momase	11	12	9%
Kokopo, Islands	119	133	12%
Goroka, Highlands	111	196	77%
Mt Hagen, Highlands	99	121	22%
Tari, Highlands	19	21	11%

^a. Points were subjectively rated by market managers against the following criteria hygiene (50), safety (50), women's participation (25), earning support (50), and governance support (50)

* In Daru no scores were provided for hygiene, earning support and governance.

Source: UN Women. 2021. *Markets Economic Recovery and Inclusion Programme (MERI) – End of Project Report, June 2020 – June 2021*. Port Moresby.

Recommendations:

To enhance future efforts designed to reduce the risks of COVID-19 in markets it is recommended to:

3. Clarify the specific starting point for support in each market to provide a stronger basis for determining program activities and the definition and measurement of progress over time.
4. Conduct integrated assessments of the physical infrastructure and governance arrangements, including the political, institutional, and financial context.
5. Continue to engage MERI-supported markets develop the collective capacity of market managers and stakeholders to (i) ensure critical infrastructure services (especially water and power) are available in markets, (ii) improve the availability of public information related to COVID-19 and potentially other communicable diseases, and (iii) reinvigorate the enforcement of COVID-19 protocols in markets.
6. Ensure a clear, single line of accountability for project performance and reporting.
7. Refine and strengthen the M&E system building on the knowledge acquired during Phase 1 of MERI with a more detailed plan for formal evaluation.

3. How effective and efficient were the governance mechanisms (LPITs and MPTF) within MERI?

4. How has MERI contributed to policy reform related to PNG Markets?

(Given the close relationship between the role of the LPITs and MPTF as governance mechanisms and supporting policy reform, these two questions are considered together.)

The MPTF and LPITs established in covering markets supported played fundamental roles as core governance mechanisms of the project. The MPTF provided a venue for high-level, multi-agency discussions of key issues affecting market operations, especially regarding WASH. LPITs provided a foundation for enhancing women's voice in market decision making as well as improving coordination across local agencies involved in providing services in markets. Continued effort and support will be needed to ensure that the gains achieved during phase 1 of the project are institutionalised under phase 2. Without such support there is already evidence that initial gains will not be sustained.

MPTF. Terms of reference (TOR) were agreed for the formation of a high-level, multi-agency task force composed of members from DfCDR, AHC, Department for Implementation and Rural Development, East New Britain (ENB) provincial government, Department of Prime Minister and National Executive Council (DPMNEC), and UN Women, with DCP serving as the secretariat (Table 1). The four responsibilities outlined in the TOR were for the MPTF to (i) set strategic direction and priorities of all relevant programs and activities; (ii) consider field reports from LPITs; (iii) make policy linkages and coordinate where appropriate with other relevant government initiatives including those in the informal

economy; and (iv) receive written briefings and reports on implementation of projects and activities from partners.

Table 1: Senior MERI Program Task Force Committee Members

Title	Organisation
Secretary (Co-Chair)	Department for Community Development & Religion
Governor, East New Britain	East New Britain Provincial Government
Vice Minister	Department of Implementation & Rural Development
Minister Counsellor, Justice, Accountability and Subnational (Co-Chair)	Australian High Commission
Economic and Infrastructure Adviser to Prime Minister	Economic Sector Improvement Program, DFAT
Senior Trade and Business Advisor	Economic Governance & Inclusive Growth Partnership, DFAT
Country Manager	UN Women

Though it was initially expected that the MPTF would meet monthly, due to challenges of finding mutually feasible schedules among the high-ranking officials on the task force, the MPTF was only able to hold three meetings during project implementation (on 30 July, 9 September, 26 November in 2020). Implementing partners provided detailed updates of implementation during MPTF meetings which provided a periodic opportunity to step back and consider progress from a broader, overall perspective and served to highlight some systemic challenges faced by markets that have become the focus of more in-depth policy discussions on key issues related to markets (see discussion in next session).

As a result of meeting less frequently than expected MPTF served more to give feedback on on-going activities rather than to provide strategic direction to the program. Nevertheless, the high level of representation on the MPTF ensured strong endorsement for the project within government.

LPITs. Markets in every location successfully established their respective LPITs except for Boroko, Gordons, and Waigani markets in the National Capital District which were covered by a single LPIT. There were significant early delays in the formation of some LPITs, especially in areas where governance structures for markets were underdeveloped. In Daru, for example, the LPIT did not meet until January 2021 and even then, key local government officials were not able to attend the initial meeting.

While it was expected in the original plan that UN Women representatives (“interlocutors”) would play the main role in establishing LPITs, in practice there were delays in recruiting the necessary staff. To maintain the project’s momentum, DCP’s SNAs stepped in and played an important role in LPIT formation. On the one hand this worked out well as SNAs had good political relationships that they were able to leverage in establishing the LPITs. On the other hand, the delayed deployment of the UN Women interlocutors made it more difficult to connect the COVID-19 agenda with the capacity development activities carried out by UN Women. SNAs continued to play an important role during implementation relation to facilitating the policy dialogue between local governments and the UN Women interlocutors. Formation of LPITs was especially valuable in locations where there were no formal structures in place for stakeholder engagement, i.e., in smaller markets such as Daru and Vanimo.

Once formed all LPITs played an effective role in expanding stakeholder participation, enhancing coordination, and broadening space for dialogue on market operations. LPITs included the participation of women’s representatives; many included local PWD representatives; and some also included other NGOs. LPITs brought together a varying mix of government agencies covering sectors such as health, police, water, and power. On an interim basis SNAs served as a secretariat to the LPITs helping to organise meetings and prepare agendas that included discussions of plans for implementing project activities as well as broader discussions about how to improve compliance with COVID-19 market protocols.

The extent to which coordination, voice, and performance improved because of the LPIT inevitably varied from market to market. In some cases, the successful formation of an LPIT itself already

represented an important step forward in governance. In other cases, LPITs were able to expand existing governance arrangements.

LPITs have served their intended purpose in the context of project implementation, so to that extent they have achieved their objective as defined in the DD. However, there is clearly an expectation that the intent of LPITs to broaden accountability and inclusion over decision making in markets would endure beyond the completion of the MERI. It is too early to expect full institutionalisation of the governance improvements supported under the first phase of MERI, so the extent to which the gains can be consolidated will therefore fall on the follow-up phase of MERI and continued support of efforts to institutionalise more accountable and inclusive market structures. These could range from moves to establish statutory authorities for markets (proposed in Goroka and Lae), the establishment of market vendor associations (proposed in Lae and Mount Hagen), or lower key efforts to at least provide a regular opportunity for debate and discussion on decisions concerning market operations. The degree to which one or other of these pathways may be taken in practice will continue to depend on a variety of related factors at the local level including leadership, political dynamics, capacity, and resources.

COVID-19 and the high-level policy discussions that have taken place in the MPTF have helped to make both national policy makers and local market managers appreciate that much more needs to be done to bring markets up to a standard that ensures markets are safe, hygienic spaces of inclusive social and economic development.

The MPTF effectively convened partners with responsibility for key policy areas related to markets. In particular, DfCDR's chairship enabled discussions about links to the informal economy policy for which DfCDR has responsibility and for which UN Women has been and continues to be a strong advocate. In this way MERI has provided additional impetus to discussions relating to the informal economy policy by highlighting the contribution that women make and the challenges they face in the context of market-based activities. Phase 2 presents a good opportunity to further advance these discussions and explore connections to other related policies, such as on social protection (policy under preparation) and gender-based violence (policy released). Under Phase 2, UN Women will conduct a range of training and workshops to develop livelihood opportunities for women in markets.

Through MPTF discussions, MERI has also advanced policy related to the development of minimum standards for WASH in markets. Leadership in relation to the WASH challenge has been taken up by senior staff in DPMNEC who have supported efforts to develop minimum standards for WASH in markets. This is a work-in-progress that is continuing under phase 2 of MERI. There is good potential for the minimum standards to be formally adopted, but this process will depend on reaching agreement on the final content of the standards and which government agency/ies will have responsibility for overseeing implementation of the standards, particularly with the Department of National Planning and Monitoring, which has leadership of the WASH policy agenda but was not formally part of the MPTF.

Although not specifically included in Phase 1, MERI has also contributed to raising awareness about the important contribution that markets make to local budgets—often being the primary source of local revenue collection. Vendor fees in markets are typically collected without much transparency and accountability and, under public finance management rules, must be remitted to the consolidated budget⁸ of the respective local government. As a result, markets are dependent on requesting funds from their respective local government and must compete with other development (and political) priorities. MPTF members have expressed interest in discussing options for how to improve the financial management of revenues associated with market operations. UN Women has previous experience of implementing better systems for revenue management that are being pursued as part of MERI Phase 2.

Taken together the wide variety of arrangements, achievements, and challenges faced by markets in different locations that MERI has brought to light suggest a deeper review of policy governing the

⁸ In the case where a statutory authority has been established, it is permitted to retain and manage revenues collected.

management of markets is warranted.⁹ Given the important link to policies relating to local government responsibilities, such a review would need to have representation beyond the current membership of the MPTF including the Department of Provincial and Local Government Affairs.

At the local level, MERI has catalysed a range of policy-related actions that, taken together with MPTF discussions, have potential for replication across markets and consolidation into a national policy framework for markets. Mindful that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to institutional change in markets, MERI has been able to foster change across locations that taken together illustrate the range of change pathways that a project focussed on markets can effectively support.

The establishment of LPITs for markets has created a precedent for more inclusive representation in decision making, especially the participation of women. Drawing on UN Women's experience of establishing market vendor associations, MERI has helped market managers in some markets formalise representation of vendors in market structures—a process that can be replicated across all markets.

The participation of local civil society organisations in some LPITs, holds out potential to improve the range of development services being offered in markets, e.g., the involvement of Susu Mamas for maternal and child health in Mount Hagen. PWD have also been able to participate in discussions about market operations and in some markets have been able to benefit directly from such engagement, e.g., in Lae specific space has been allocated within the market for PWD to buy and sell produce. By convening a broader range of local partners LPITs have also enabled better sharing of information across local government agencies with potential improvements in coordination.

Building on the model adopted for provincial markets in ENB, market managers in Lae and Goroka are considering adoption of a process to establish a statutory authority to oversee all markets (primary and secondary) that fall within their geographic jurisdiction. Further analysis is warranted of the pros and cons of adopting this approach to managing markets.

In some smaller markets the experience of MERI has highlighted the challenges that LLGs face in managing markets on their own. For example, in Vanimo while MERI made a significant investment in a new market, the LLG has not been able to successfully open the market and in Daru while MERI made an important contribution to elevate discussion and organisation of the market as well as physical improvements, market facilities remain inadequate, and the market has not been reopened. In both cases, the limitations of market management have put the investments made by MERI at risk. In the case of smaller markets options to include a role for the district authority and/or provincial government may help boost local capacity and improve market outcomes.

In October 2020, UN Women organised a National Markets Workshop that brought together market managers from across the country. The workshop was widely appreciated, especially in terms of sharing knowledge from different markets. Continued efforts to build a community of practice among market managers could provide a powerful platform for creating a range of networking possibilities, e.g., the production and dissemination of knowledge products, a stronger voice for markets in budgetary processes, capacity support by larger markets to smaller ones, an annual competition to promote good practice for different categories of markets.

Recommendations:

To enhance the contribution of future market support programs to policy reform it is recommended to:

8. Continue the process of engagement relating to policy agendas that have the potential to reduce COVID-19 transmission risks (WASH), promote increased investment in markets (Services Improvement Program funding), and enhance livelihood opportunities for vendors, especially women (informal economy policy).

⁹ An internal governance sub-group was formed by the DCP team which began work to systematically identify key drivers of performance in markets. Given the need to implement the project quickly, the sub-group did not have time to complete their analysis; future policy analysis can build on the initial work undertaken.

9. Ensure a sufficiently long period of implementation based on each market context to institutionalise participatory decision-making structures at the local level and prepare case studies from different markets to promote knowledge sharing of good practice.

5. To what extent have gender and social inclusion principles been incorporated into the design and delivery of this program?

MERI established improving GEDSI outcomes as a core objective of the project. Evidence of MERI's commitment to GEDSI is reflected in its design and designation as a gender "principal" project¹⁰—the first such project for DCP; the selection of UN Women as an implementing partner; and the adoption of the LPIT structure as a primary instrument for promoting participation of women and other underrepresented groups.

Given the central role played by women in markets, designing MERI without a gender-specific outcome would have vastly reduced the relevance of MERI and its potential to catalyse transformational change. While the rapid design process did not present opportunities for a formal stakeholder consultation process that would have included women as specific stakeholders, the active role taken by women in the formation and operation of LPITs reflects the strong interest that women have in being more engaged in market decision making processes.

MERI represented a continuation of DFAT's support for improving the functioning and safety of markets in PNG and across the Pacific through its partnership with UN Women.¹¹ For MERI activities were specifically designed to meet women's needs in markets, increase the space for women's voice in the governance of markets, and promote women's economic empowerment through training courses and other livelihood-related services, such as access to financial services. The high relevance of the GEDSI agenda is reflected in its continued prioritisation in phase 2 of the MERI project currently being implemented.

Participation in LPITs provided the primary venue for women's direct involvement in project activities. The local interlocutors hired by UN Women acted as a bridge between market managers and women vendor representatives. Drawing on UN Women's substantial experience, MERI included efforts to institutionalise women's representation through market vendor associations, such as the one established in Lae market. Creation of vendor associations remains a work-in-progress in many of the markets supported under MERI that is continuing during Phase 2 of MERI.

Given the necessary priority to operationalise MERI quickly GEDSI-related activities focussed on establishing the foundation for enhancing women's participation in LPITs. Future support would benefit from establishing a direct communication channel with women representatives on market structures to provide periodic feedback on issues affecting women and other underrepresented groups in markets.

Engagement and training for market managers has also been an important part of efforts to raise awareness concerning the rights of women and the need to strengthen efforts in markets to prevent gender-based violence as part of a strategy to improve overall safety. These efforts are also continuing in Phase 2.

MERI also created some opportunities for PWD to participate and benefit from being involved in project activities, mainly through the participation of PWD representatives in the LPIT. In the case of Lae market, as a result of discussions in the LPIT, an accessible area within the market has been set aside for PWD vendors and market-goers to do their marketing. Phase 2 of MERI is continuing the advocacy for PWD.

¹⁰ "A 'principal' score is assigned if gender equality was an explicit objective of the activity and fundamental to its design, i.e., the activity would not have been undertaken without this objective." (DFAT. 2016. *Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy*. Canberra).

¹¹ UN Women is implementing the DFAT-supported six-year *Markets for Change* program in Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu.

Youth, while not a specific target of the project, have been given a role as interviewees for the market surveys conducted by UN Women. Youth area also part of UN Women's advocacy as many young men and boys are involved in providing portering services in markets.

As an emergency response project, it proved difficult in the time available to establish a results framework for effective monitoring of the project's overall contribution to GEDSI objectives. To be able to systematically assess the impact of GEDSI future support for markets should focus on strengthening the results framework for GEDSI to include gender and other inclusion-specific indicators to track outcomes/impact, specific data and indicators disaggregated by sex, and monitoring and reporting on GEDSI results achieved by the project in its evaluation phase.

Recommendations:

To enhance the gender and social inclusion principles in future market support programs, it is recommended to:

10. Improve the M&E framework to included GEDSI-specific indicators that can be tracked over time.

Annexes

Annex 1: List of organisations/people interviewed

Annex 2: Summary of data collected by DCP M&E team in selected markets

Annex 3: List of MERI project investments by market

Annex 1: List of organisations/people interviewed

Date	Organisations/People interviewed
3 September 2021	DCP – Lucy Moore, Janice Bran
7 September 2021	DFAT – Geoff King, Amanda Young, Euodia Mosoro, Freddy Hombuhanje
8 September 2021	Planpac – Damien Ferguson
9 September 2021	UN Women – Brenda Andrias
13 September 2021	WASH specialist, DCP – Mark Wolfsbauer
19 October 2021	Former Sub-National Adviser, Western Highlands Province, DCP – John Simango
20 October 2021	Sub-National Adviser, Western Province, DCP – Ire Olewale
21 and 28 October 2021	Former Sub-National Adviser, East and West Sepik Province, DCP – James Ogia
21 October 2021	Lead Regional Adviser, DCP – Jimmy Morona
28 October 2021	Market manager, Vanimu – Barry Dikmop
29 October 2021	Market manager, Mount Hagen – Rex Punim
2 November 2021	Market manager, National Capital District Commission – Charlie Pengi
5 November 2021	Former Sub-National Adviser, Western Province/Western Highlands Province, DCP – Sabi Pati
10 November 2021	Former Market manager, Lae – Ben Maipa
11 November 2021	Communications and Public Relations Manager, DCP – Kate Uvia

Annex 2: List of MERI project investments by market

Emergency PPE delivered and minor infrastructure works completed¹²

4.1 GORDONS

4.1.1 Completed minor works summary

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| ✓ Materials Procurement | ✓ 20ft Container Works + Site Placement |
| ✓ Supply & Install Covid 19 Signage | * |
| ✓ 2x TV's & Enclosures | |

Note: * Containers were used initially for storing PPE but also provide additional flexible storage space

Budget

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| - Emergency PPE: | PGK191,022.98 |
| - Minor infrastructure: | PGK 24,686.20 |

4.2 BOROKO

4.2.1 Completed minor works summary

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| ✓ Materials Procurement | ✓ 2x TV's & Enclosures |
| ✓ Covid 19 Signage | ✓ 20ft Container Works + Site Placement |
| ✓ 2x Wash Stations | |

Budget

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| - Emergency PPE: | PGK185,656.83 |
| - Minor infrastructure: | PGK 22,922.90 |

4.3 WAIGANI

4.3.1 Completed minor works summary

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| ✓ Materials Procurement | ✓ 2x TV's & Enclosures |
| ✓ Covid 19 Signage | ✓ 20ft Container Works + Site Placement |
| ✓ 2x Wash Stations | |

Budget

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| - Emergency PPE: | PGK181,141.69 |
| - Minor infrastructure: | PGK 23,275.56 |

¹² Source: Planpac. 2021. *MERI Program Completion Report*. Port Moresby.

4.4 DARU

4.4.1 Completed minor works summary

- | | |
|---|--|
| ✓ Materials Procurement/Logistics/Fabrication | ✓ Placement of Storage Container + concrete pads |
| ✓ Concrete handstand to wash station | ✓ Line Drain Steel Grating |
| ✓ Fencing & Gates | ✓ Skillion Roof Structure |
| ✓ Freestanding wash stations | ✓ Existing Building Roof Works |
| | ✓ Install Covid 19 Signage |

Budget

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| - Emergency PPE: | PGK110,448.95 |
| - Minor infrastructure: | PGK283,013.65 |

5.1 LAE

5.1.1 Completed minor works summary

- | | |
|---|--|
| ✓ Materials Procurement | ✓ Storage Container works & Site Placement |
| ✓ TV & TV Enclosure Fabrication + Install | LAE Ablution Work |
| ✓ PA System Relocation | ✓ Materials Procurement |
| ✓ PPE + Sanitisation Items | ✓ Acid Scrub & Paint Internal Wall |
| ✓ Ablution Block Works | |
| ✓ Gate & Fencing Works | |

Budget

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| - Emergency PPE: | PGK203,077.61 |
| - Minor infrastructure: | PGK 22,230.00 |

5.2 WEWAK

5.2.1 Completed minor works summary

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| ✓ 20ft Container Works + Site Placement | ✓ Covid-19 Signage |
| ✓ Amenities Upgrade | ✓ Temporary Vendor Ticket Stall |
| ✓ Materials Procurement | ✓ PA System Repair |
| ✓ Septic Tank Area Fencing | ✓ Gate and Fencing Works |
| ✓ 3x Free standing wash stations | ✓ Storm water maintenance |

Budget

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| - Emergency PPE: | PGK110,728.85 |
| - Minor infrastructure: | PGK249,010.63 |

5.3 Vanimo

5.3.1 Completed minor works summary

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ✓ LPIT Approval | ✓ Repair Works |
| ✓ Minor civil works | ✓ 1x Food wash station |
| ✓ Contractor Pricing Evaluation | ✓ Signage installation |
| ✓ Gates & Fencing | ✓ Temperature check stations |
| ✓ Materials Procurement | ✓ Procurement of PPE & Sanitisation |
| ✓ Ablution Block Repairs | ✓ Install Vendor Ticket Stall |
| ✓ 3x Free standing wash stations | |

Budget

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| - Emergency PPE: | PGK 28,179.14 |
| - Minor infrastructure: | PGK364,941.92 |

5.4 MADANG

5.4.1 Completed minor works summary

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| ✓ Materials Procurement | ✓ Main Office Building |
| ✓ 6x Free standing wash stations | ✓ Procurement of PPE & Sanitisation |
| ✓ 2x Toilet Amenities Water Tank Install
+ Plumbing | ✓ Market Minor Plumbing Repairs |
| ✓ Toilet Amenities – Maintenance | ✓ Contractor Pricing Evaluation |
| | ✓ Install Covid-19 Signage |

Budget

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| - Emergency PPE: | PGK 28,631.30 |
| - Minor infrastructure: | PGK253,707.32 |

6.1 KOKOPO

6.1.1 Completed minor works summary

- | | |
|--|---|
| ✓ Materials + Signage Procurement | ✓ Contractor Pricing Evaluation |
| ✓ 22x Install new Bollard & Chain | ✓ 2x Unblock & Service Amenities |
| ✓ Handrails & Balustrades Fabrication +
Install | ✓ Materials Procurement |
| ✓ 3x Temperature Check Stations | ✓ PPE Store Enclosure |
| ✓ Install Covid-19 Signage | ✓ 3x Install Wash Stations |
| ✓ Procurement of PPE & Sanitation | ✓ Drainage |
| ✓ Vendor Ticket Stall | ✓ New Concrete Pavement and Line
marking |
| ✓ Ablution Block | ✓ PA System Repair |

Budget

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| - Emergency PPE: | PGK 34,497.30 |
| - Minor infrastructure: | PGK262,353.43 |

7.1 MT HAGEN

7.1.1 Completed minor works summary

- ✓ Materials Procurement
- ✓ Contractor Pricing Evaluation
- ✓ 2x Wash Stations
- ✓ Procurement + Mobilisation
- ✓ Install Covid-19 Signage
- ✓ Power supply and Power Reticulation + back-up generator installation
- ✓ 20ft Container works + Site Placement
- ✓ Water Pump Installation and make system hydraulically functional within market
- ✓ Material Procurement
- ✓ Service Room – New solid core doors hardware, anti-climb mesh to soffits and internal gables
- ✓ LPIT Approval
- ✓ Vendor Food Wash Stations

Budget

- Emergency PPE: PGK164,607.13
- Minor infrastructure: PGK361,980.57

7.2 GOROKA

7.2.1 Completed minor works summary

- ✓ Materials + Signage Procurement
- ✓ Install New Steel Bollards with Chain
- ✓ Gate 5 & low height fence Fabrication + Install
- ✓ Install New Pedestrian Zone Line marking
- ✓ 4x Temperature check stations Fabrication + Install
- ✓ Vendors Entry & Exit (Gates 1 & 2) – Wash Station Tank Stand + Concrete Hard Stand + Tank & Plumbing
- ✓ Install Covid-19 Signage
- ✓ Install New Fencing from Existing Guard House to Wash Station
- ✓ Procurement of PPE & Sanitisation
- ✓ Install New Non-Return Gate (Gate 6) + Fencing
- ✓ LPIT Approval
- ✓ Materials Procurement
- ✓ Install new low height fence @ Temperature Check
- ✓ Public Entry and Exit – Wash Station Tank Stand + Concrete Hard Stand + Tank & Plumbing
- ✓ Install 8 x Covid-19 Signage
- ✓ Install New Fence Wash Station Area
- ✓ Install New Pedestrian Zone Line marking
- ✓ 2x New threshold Ramp to Existing Kerb

Budget

- Emergency PPE: PGK 28,330.85
- Minor infrastructure: PGK163,318.54

7.4 TARI

7.4.1 Completed minor works summary

- ✓ Site visit and market assessment
- ✓ Minor works scoping
- ✓ Minor infrastructure works drawings
- ✓ Design & documentation of market & Covid-19 signage
- ✓ Preliminary procurement & pricing of PPE & Sanitation

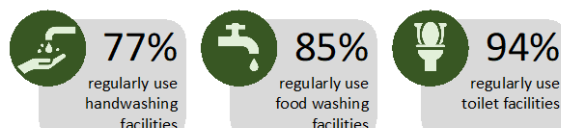
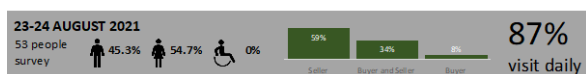
Note – minor construction works did not proceed at the Tari market as the budget was reallocation across other markets as agreed and instructed by Abt.

Budget

- Emergency PPE: PGK -
- Minor infrastructure: PGK -

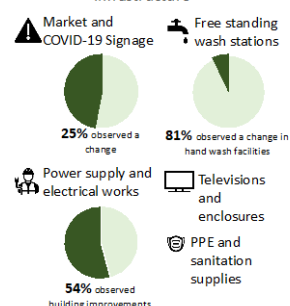
Annex 3: Summary of data collected by DCP M&E team in selected markets

BOROKO MARKET

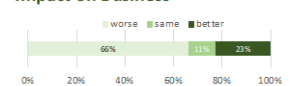


MERI Infrastructure Improvements

91% observed changes in infrastructure

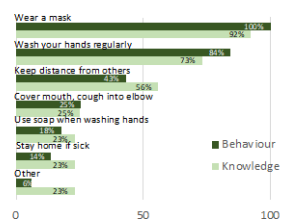


Impact on Business

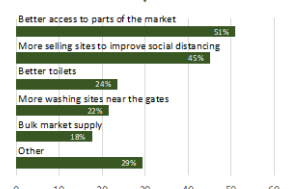


COVID-19 Safe Behaviour

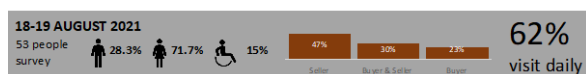
96% changed behaviour to protect themselves from COVID-19



Market Place Improvements

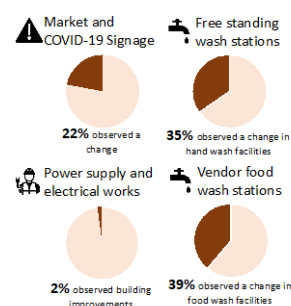


MOUNT HAGEN MARKET



MERI Infrastructure Improvements

92% observed changes in infrastructure

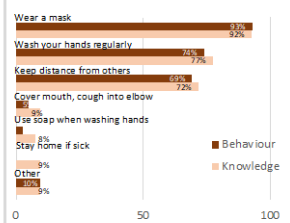


Impact on Business

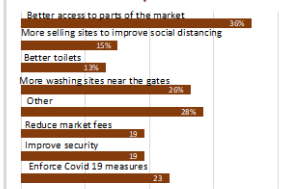


COVID-19 Safe Behaviour

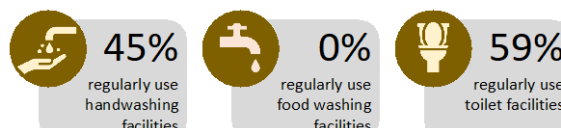
79% changed behaviour to protect themselves from COVID-19



Market Place Improvements

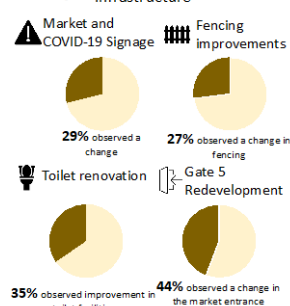


LAE MARKET



MERI Infrastructure Improvements

96% observed changes in infrastructure

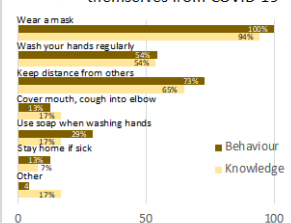


Impact on Business

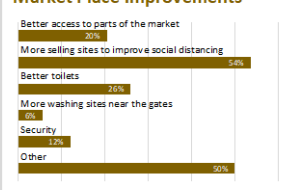


COVID-19 Safe Behaviour

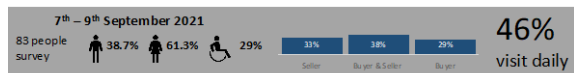
92% changed behaviour to protect themselves from COVID-19



Market Place Improvements

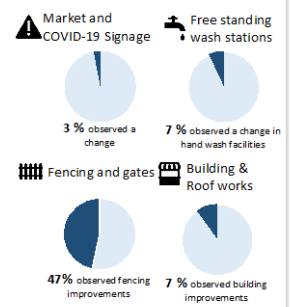


DARU MARKET

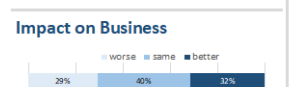


MERI Infrastructure Improvements

37% observed changes in infrastructure

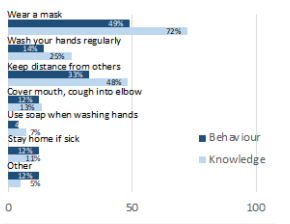


Impact on Business

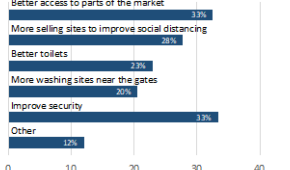


COVID-19 Safe Behaviour

62% changed behaviour to protect themselves from COVID-19



Market Place Improvements



Source: Survey data, DCP M&E team