

Coping with COVID

The rapid spread of COVID-19 has introduced multiple challenges in the lives of small-scale fishers in Indonesia

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The COVID-19 pandemic that affected Indonesia in early March 2020 has impacted coastal communities, fisher households and fisher women. Information collected by women fisher activists in 12 provinces revealed that the pandemic has dealt a serious blow to fishing activities. It started with significant decreases in demand followed by significant decreases in fish prices. Reports from various provinces found that the price of fish dropped as low as 50 percent. In fact, in some cases no one was buying the fish at all. With this, there was no incentive for fishers to go fishing as the risk was too high. Additionally, since their savings were used for daily consumption, at the end of the day, fishers were left with no capital to go fishing anymore.

For fisher women, the sale of value added products, such as fish crackers, shrimp paste and other fish products through outlets such as gift shops in tourist areas, stopped. The government's strict prohibition of travel to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, has almost entirely wiped out the tourism and travel industry. A report produced by the Indonesian Traditional Fishers' Association confirmed these impacts were occurring in fishing communities all over Indonesia.

The Persaudaraan Perempuan Nelayan Indonesia (PPNI or Indonesian Fisher Women Sisterhood) has noted that these problems have created a double burden for fisher women. First, because COVID-19 has stopped both fishing activities and post-harvest related business, it

COVID-19 Impact for Small-scale Fisher and Aquaculture Fisheries in Indonesia

Last data update on 22 April 2020

Sources:

KNTI Data Center, 2020

Processed from Regional KNTI Officials





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has, in effect, closed two sources of income for fishing households. Second, the responsibility of putting food on the table rests in the hands of women. So, it has become the responsibility of women to meet all basic household needs.

In response to these problems, PPNI developed some activities to both minimise the spread of COVID-19 in coastal communities and support the basic needs of severely impacted households. Supported by some NGOs and independent activist, PPNI started the distribution of mask and foods. By the end of May, 5,000 masks and 3,000 packages of food such as rice, cooking oil, sugar and instant noodles had been distributed. This was an important source of support for fisher households. Significantly, the food was distributed at the end of the fasting month of Ramadhan marked by the Idul Fitri celebration.

In another round, PPNI distributed an additional 300 packages of food and 5000 masks in the second week of July. So far, given the volume of donations received, the distribution of masks and food packages has been limited to coastal communities in the districts of Demak, Jepara, Rembang and Kendal in Central Jawa, and Surabaya in West Jawa provinces.

COVID-19 in Indonesia is still a serious threat and the curve of infected cases is still rising. Although, for economic reasons, the Indonesian government has partially lifted travel restrictions, and economic activities have resumed, it seems that the pandemic will remain a threat for some time. People still need help to get back on to their own feet. The Indonesian

government has introduced a new term to deal with this circumstance – the New Normal, which implies that people have to learn to live with the potential threat of COVID-19.

PPNI is planning to continue supporting needy fisher households during the New Normal era. Under these circumstances, apart from collecting additional funds for food distribution, PPNI has now turned its attention to helping women fishers prepare to face the new normality. In this regard, PPNI started to expand initiatives toward more long-term empowerment. These include support for small-scale or home based fresh water fish aquaculture using waterproof plastic ponds, and metal or plastic containers.

PPNI also continues to support small-scale women-run businesses by connecting them to government funding sources or training activities. Some support to upgrade the packaging of women-produced, value added fisheries products has also been extended.

To increase market access, the PPNI is now trying to develop an online marketing scheme, and encouraging the use of Tokopedia, the online marketing platform. Although these initiatives depend on phone and internet access, it is important to recognise them as small steps in the right direction. 📌

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