



Pacific  
Community  
Communauté  
du Pacifique

PACIFIC COMMUNITY (SPC)  
STATISTICS FOR DEVELOPMENT DIVISION  
IN  
COLLABORATION WITH THE WORLD BANK AND  
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

**CONCEPT NOTE**

**A Proposal for  
High-frequency Phone Monitoring Surveys of  
Households to Monitor the Impact of the COVID-19  
Pandemic on the Socioeconomic Situation, Coping  
Strategies and the Effectiveness of Response Measures  
in Pacific Island Countries and Territories**

**MAY 2020**

## PURPOSE

The Pacific islands have, so far, escaped the worse impacts of the COVID-19 virus on the health of the people in the region, however the restrictions on international travel and both global and domestic lock-downs have caused severe economic disruption through loss of tourism, reduced remittances and trade flows, higher unemployment and increasing hardship and poverty.

There is currently a lack of reliable and timely data on the depth and breadth of the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and its consequences. This Concept Note proposes a programme of High Frequency Phone Monitoring (HFPM) surveys of households in all Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) across the region. Such surveys would aim to gather data to provide near real-time information to assist governments and development partners to frame and evaluate suitable policy responses and mitigation measures.

The proposed HFPM surveys would involve 15-minute mobile phone call interviews to carefully selected random-sample households in each PICT using Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) methodology. The surveys would involve a total of six interviews with each selected sample household over a two-phase, twelve-month period. The sample size would be determined by total population according to the following criteria: PICTs with populations  $\geq 100,000$  sample size 2,000 HH; a sample of 1,000 HHs for PICTs with a population of  $<100,000$  and a sample of 250 HH each for Niue and Tokelau. Wherever possible, samples would be drawn using recent census or survey sample frames, especially those where household phone numbers had been collected. In other countries random-number dialing or other sample selection would be developed in conjunction with national statistical offices (NSOs) and the Statistics for development Division (SDD) of the Pacific Community (SPC).

Phase 1 of each country survey will cover three survey rounds (six months) and, after review and assessment of results, Phase 2 would cover a further three rounds over the subsequent six-months. A one-year period of survey would be expected to provide a very comprehensive dataset on the changes in the socioeconomic situation of Pacific households, and to enhance understanding of the coping strategies as Pacific people adjust to the impacts of the COVID-19 virus, and the efficacy of response measures by governments and the international community.

The total cost of conducting surveys in all 21 countries and territories is estimated at US\$7.066 million as detailed in the Table below. This would cover a total of approximately 175,000 phone interviews in six survey rounds over a twelve-month period, across all 21 countries and territories.

Expressions of interest and/or funding commitments are sought from development partners and other funding agencies towards the costs of conducting this innovative, comprehensive and valuable survey programme for the benefit of all the people of the Pacific as they face unprecedented challenges to their, lives, livelihoods and wellbeing.

Initial commitments have been received from the World Bank covering PNG and Solomon Islands, and SPC has provisionally earmarked funding from its Public Health Division and a World Bank project for three additional countries, Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu, pending confirmation of participation from the countries concerned and agreement with the Bank on funding modalities. FAO has also indicated its support for the programme.

Once support for this initiative has been indicated by development partners and agencies, individual countries will be approached to invite them to become part of the programme.

## BACKGROUND

The outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in China in late 2019 was declared a Pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in early 2020. The spread of the virus across the globe and its impact on the social and

economic situation of almost every single country has been immense and continues to be so after almost three months of international travel restrictions and domestic lockdowns and business closures.

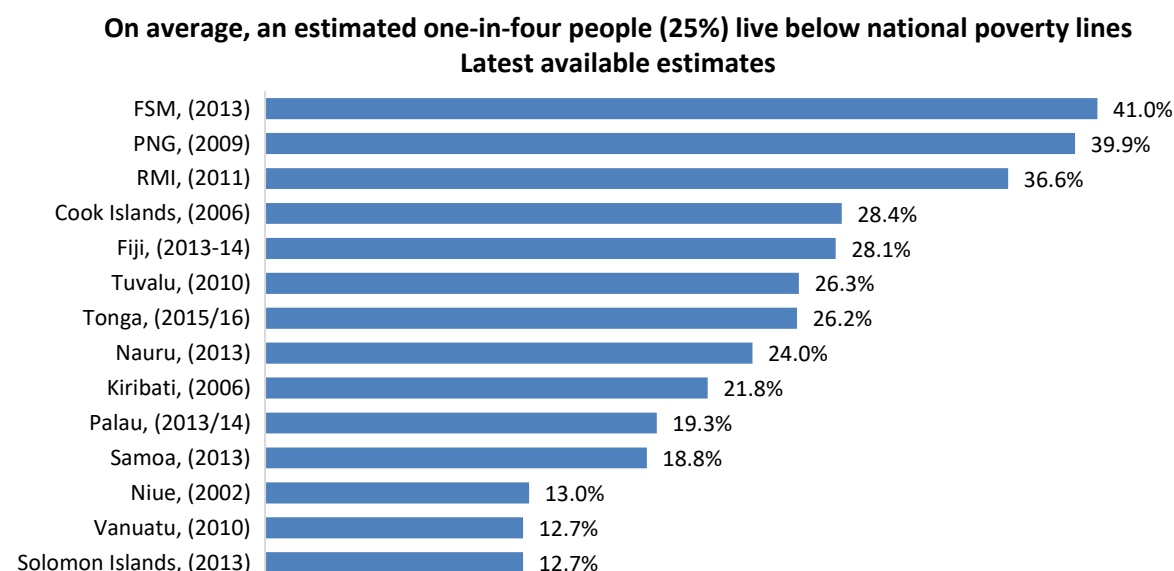
Although the PICTs have largely escaped the widespread infection rates and high-death tolls from the virus itself, they have done so only by implementing strict travel restrictions and border closures to prevent the importation of cases of COVID-19. States of public health emergency have been declared in many Pacific countries, accompanied by lockdowns, curfews and social distancing measures to prevent the domestic transmission of COVID-19 should a case manage to get through the border screening.

The enforced isolation of the islands, together with the restrictions of movement globally have put an enormous strain on the very open economies of the Pacific. The region is characterised by a high dependence on tourism for employment, and remittances for income. Both of these important economic and income drivers have suffered very badly from the travel restrictions and worldwide lockdowns; the loss of tourism revenue has had adverse knock-on effects throughout the formal and informal economies, as well as urban and rural households, and has significantly dampened overall economic activity and has caused disruptions to both domestic and international supply chains. Job losses are mounting as tourism operators and more and more small and medium enterprises struggle to survive with little or no turnover.

Dampened levels of economic activity and weakened consumer spending lead to reductions in taxation and government revenues that are needed to provide social protection and government services, including health. At a time when developed countries are extending social protection measures, including enhanced unemployment benefits or “furloughing” workers, and have significantly increased their budget deficits, this option is not open to PICT administrations, many of which are already underpinned by budget support. Progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is being severely compromised and even reversed in some instances where families are being forced below the national poverty lines as employment and incomes are lost and food systems are disrupted.

The extent of these adverse impacts and the manner in which households are being affected, and are finding coping strategies, needs to be better understood to enable governments and development partners to put in place measures to alleviate the worst of the suffering, which warrants an immediate response in containing the spread of COVID-19 and stabilizing the regions’ economies in a resilient and sustainable manner.

The incidence of Basic-Needs Poverty (BNP) amongst the PICTs for which data is available (SDG1.2.1) is illustrated in the following Chart.



In general, there has been little improvement (reduction) in the level of basic-needs poverty in the Pacific region in the last two decades<sup>1</sup>. And whilst the figures for poverty incidence need to be read with caution, it appears quite clear nonetheless that around one-in-four of the Pacific population were likely to be struggling to achieve a minimum standard of living in their national situations prior to the impact of the virus on their national economies.

As the impact of the international travel restrictions and global lockdowns feeds into the Pacific economies causing job losses and declines in remittances, it is very likely that the number of Pacific Islanders experiencing serious hardship could increase substantially throughout 2020 and possibly beyond.

Although data is only available for a few countries, it is estimated that a 20% fall in per capita household income/expenditure (or a combination of rising costs and falling incomes/expenditure) could lead to an increase of between 7% and 17% in the incidence of basic-needs poverty amongst the population. This could mean that more than one million additional Pacific Islanders are at risk of falling below their national basic-needs poverty lines in the coming months, bringing the average level of poverty incidence up to one-third of the region's total population. In most Pacific countries the impact is likely to be felt mostly in the urban centres where having cash for food and non-food basic-needs is greatest. In the rural areas, where consumption of own-produced food is higher, and the need for cash is lower, coping with reduced income might be somewhat easier, but will nevertheless impact severely on marginalised demographics, such as children, women, people with disabilities and the elderly.

## THE PROPOSED HIGH FREQUENCY PHONE MONITORING

In order to assist in filling the data gaps on the impacts of COVID-19 on the lives and livelihoods of Pacific Islanders, the SPC, through its Statistics for Development Division in collaboration with the World Bank, the UN system in the Pacific region, national statistics offices and other interested partners, is proposing to engage an experienced survey firm to conduct a high-frequency phone monitoring survey of households (CATI-HFPM-HH) in all 21 PICTs to assess the dynamics of the impacts of COVID-19 on households across the region.

Despite the closure of borders around the world and aggressive containment measures, the coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to spread globally and the death toll continues to rise. While the current battle to bring new infections under control continues in the US and Europe and infection rates in the Pacific region appear low, the virus is, nevertheless, having a significant impact on the people and economies of the Pacific Islands. The World Health Organization warns that the Pacific, as well as other relatively untouched regions, should be prepared for the worst. As the impacts of the collapse in the region's tourism industries lead to rising unemployment, along with declining remittances and weak government revenues are felt across the economies, governments are coming under pressure to enact policies to alleviate the increasing hardship and poverty that are being experienced by people across every Pacific country.

The potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Pacific are expected to be severe on the welfare of the region's households. The virus is impacting the welfare of households through four broad channels: (i) the income/employment channel, which includes both formal and informal employment and remittance income, (ii) the price channel with rice, a staple for many urban households increasing in price as supply channels are disrupted, (iii) the long-term human capital channel with schools being closed and home-schooling systems weak in the region, and iv) the inability of governments to provide the needed social protection required by the most vulnerable.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the methodology and quality of the household income and expenditure surveys on which these figures are based has changed over the period and the trends must be interpreted with caution.

It is in this context that SDD and collaborating agencies wish to implement a high-frequency phone survey to understand the immediate impacts and to monitor the ongoing negative effects of COVID-19 on households across the Pacific region.

The proposed surveys will focus on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on households in urban and rural areas, using recent nationally representative sampling frames, based on census and surveys wherever possible, alternatively random number dialing or other appropriate random sampling techniques would be used.

Initial surveys are expected to take place in PNG and Solomon Islands led by the World Bank. Provisionally, and subject to agreements, Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu would follow. These three countries have been selected for the initial group because: a) the sampling frame and household phone numbers are available, and b) they are impacted through loss of tourism revenues causing domestic unemployment, loss of remittances to domestic households, and loss of income from seasonal worker programmes in New Zealand and Australia.

The HFPM survey is expected to provide data to the government and development partners in near real-time, supporting an evidence-based response to the crisis. Survey data collection for the HFPM survey will begin as soon as possible, the first round to assess the effects of COVID-19 as the end of the current lock-down period approaches in many PICTs.

The survey will focus on gathering information on the socioeconomic situation of households in each of the surveyed countries, together with indications of household coping strategies, and on the efficacy of response measures by government and the international community. As far as possible, within a fifteen-minute survey phone-call, the survey team will aim to gather as much information on the impacts of COVID-19 on the household.

## **IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS**

It is proposed that the complete HFPM survey for each country will be undertaken in two phases. In the first Phase households will be tracked in three survey rounds over a 6-month period. At the end of this period a careful review of the response rates, quality of data and the results of analysis will be undertaken. If the results prove to be satisfactory a second Phase will be conducted in an additional three rounds over a further six-month period. Selected respondents will complete phone-based interviews every 7-8 weeks over the two phases.

As an indication of how the process will work in practice, and using Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu as an example, in the first Phase the goal will be to conduct a total of around 6,000 15-minute phone interviews, 2,000 in each country, every seven to eight weeks for the first six months. This would be repeated in the second phase if it is approved. As far as possible a common questionnaire would be used throughout in order to provide cross-country comparability. However, some country-specific questions could be accommodated if required e.g. on TC Harold issues in Fiji and Vanuatu for example.

In the second Phase the sample size and/or frequency of follow-up calls may be altered in order to respond to the evolving data needs and budget availability. For instance, the sample size may be increased in specific geographies and/or it might be deemed desirable to contact sampled households more (or less) frequently. This possibility will be assessed on a regular basis, and to the extent that the volume of data collection increases, a new terms of reference, with a refined set of outputs and budget, may be negotiated, resulting in the modification of the contract for services. Furthermore, the survey instrument may change between phases, or within phases, to avoid repetition and to establish a dynamic monitoring system that meets evolving data needs.

The proposed HFPM phone data collection will require the following equipment and infrastructure to be provided by the selected consulting firm: (i) smartphones, tablets or computers for the survey team with a

sound Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) data entry software; (ii) an experienced team of survey personnel with multilingual capability as may be necessary for each country being surveyed; (iii) reliable internet connection for every survey team member wherever they are located; and (iv) all necessary approvals in place in the respective governments for such a HFPM CATI survey to be undertaken. For the respondents it will be necessary for them to have a reliable phone and phone connection, with sufficient credit and a good reception to undertake a maximum of a 15-minute call.

To ensure the smooth implementation of the survey all equipment, infrastructure and approvals must be readily available through the survey firm, and/or put in place in cooperation with SDD and the national authorities. It is essential for the survey firm to have the capacity to share data collection in near real-time using a cloud-based CATI system.

## **SCOPE OF WORK**

The survey firm will conduct CATI for a high frequency panel of selected households in each country with follow-up interviews over a period of 6 months as Phase 1; if Phase 1 results appear successful a possible extension for another 6-months may be authorised. Selection of participating households will be conducted by SDD staff in consultation with the respective National Statistics Offices, the selected consulting firm and national mobile phone operators as appropriate.

Households will be contacted every 7-8 weeks for the first 6 months in Phase 1, and, subject to the approval of the second Phase, again in a similar frequency for a further 6 months thereafter for a total of about six interviews for each of the selected households,. The high-frequency survey questionnaire will be designed by SDD in consultation with the survey firm, World Bank, SPC's Public Health Division (PHD), participating UN and other collaborating agencies, including the UN Resident Coordinator's Office in Fiji.

Phone questionnaires following the specifications outlined by the SDD team and in the required languages as necessary, will be developed, pretested, and shared prior to the start of fieldwork. Depending on the respondents' circumstances English or a local national language will be used to conduct the telephone interviews. The Survey firm is expected to share the server for data collection with the SDD team to ensure that SDD has access to the raw de-identified data during the data collection. This will support SDD to monitor the quality of data collection together with the survey firm. The survey firm will also be expected to develop data quality check and cleaning protocols together with SDD and share clean data version and cleaning STATA do files one week after the completion of each survey round in each country. The survey firm will also be expected to present an agreed set of summary indicators after each round for each country in a high-quality, easy-to-use dashboard within one week of the end of the survey round.

Household replacement, in the event of nonparticipation, will take place from a list provided to the survey firm by SDD or by random dialing, but only after a household refuses to participate, or is not contactable after five attempts in two consecutive days before replacement. The selected survey firm will follow-up with households that drop out of the survey to identify the reason for non-participation, and the results of these follow-ups will be shared with SDD. Each round of the survey must include an agreed number of household interviews conducted according the procedures outlined in this document. Any data cleaning procedures applied by the selected survey firm must be cleared in advance by SDD and individually documented.

The survey firm will be required to undertake translation of the questionnaire from English into the relevant survey languages as necessary, and programming for a CATI questionnaire using Survey Solutions or another analysis program available and in-use by the survey firm. Interviews are expected to last an average of 15 minutes each over the course of the survey. Questions will evolve around the immediate economic impacts on households, including their labor market situation, as well as awareness of the virus and prevention measures undertaken by the household. Participating households will receive a compensation in the local currency

equivalent of US\$5 phone credit per completed interview, to be paid in full on completion of the three or six survey rounds, after Phase 1 or Phase 2 depending on the length of the complete survey.

The survey firm is expected to adhere to the current restrictions of assembly and movement applicable to each of the respective participating and/or other relevant countries. If training of survey enumerators and/or supervisors is required, this will be provided by the survey firm prior to the commencement of the survey. The survey firm is expected to provide a team of skilled CATI enumerators with proficiency in English and/or the relevant national languages and experienced CATI supervisors. The firm is also expected to secure verbal consent with the household representative(s) before proceeding to the interview. The survey firm will also assign a quality controller who will make a random set of call-backs to ensure that data has not been omitted or falsified.

## **DELIVERABLES**

The following deliverables are expected of the survey firm:

- Phone call protocol detailing how respondents and interview dates are allocated to survey enumerators, how refusals and attritions will be handled. The protocol indicates strategies the firm intends to adopt to track fully completed interviews, partially completed interviews and pending appointments.
- A tracking sheet with number of calls made before reaching respondents, and remarks if interviews are not completed, if respondent is not reached or if the respondent within the household is replaced by another household member. For unsuccessful interviews, the tracking sheet would describe the reasons for non-completion.
- Feedback from a short pilot and pretest of the questionnaire (brief, bullet points, main findings, and recommendations).
- Finalized questionnaire versions in English and other survey languages as agreed.
- HFPM questionnaire programmed for use in CATI, with demonstration of effectiveness linked to survey pilot/questionnaire pretest.
- Survey enumerator and supervisor training plan and guidelines if additional inexperienced survey enumerators or supervisors need to be recruited.
- Short Enumerator handbook for high-frequency survey data collection.
- Raw deidentified database in STATA and Excel to be provided immediately following completion of last interview for each round.
- Cleaned database in STATA and Excel with related syntax and cleaning explanation within one week of completion of each round (adding each round's data to the previous rounds' dataset with an identifier for the survey round).
- Report on any replacements occurring in each round within a week after completion of the last interview of each round.
- Metadata for phone calls within one week after completion of the last interview for each round.
- A summary report with a results dashboard after each survey round for each country surveyed, and an overall summary and dashboard at the end of the completed programme.



## INDICATIVE COST SCHEDULE

The following summarises the key components contained within the preliminary/indicative overall costing for the proposed HFPM survey.

General Scope of Works to be Provided by Consultant	
Survey Component	Implementing Assumption
Questionnaire	To be provided by SDD in consultation with Consultant and WB, UN and other partners
Questionnaire revision	Minor changes to QR/scripting in each survey round as agreed
Translation	Translation to be provided into local languages as necessary
Methodology	CATI, longitudinal (same respondents for 6 survey rounds over 12 months)
Length of interview	Average 15 minutes per interview over the six survey rounds
Incentives	Incentives may be included; guide might be US\$5 per round payable in local currency phone credit on the completion of the survey
Locations	All PICTs
Survey Sample Size	PICTs with populations $\geq 100,000$ sample size 2,000 HH; a sample of 1,000 HHs for PICTs with a population of $<100,000$ and a sample of 250 HH each for Niue and Tokelau.
Contact attempts	Allows for a minimum $n=5$ attempts per number
Pilot survey	Ten HH per country (may be included in total sample size, if responses acceptable)
Scripting	CATI scripting by consultant
Sampling	Sample provided by SDD, additional HH may be required through random supplementation if necessary
Briefing & training	To be provided by consultant as required
Validation	10%, mix of direct observation and call-backs
Progress reporting	Weekly email or call and end of round reports
Deliverables per wave	Statistical output for each survey round, including analysis and summary of findings; basic field report (including response rates); Deidentified (anonymised) dataset to be provided
Stata data file cleaning and coding	Allows for 2 short open-ended (non-specific) responses to be coded if required
GDPR/PII/Data concerns	Data protection standards to be met.

Based on the above scope of work and implementation assumptions, the preliminary/indicative costing is set out in the following Table. It is estimated that the overall cost of completing HFPM surveys for all PICTs would amount to about US\$7.066 million. Phase 1 would cost around US\$2.5 million and Phase 2 approximately US\$2.4 million. In addition, US\$0.88 million would be required for participation incentives for interviewed households, US\$0.9 million for project management, with contingencies of US\$0.4 million.



High Frequency Phone Monitoring Survey Programme									
Indicative Costing By Country/Territory									
Country/Territory	Population 2020 Estimate	Sample (HHs) per Round	PHASE 1		PHASE 2		Project management		TOTAL
			Participation Incentives	Mobilisation and Phase 1 Survey Operations	Participation Incentives	Phase 2 Survey Operations	Contingencies	Project management	
American Samoa	56,813	1,000	\$15,000	\$84,667	\$15,000	\$80,000	\$13,627	\$31,244	\$239,537
Cook Islands	15,281	1,000	\$15,000	\$84,667	\$15,000	\$80,000	\$13,627	\$31,244	\$239,537
Fiji	894,961	2,000	\$30,000	\$169,333	\$30,000	\$160,000	\$27,253	\$62,488	\$479,075
Micronesia (Federated States)	105,503	2,000	\$30,000	\$169,333	\$30,000	\$160,000	\$27,253	\$62,488	\$479,075
Guam	176,664	2,000	\$30,000	\$169,333	\$30,000	\$160,000	\$27,253	\$62,488	\$479,075
Kiribati	118,744	2,000	\$30,000	\$169,333	\$30,000	\$160,000	\$27,253	\$62,488	\$479,075
Marshall Islands	54,590	1,000	\$15,000	\$84,667	\$15,000	\$80,000	\$13,627	\$31,244	\$239,537
Northern Mariana Islands	56,608	1,000	\$15,000	\$84,667	\$15,000	\$80,000	\$13,627	\$31,244	\$239,537
New Caledonia	273,015	2,000	\$30,000	\$169,333	\$30,000	\$160,000	\$27,253	\$62,488	\$479,075
Nauru	11,200	1,000	\$15,000	\$84,667	\$15,000	\$80,000	\$13,627	\$31,244	\$239,537
Niue	1,562	250	\$3,750	\$21,167	\$3,750	\$20,000	\$3,407	\$7,811	\$59,884
French Polynesia	278,908	2,000	\$30,000	\$169,333	\$30,000	\$160,000	\$27,253	\$62,488	\$479,075
Papua New Guinea	8,934,475	2,000	\$30,000	\$169,333	\$30,000	\$160,000	\$27,253	\$62,488	\$479,075
Palau	17,930	1,000	\$15,000	\$84,667	\$15,000	\$80,000	\$13,627	\$31,244	\$239,537
Samoa	198,646	2,000	\$30,000	\$169,333	\$30,000	\$160,000	\$27,253	\$62,488	\$479,075
Solomon Islands	712,071	2,000	\$30,000	\$169,333	\$30,000	\$160,000	\$27,253	\$62,488	\$479,075
Tokelau	1,506	250	\$3,750	\$21,167	\$3,750	\$20,000	\$3,407	\$7,811	\$59,884
Tonga	99,780	1,000	\$15,000	\$84,667	\$15,000	\$80,000	\$13,627	\$31,244	\$239,537
Tuvalu	10,580	1,000	\$15,000	\$84,667	\$15,000	\$80,000	\$13,627	\$31,244	\$239,537
Vanuatu	294,688	2,000	\$30,000	\$169,333	\$30,000	\$160,000	\$27,253	\$62,488	\$479,075
Wallis and Futuna	11,441	1,000	\$15,000	\$84,667	\$15,000	\$80,000	\$13,627	\$31,244	\$239,537
<b>Total estimated costs</b>		<b>29,500</b>	<b>\$442,500</b>	<b>\$2,497,667</b>	<b>\$442,500</b>	<b>\$2,360,000</b>	<b>\$401,987</b>	<b>\$921,698</b>	<b>\$7,066,351</b>
<b>Assumptions</b>									
Phase 1 rounds	3								
Phase 2 rounds	3								
Interview length	15 minutes								
Translation	3000 words								
Incentives	\$5/household/round								
Currency	USD								
Contingencies	7% of costs								
Project Management	15% of costs								

## CONFIDENTIALITY

All the data and information collected or received for the purposes of this study will be kept strictly confidential and will be used exclusively to execute the ToR for the HFPM survey. The completed dataset will be the property of SDD. The selected firm may not use the data for their own research purposes, nor license the data to be used by others, without the written consent of SDD. The Pacific Community exclusively owns all rights in and to any work created in connection with this agreement, including all data, documents, information, copyrights, patents, trademarks, trade secrets or other proprietary rights in and to the work. The selected survey firm will not be allowed to post, publish or disseminate (electronically, in print or by another other means) any project-related information without the explicit permission of SDD.

As part of the proposal, the survey firm will be expected to (i) describe how to ensure confidentiality of data; (ii) how personal data will be dealt with; and (iii) the firm's data protection rules and principles in handling data privacy requirements.

## BUSINESS CONTINUITY

Consulting firms experienced in using CATI survey methodologies will be requested to submit to SDD, a contingency plan detailing how they will continue performance of this contract with a minimum of delay, interruption or other disruption in the event of a security or health and safety event which affects the

contractor's ability to perform the services. An appropriate contractual clause will be added to the relevant suspension clause of SPC's General Conditions to cover this risk.

## **CONTRACTING PERIOD**

As soon as funding is confirmed, procurement of a suitable consulting survey firm will be set in motion. The overall duration of the HFPM programme will depend on the amount of funding committed by development partners and other agencies. The selected survey firm will be contracted for the completion of the requisite number of interviews (not accounting for attrition) in Phase 1. Following a review of response rates, data quality, and usefulness, a Phase 2 will be contracted for a further agreed set of interviews to complete six full survey rounds over a twelve-month period. It is hoped that with early funding commitments the programme will start in June 2020. The survey firm will work under the supervision of Epeli Waqavonovono, Director, Statistics for Development Division, SPC.

## **FUNDING COMMITMENT**

Development partners and other funding agencies are invited to indicate their interest in supporting this innovative and important survey programme aimed at assisting PICT governments and development partners to respond effectively to the urgent needs of the people of the region.

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