



## Promoting Family Well-being in Covid Times



Methodist and Presbyterian Women's

Special Project 2022 with our partners in the Pacific and  
Christian World Service



The words 'For God so loved the world' from John's gospel are so familiar we often gloss over them in our reading of chapter 3. In this short phrase, Jesus captures the work we do together in the Special Project. We are sharing that love for God's world by giving what we can.

Reweaving the Ecological Mat is a vision from the Pacific looking at how we can draw on ancient knowledge to face current challenges.



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### In a Nutshell:

The Special Project is about raising funds for Pacific communities affected by Covid-19. Starting in Fiji with SEEP, we will support them to:

- Raise awareness and share new information and health advice in response to Covid-19
- Distribute food and hygiene materials, especially for senior citizens and single mothers
- Support family livelihoods by planting backyard gardens and developing the local economy.



*The tourism industry collapsed in Fiji, leaving many families without income and food. SEEP distributes food and hygiene supplies to some families living in informal settlements. Where possible it buys food from rural communities to support the 'circular economy'. Photo: SEEP*

## Starting in Fiji

The tourism industry [employed](#) 150,000 people directly or indirectly before Covid—most lost their jobs. The Asian Development Bank [reported](#) Fiji's Gross Domestic Product dropped by 15.7% in 2020 and projected a further 5% fall in 2021. According to its most recent data, 29.9% of people were already living below the poverty line in 2019.

The economy plummeted and infection rates remain high. However, the 48 rural communities that our partner the Social Empowerment and Education Programme (SEEP) works with continue to report no Covid-19 infections, leptospirosis, or domestic violence incidents.

SEEP staff have shared the latest health advice and statistics through regular phone calls with

these communities. It is working to strengthen the participation of all people in the decisions that affect them and to improve their livelihoods. **Mai Democracy** challenges the 'culture of silence' by supporting women and young people to speak out in village meetings. SEEP says communities are at the heart of the democratic process and need to contribute to discussions on government policy and practices to ensure they are people-centred.

In response to the pandemic, SEEP is extending its work to the informal settlements in urban settings. The Livelihood Hand-up Project supports people who have little or no income, who are living unassisted and without a network of relatives to support them. It will provide necessary items to improve their lives, and will engage the single mothers and young people in the planning process to strengthen



*SEEP staff deliver food and hygiene supplies at the height of the Covid pandemic in Fiji.*

*Photo: SEEP*

their skills and networks. It will train five women from each of 15 communities who are struggling more than most. The women will set up and run a canteen selling basic food items to the community, improving their family' income. SEEP will support them to make the business sustainable and independent. As well

as business skills, the women will be encouraged to participate in community decision-making.

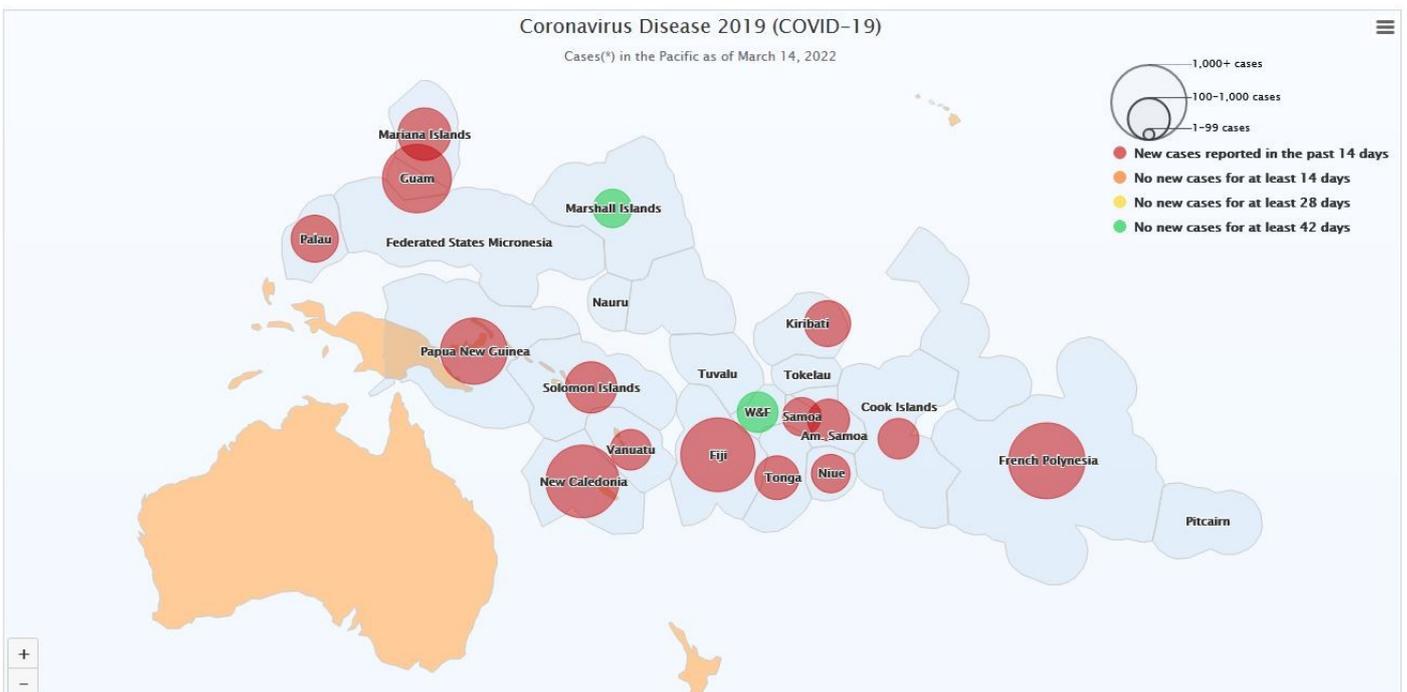
Another aspect of SEEP's work is the **Go Organic** programme which encourages sustainable and organic agriculture based on traditional methods. Buying local supports the local economy and cuts dependence on imported food sources. By eating fresh produce and learning new cooking methods, people will be healthier and less likely to develop diabetes, hypertension or other non-communicable diseases.

## Beyond Fiji

When the Special Project is finished, funds may assist local groups in other Pacific nations to respond to people affected by the pandemic.

## Think, Talk and Pray

1. Do you have family connections to special places across the "blue continent"?
2. Over the last two years what ways has Covid-19 affected the communities you are part of? What has been good? What has been difficult? What do you want to continue?
3. Thinking about our Pacific region, what could you do to protect our shared future?



## ***Reweaving the Ecological Mat***

In *Reweaving the Ecological Mat (REM)* the Pacific Conference of Churches and the Pacific Theological College address the risks and resilience of Pacific communities. It acknowledges the indigenous knowledge and understandings of well-being that have built resilience into the heart of Pacific communities. However, current development and educational models favoured by many governments and other actors are undermining well-being and resilience in the Pacific.

Perhaps the most pressing issue is the emerging ecological crisis. For most indigenous Pacific peoples, their lives are intimately bound together with the land, forest and sea—the sources of life. They are part of the environment and carry the responsibility to protect and preserve it.

The REM takes on the task of developing a Pacific narrative or story, drawing together contributions from across the region.

### ***Read More:***

[Ecological Economic Accounts](#) by Arnie Saiki



[From the Deep—  
Pasifiki Voices for a  
New Story](#) edited by  
James Bhagwan,  
Elise Huffer, France  
C. Koya-Vaka'uta  
and Aisake Casimira

[Reweaving the  
Ecological Mat  
Framework](#) by Cliff  
Bird, Arnie Saiki and  
Meretui  
Ratunabuabua

*Note: These are all  
large documents.*



### ***A Message from CWS***

Thank you for supporting the work of Christian World Service each year in the Special Project. We truly appreciate your interest in the work taking place overseas, and the wonderful way you work to assist others through the funds you raise.

This year your support will make such a positive difference to individuals, families and communities in the Pacific who are struggling with the affects of Covid in particular. The economic impact, felt by many, is an ongoing challenge.

Thank you for partnering with us and for your ongoing interest in helping our family and neighbours in the Pacific.

Murray Overton  
National Director  
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