



# Evaluation Report

## Evaluation of the Pacific Regional Food and Water Security Project Timor-Leste

2013 – 2022

Project and evaluation funded by the Australia Government via ANCP

# Endline Evaluation Report

## Evaluation of the Pacific Regional Food and Water Security Project Timor-Leste

2013-2022

Version 15 June 2022

### Independent Evaluation completed by:

Mr Frank Tembo

Mr Peter Weston

Ms Zenny Correia

Mr Steven Herbert

### K4Dev – Knowledge for Development

Brisbane, Australia

[peter@k4dev.com.au](mailto:peter@k4dev.com.au)

[www.k4dev.com.au](http://www.k4dev.com.au)



Commissioned by Action on Poverty

Cover image: Meligo Village community growing vegetables. Source: Pictorial project update AOP Sept-Dec 2017

© 2022 Action on Poverty & K4Dev – Knowledge for Development

# Executive Summary

---

<b>Project Name:</b>	Pacific Regional Food and Water Security Program – Timor-Leste
<b>Country:</b>	Timor-Leste
<b>Donor:</b>	Australian Government (Australian NGO Cooperation Program) and donations from the people of Australia
<b>Duration:</b>	July 2014 to June 2022
<b>Estimated beneficiaries:</b>	400 direct participants 2200 direct beneficiaries 6332 direct and indirect beneficiaries.

## Introduction and context

Timor-Leste remains one of the poorest countries in the world with estimates that half the population live below the poverty line and around two-thirds are considered food insecure. Almost 70% of the total workforce in the country is involved in agriculture, with the majority working on subsistence farms. Low crop productivity, lack of infrastructure and rapid population growth contributes to the food insecurity situation where poverty remains endemic.<sup>1</sup> The impact in food insecurity in Timor-Leste is evident in the high rate of malnutrition in Timor-Leste, with 47.1% of children under five stunted and only 35.5% of children aged 6 to 23 months receive at least minimum dietary diversity (36.8% in Bobonaro).<sup>2</sup>

## The project

Between 2013 and 2022, with funding from the Australian Government’s ANCP program and donations from people of Australia, AOP with Timorese partner, Timor Aid, implemented the Timor-Leste component of the Pacific Regional Food and Water Security program. This three-country program was also active in Kiribati and Fiji. The Timor Aid project aimed to achieve five objectives:

- Outcome 1: Increased production supply of locally available nutritious food in target communities
- Outcome 2: Increased household income generated through the sale of surplus produce
- Outcome 3: Enhanced household water security and sanitation in targeted areas – including increased irrigation for food production
- Outcome 4: Increased community coordination and collaboration with Provincial/District government service providers
- Outcome 5 Increased technical support for local partner NGOs.

## Evaluation

The overall purpose of the evaluation was “to assess if the project is achieving what it sets out to achieve and provide recommendations to improve on areas that are not working well”. While considering the entire project, the project evaluation focused on the most recent three-year period from July 2019 to June 2022. The evaluation used a mixed-methods design including a review of project documents and external literature; key informant interviews; focus group discussions with beneficiaries, project partners, and staff; a survey of project participants; and a stakeholder review workshop in which AOP and Timor Aid feedback on draft findings.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ifad.org/fr/web/latest/-/news/improving-food-security-in-timor-leste-to-end-hungry-season>

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Health. Timor-Leste Food and Nutrition Survey 2020, Final Report. At [https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/media/4606/file/Digital\\_Eng\\_TL%20Food%20Nutrition%20Survey%202020\\_FINAL\\_20%204%202022.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/media/4606/file/Digital_Eng_TL%20Food%20Nutrition%20Survey%202020_FINAL_20%204%202022.pdf)

## Results

### Relevance

Evidence demonstrated that the project's design and activities were relevant to locally defined needs and priorities of farmers and community members of Bobonaro. The project aligned with international donor, national, and community partners' priorities and policies. There was also evidence the project was responsive to the changing needs of the intended beneficiaries by adapting to new information and changing circumstances. The project was also responsive to the changing context in Timor-Leste due to the COVID-19 pandemic, adapting its support and coordination activities during this period.

### Effectiveness

Project documents and monitoring reports showed that the project had successfully achieved or exceeded most of its planned outputs for the three years covered in the evaluation. The number of farmers engaged increased over its lifecycle. Direct participants in earlier years remained around or slightly above 100. As the project expanded to incorporate more farmers, earlier participants remained engaged in the project. The number of direct participants is expected to peak at 400 by end of project.

#### ***Outcome 1: Increased production and supply of locally available nutritious food in target communities in Timor-Leste***

The project supported project participants and communities to grow and harvest vegetables, with attention on climate/drought resilient types such as chili, eggplants, peanuts, onions, long beans and corn. Some progress was made on livestock (goat) procurement, yet was hindered due to disruptions to distribution networks and the floods (APR 2020 -21). Evidence shows that Timor Aid activities have contributed to modest increases in production and supply of locally available nutritious food in target communities in Timor-Leste. Survey data showed that the majority 89% of households have a **home garden of nutritious vegetables** for household consumption engaging with Timor Aid against a proxy baseline of 82.5% who reported having a vegetable garden for more than three years. These findings were supported during FGDs and interviews.

The project promoted **fish production for nutrition**. Surveys with farmers showed that 83% of participants who had started a fishpond (n=6) were still operational. During FGDs, farmers reported being involved in production of tilapia and catfish. However, at time of evaluation, none of the producers had succeeded in selling any of their fish harvest. While aquaculture was promoted for nutrition, the ability to sustain aquaculture is dependent on households being profitable to cover the high associated costs.

Around a quarter of farmer participants obtained **chickens or goats to breed and sell**, complemented with training.

**Outcome 1 challenges:** The initiative achieved increased production, yet gains were eroded by high mortality rates.

#### ***Outcome 2: Increased household income generated through the sale of surplus produce***

The project improved ability of farmers to analyse markets, devise budgets, plan farming activities to increase production and income in Atudara, Meligo, and Bilimau. Survey data which showed that 87% of farmers feel their household are more knowledgeable about **how to access to new markets** for selling their produce – an observation confirmed by farmer FGDs.

The survey also showed that since engaging with Timor Aid, 98% of participants have **learned new skills that they find useful in expanding crop and livestock production** and 98% have **diversified their production** of food or income sources.

The project included building capacity of farmers to analyse markets, devise budgets, plan farming activities to increase production and income. There was no evidence of new markets being established in collaboration with government to provide better market access. The project budget and scope only allowed for assistance to farmers in assessing and accessing the existing markets.

**Outcome 2 challenges:** The survey revealed that only 21% of participants engaged in vegetable production reported any improvement in sales of vegetables in the last three years. Similarly, just 18% of participants engaged in livestock production reported any improvement in sales of livestock in the last three years. The

biggest challenge faced during the period 2019 – 2021 was the surge of Coronavirus and the subsequent compulsory confinement / lockdown due to Covid 19, in addition to the project not succeeding in developing new market avenues.

### ***Outcome 3: Enhanced household water security and sanitation in targeted areas, including increased irrigation for food production***

Timor Aid strengthened household water security, sanitation, and irrigation for food production. Timor Aid management and community informants explained that they promoted the development of **irrigation systems** with funding from other donors under a parallel project. However, this AOP project helped producers optimise outcomes of the irrigation. Farmers during FGDs, recalled as to how they benefited from Timor Aid's support.

The project promoted that good hygiene practices at home and school are very important to reduce water borne illnesses. These training sessions had positive impact on communities. The evaluation survey revealed that 97% of participants stated that since engaging with Timor Aid they have **learned new sanitation practices and safe water storage skills that they find useful**. Furthermore, 100 % stated that since engaging with Timor Aid they have **reduced how often they defecate somewhere other than a latrine** and 98% of participants now **own a latrine** against a proxy baseline of 82%. The surveys further revealed that 82% report that, since engaging with Timor Aid, their households have **introduced safer water storage or treatment practices**.

**Outcome 3 challenges:** Of those new water sources installed or rehabilitated by the project, **59%** were reported to be still working at time of evaluation. Floods were also reported to damaged irrigation systems. Secondly, farmers reported production still being compromised because of ongoing water scarcity.

### ***Outcome 4: Increased community coordination and collaboration with provincial/district government service providers***

This component focussed on ensuring that community-development plans are designed, written and presented to government authorities. The program over-achieved its reach in target communities by 27% (engaging 19 against planned 15 communities). Training workshops covered the topics of livestock rearing; crop production; nutrition; and bookkeeping.

The project also supported community representative groups to design, write and present community plans to government authorities. In the participant survey, 65.2% stated that since engaging with Timor Aid, groups in their community have designed and presented to government authorities better community development plans that before project support. What's more, 71% of participants expressed that they can participate more actively in community development discussions and decisions.

In the fight to reduce malnutrition, the project promoted education and improved nutrition for children via the establishment of kitchen gardens to grow diverse vegetables in selected schools and in the communities. The evaluation found that such gardens were now present in approximately half of all targeted communities. Most of these were managed by community groups.

In response to COVID-19, project implementation adapted to the pandemic to incorporate new activities to ensure that Farmers' groups have training and awareness raising on COVID-19 and how to mitigate it. Project documents reveal that 11 farmers' groups were trained. However, most of Timor Aid's COVID-related responses were funded by another donor, and not under the AOP project.

**Outcome 4: challenges:** Informants noted that the Timorese NGO Hiam Health was supposed to lead the implementation of the school kitchen gardens. However, this NGO stopped working on the project in 2018 and has still not recommenced.

### ***Outcome 5: Increased technical support for [the] local NGO***

Project documents showed that under the project, Timor Aid accessed training from the AOP and also the Australian-government funded PHD program in Timor-Leste. Training ensured Timor Aid could operate in **accordance with DFAT requirements**. Topics covered included child protection, fraud and sexual harassment and safety; M&E; finance; and report writing. Timor Aid has internalized these lessons into the contents of policies, staff contracts, orientation of new staff, and performance management of all staff. Additionally, AOP conducted institutional capacity-building interventions with Timor Aid through the **Platform for Learning and Exchange**, and the shared lessons across the broader multi-country project.



Where AOP could add further value is via supporting Timor Aid with sector-relevant agricultural and water-related technical capacity.

### Ownership & sustainability

Evidence suggests that the project activities may continue to benefit the beneficiaries and indirect beneficiaries after completion. While overall results in income-generation are patchy (see discussion of **Outcome 2**), evaluation evidence and project reports demonstrated that farmer groups have made progress in terms of saving and utilising income to pay for education of their children, improved diet at home and for daily needs.

Further, evidence shows that Timor Aid has developed strong partnerships with project implementation partners and stakeholders who demonstrated an interest in further support and collaboration with Timor Aid. Sixty-two percent of informants reported that, since engaging with Timor Aid, their community has established local committees to maintain water sources to maintain water points beyond the project lifetime. Furthermore, benefits may continue to be reinforced after project completion due to the complementarity of education, health/nutrition, and small business support via other NGOs in neighbouring communities.

*Challenges to sustainability.* Key challenges to the sustainability of the food production components are that, with high livestock mortality among project-provided ruminants and no aquaculture incomes yet, the livestock progress is fragile. Farmer-managed horticultural technologies have greater likelihood to continue after the phasing of the project, as do the promotion of chicken-breeding.

Project documents reveal strong partnership with government and other stakeholders as evident in joint planning of major activities implemented. The government agricultural extension workers *should* be available to help with technical issues, training and helping with sourcing of farm inputs. However, the MAF's extension workers are not active in the communities, limiting any ongoing support to communities after the project ends. Similarly, a changeover of staff in the government's water authority has resulted in a loss of organisational memory of the project's activities which will require Timor Aid to meet and update new managers and staff.

### Equity

Evidence demonstrates that Timor Aid involved and benefitted different genders, people living with disability and other marginalised groups through the project, including in the design and monitoring and evaluation systems. Project reporting stated that 60% of all farming participants were women. As evidence of the project's successful inclusivity approach, 11 % of surveyed participants self-reported as people with a disability. This is well above the national average<sup>3</sup>, and commensurate with WHO estimates of global prevalence of disability<sup>4</sup>.

*Challenge to equity.* A gap in the logic of the project's disability inclusion is that the same supports were given as for able-bodied participants without regard or consultation for appropriateness. This resulted in examples of people with disability not being able to make use of the inputs provided them by the project.

### Value-for-money

Project documents and financial reports showed that the project had achieved value-for-money, including an appropriate balance between economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. This evidence was also supported during KIIs with project partners and staff. While absolute benefits per beneficiary were found by the evaluation to be modest, the cost per beneficiary is also on the comparatively lower side, thus remains justifiable.

### Unintended outcomes and lessons learned

The evaluation identified several unintended outcomes from the project activities.

---

<sup>3</sup> GDS & UNFPA 2018. Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2015, Analytical Report on Gender, Volume 13. General Directorate of Statistics (GDS) & United Nations Population Fund (UNPF Available: <https://timor-leste.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2015%20Census%20Gender%20Dimensions%20Analytical%20Report.pdf>)

<sup>4</sup> Burn T. 2017. Timor-Leste 2016 Suco Council Elections- Disability Inclusion Monitoring Report. USAID, Counterpart International and Ra'és Hadomi Timor Oan (RHTO). Available: <https://www.counterpart.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Disability-Inclusion-Monitoring-Report-Timor-Leste.pdf>

1. Food production vs. nutrition: The project had no knowledge of whether the promoted food sources addressed the specific nutrition gaps of children in targeted communities.
2. The need for external market opportunities. While acknowledging the strong contributing effect of COVID-related restrictions on movement, the project's focus on assisting participants to sell into existing markets most likely contributed to saturating those markets rather than helping farmers tap into new markets.
3. Difficulties of introducing livestock. The project was not able to anticipate the high mortality rate of small livestock distributed by the project, reportedly as a result of animal disease.
4. Cross-project complementarity. Conducting project objectives that relate to other NGOs initiatives in the area creates the opportunity for amplified results.

### ***Project management lessons learned***

On the whole, the project was well managed to the extent that implementation was largely executed against plans, and output targets met. As reported above under '**Value for Money**', project management was responsive to changes in context and discovery of opportunity for value-add. However, review of project documentation also revealed a number of weaknesses in project management systems that hampered optimal monitoring of performance over time. These included

1. The project was redesigned annually, with no master plan. Consequently, the project was not able to set and self-assess against any long-term goal or high-level outcomes.
2. Single-year project tracking. An additional gap created by the sequence of annual designs is that beneficiary numbers were not tracked over time.
3. No collection of baseline data.
4. Inconsistent and incomplete recording of project results.
5. Insufficient feedback to the implementer. Timor Aid staff expressed that, often, the progress reports they submitted to AOP did not receive feedback from AOP that they could draw on to learn and improve.

## **Conclusion**

During the evaluation period, the project has achieved its planned outputs and contributed to its five outcome areas, including increased production supply of locally available nutritious food in target communities; increased household income generated through the sale of surplus produce; enhanced household water security and sanitation in targeted areas – including increased irrigation for food production; increased community coordination and collaboration with Provincial/District government service providers; and increased technical support for local partner NGOs. Unintended outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations provide areas to improve the project.

Overall, the project generated modest but good results for participating communities, commensurate to the modest level of funding the project received, which never exceeded AUD 67,000 in-country, in any given year. Overall impact most likely was compromised by the project design's aspirations to address a broad diversity of community needs (nutrition, income, water supply, sanitation and hygiene behaviours, community participatory planning and government engagements) with such a small budget.

## **Recommendations**

Several recommendations were revealed through the evaluation. These recommendations include:

1. The program should focus on fewer priorities
2. Conduct a pre-design assessment of current nutritional intake of children in targeted communities.
3. Increase community education on animal husbandry practices
4. Learn and incorporate how to undertake market assessments to identify non-traditional market opportunities and which products to promote and for optimal income.
5. Promote water efficient technologies and context-appropriate water harvesting technologies
6. Future projects could concentrate on chicken and egg production, especially with some form of chicken cages to protect against predators.