



Executive Brief: **Dili - Timor Leste** Emergency Food Security Assessment

Overview, scope and methods

In April 2006, anti-government protests led to fighting between heavily armed groups, including the military, the police and rebel factions. The unrest has hampered progress made since the accession to independence in 2002 to revive the economy and establish viable political institutions. Many economic activities were brought to a stand still or greatly reduced at the onset of the crisis. Timor Leste is a low income and food deficit country and the poorest in South East Asia.

The 2006 political unrest led to the displacement of some 100,000 people who took refuge in camps in Dili or with relatives in the districts. Since then, WFP and the government have distributed emergency food assistance to the IDPs. WFP currently provides food to some 70,000 IDPs in Dili.

The Emergency Food Security Assessment's (EFSA) purpose is to assess the food security situation in Dili 18 months after the events, determine how the different livelihood groups are coping with the situation, estimate the number of food insecure people, identify appropriate response options and possibilities for recovery and longer-term food security assistance.

How was the assessment done? It is based on an analysis of available secondary data and on data collected at household level and at Dili markets in September 2007. In total, 613 randomly selected households (50% in the camps, 50% in sucos/neighborhoods) and 117 traders were interviewed. The Mid Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) was measured on children under 5 years and women in the households interviewed.

How many people are at risk to lives and livelihoods?

25,000 people are at risk to lives, representing 24 percent of the population surveyed, and need immediate assistance. They have poor food consumption and low income resulting in severe food insecurity. Their coping strategies, such as reducing the number of meals/per day or meal size are highly detrimental to their health and nutritional status.

41,000 people are at risk to livelihoods, representing 41 percent of the population surveyed, and also need assistance. While their current food consumption is slightly better, they have difficulty accessing food. In addition, their coping strategies will affect their future livelihoods.

11 percent of children under 5 suffer from moderate acute malnutrition (with mid-upper arm circumference MUAC between 11.0-12.5 cm). About 8 percent of women are moderately emaciated (MUAC between 21.0 - 22.5 cm) and 1.3 percent are severely wasted (MUAC below 21 cm).

Who are the people at risk to lives and livelihoods?

The difference in terms of being at risk to lives or livelihoods between the IDPs and residents is minimal.

The people whose lives are at risk are essentially groups whose main income comes from government allowances and the sale of firewood. People in cash-for-work schemes and unskilled workers also fall into this category.

The groups with the highest percentage of people at risk to livelihoods are the beneficiaries of church assistance, petty traders, people receiving remittances and unskilled wage labourers.

What are the underlying causes of food insecurity?

The causes of food insecurity in Dili are mainly related to problems with accessing food.

Food availability and markets: market operations are slowly recovering but the situation is not yet back to normal. Market recovery is slowed down by:

- the lack of market infrastructure. Most of the reopened markets are in temporary locations, lacking adequate space or storage facility;
- the volatility of the security situation;
- the lack of supplier credit, high cost of credit and inability to arrange for consumer credit for retail sales (only 3 out of 9 micro finance institutions are still operating);

- the increase of transaction costs contributing to general inflation; real prices of food have increased by 12 percent since 2006; and
 - the irregularity of supplies (wholesale traders for dry food have difficulties supplying the markets).
- The primary reason for the slow market recovery mentioned by traders is low purchasing power. Therefore, the ability of households (especially people at risk to lives and livelihoods) to access food may be undermined by continued market price increases and declining income per capita.

Food access: Household production is very limited with most depending on the market for food. In addition, household food access is undermined by the rising price of food commodities. About 42 percent of the population is currently having a problem accessing food, as they cannot cover the cost of a minimum food basket.

There has been a remarkable reduction of the productive assets, small livestock, and poultry owned by households, particularly among IDPs. Some 88 percent of households in the camps have had their homes either destroyed or damaged and this is the main reason for remaining in the camps. Repairing destroyed or damaged houses is often mentioned as a priority by households.

Food consumption: Globally, only 4 percent of the households (15% among those at risk to lives) have poor food consumption. This is an improvement compared not only with previous months but also with the baseline assessment in 2005¹. However, a direct comparison must be done with caution as the three assessments were carried out during different times of the year.

Conclusion: The causes of food insecurity among households in Dili are essentially chronic (low food production, lack of assets and income) and the current political crisis has resulted in further deterioration. Poor food access is the result of long-term structural issues such as the lack of employment opportunities and market weaknesses contributing to increases in food market prices that go back to 2002.

What are the implications for programming?

The following response options are recommended:

- **Provide immediate Cash/Food for work for 2,500 households whose lives are at risk.**
- **Implement livelihood support activities** such as cash/food for work for **5,800 households whose livelihoods are at risk.** Cash/voucher/food for work is the recommended response. Sustainable self-employment opportunities could be initiated in combination with vocational/skills training.
- **Provide support to repair houses to returning IDPs** (3 month food rations and building materials). It is estimated that 1000 IDP households would be willing to return to their homes if the proper support is given. Support to livestock restoration could also be envisaged.
- Some 3500 vulnerable individuals (orphans, chronically ill, disabled) should be prioritized by government safety net programmes.
- Implement a targeted Mother and Child Health programme for 3,900 children under five and for pregnant/lactating women.
- Support market recovery. While cash options would support markets on the demand side, effort is required to support supplies by providing credit schemes to petty traders and retailers, and to re-open market buildings to address the lack of adequate storage facilities.
- Long-term sustainable self employment/job creation is needed, including micro credit opportunities as well as vocational/skills training.

Targeting criteria: A revision of the targeting criteria is recommended as the current targeting criteria for food assistance is no longer addressing the need of the most vulnerable households. The large inclusion and exclusion errors found in this assessment advocates for a refinement in the criteria.

For more information on the EFSA, please contact:

Joan Fleuren, WFP Country Director, Timor Leste, joan.fleuren@wfp.org

Yvonne Forsen, Regional Assessment Officer, Bangkok, yvonne.forsen@wfp.org

Issa Sanogo, Trade Economist (responsible for the market analysis), Rome, issa.sanogo@wfp.org

¹ Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis, 2005, Dili EFSA-June 2006. It is available on www.wfp.org/odan