

# Evaluation Brief



## Timor-Leste Country Portfolio Evaluation 2008-2012

### Context

Timor-Leste is a young and fragile state with 1.2 million people. After four centuries as a Portuguese colony and 25 years of Indonesian occupation, its people voted for independence in 1999. Since the mid-2000s, Timor-Leste has experienced rapid economic growth, mainly based on the exploitation of offshore oil, and it now qualifies as a middle income country. The country's educational and institutional legacy leaves huge capacity constraints, and social indicators are very poor. Nutrition indicators in Timor-Leste are among the highest in severity in the world. Nationally, 20% of households were assessed by WFP in 2006/07 as food insecure, 23% highly vulnerable, 21% moderately vulnerable, and 36% food secure. Significant progress in primary education has seen the net enrolment rate increase from 68% to more than 90% from 2004 to 2011. Improvements in key health indicators reflect well on government efforts to ensure nationwide coverage of primary health care services.

### Timor-Leste Portfolio

The portfolio comprised three main operations and included emergency relief, food-for-work/assets, school feeding, maternal and child health and nutrition, and capacity development. A total combined planned budget of US\$75.4 million (US\$38.6 million contributed) covered one Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) 2008-2011, a Special Operation (SO) 2009-2011 focused on capacity development; and a Country Programme (CP) 2011-2013. The portfolio also included some smaller grants and trust funds (US\$3.4 million contributed), and WFP participated in two joint UN programmes addressing nutrition and food security. An annual average of 312,428 beneficiaries (51% female) received assistance under the PRRO reducing to 48,542 (66% female) under the CP.

### Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

Covering the period 2008 – 2012 the Timor-Leste country portfolio evaluation focused on three key questions: i) portfolio alignment and strategic positioning; ii) factors that have driven WFP's strategic decision-making, including its intended handover and exit by the end of 2013; and iii) performance and results.

### Key Findings and Conclusions

#### *Alignment and Strategic Positioning*

The evaluation found that the portfolio has been relevant and well aligned with men's and women's needs, government policies and priorities. WFP's strategy of supporting and working through government systems for delivery of basic services has been highly appropriate for the fragile state context of Timor-Leste.

### *Strategic choices*

The evaluation found that Timor-Leste country office (CO) was right to focus on nutrition issues, on government as its key partner and on capacity development as a key objective. In doing so, it contributed to state-building and supported country-wide delivery. It was pragmatic in adjusting ongoing operations to focus where there was most chance of making a difference. However, both the CO and HQ misjudged the intensive management requirements for the conditional cash transfers research programme which meant that Timor-Leste was not a suitable participant. The CO has been energetic in seeking supplementary funding, and in seeking to maintain adequate CO staffing but a heavy reliance on relatively junior staff, and an inability to offer job security, has disadvantages.

### *Portfolio performance and results*

The main original components of the portfolio were all broadly **relevant** at the time the PRRO was launched in 2008. The subsequent challenge for the CO has been to balance and adapt these different components in a dynamic and constrained situation. WFP also deserves credit for the **connectedness** of its "working with government" approach.

### *School Feeding*

School feeding (cooked meals for grades 1–6) begun in 2005 to encourage enrolment and attendance, in 2008 the government and WFP-assisted programme merged so as to ensure the same standard of service across the country. The programme was always under considerable financial stress, and the planned ration was reduced from 30% to 20% of estimated daily requirements. It reached up to 250,000 beneficiaries, almost evenly divided between boys and girls.

WFP was keen to remain involved and to work with Ministry of Education on strengthening the national system, but the government chose to take over full responsibility, and WFP involvement in the school meals programme ended in August 2011. The government has adopted a different approach: a basic ration of rice is to be supplemented by locally purchased complementary foods, for which schools are supposed to receive a cash allowance. The programme remains seriously underfunded and is experiencing implementation difficulties.

### *Food-for-work/Food-for-assets*

Assets created included the construction/rehabilitation of 440km of rural roads, 27 schools, over 200 hundred reservoirs, and 24km of irrigation canals, along with other agricultural improvements, such as forestry, fencing and land reclamation. The PRRO evaluation (2010) included a comprehensive review of the programme and assessed it very positively, though with some suggestions for technical improvements, while the joint UN project 2011 mid-term evaluation found that the activities were relevant, implemented in a timely fashion, and likely to be effective.

## Blanket and targeted supplementary feeding for children and women

WFP support focused on blanket feeding for children aged 6–23 months, and targeted feeding for pregnant and lactating women and children aged 24–59 months, all delivered through the government health services during monthly multi-purpose clinics at health facilities and outreach centres. During the evaluation period there was a considerable expansion of food deliveries and facilities covered while beneficiaries reached was variable, highest in 2009 at just above 49,000. Throughout the period, reviews and assessments have found that sharing of rations tends to undermine the programme. At the same time, nutrition support was considered a strong incentive drawing mothers and children to primary health care services.

## Fortified Blended Foods (Timor Vita)

WFP also supported the establishment of a factory to produce a pre-mixed ration of fortified blended food known as Timor Vita. There were considerable start-up problems and unanticipated costs (e.g. the machinery required additional generating capacity, and a full-time food technologist had to be recruited to supervise production). All ingredients are imported and production levels have been much lower than planned. In 2012, Timor Vita covered 22% of MCHN food requirements.

## Capacity development

The aim of capacity development interventions has been to establish effective national capacity in logistics and supply chain management, and in school feeding and nutrition programmes as a contribution to the achievement of nationally owned hunger solutions. The Special Operation had some notable success the development of systematic capacity development and handover strategies for health and education was more problematic.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Overall Assessment

The Timor-Leste country office was commendably proactive, innovative, diligent and adaptable, pragmatically adjusting operations to maximize their contribution to results. However, monitoring of the programme was very weak. Food-for-work/assets activities, emergency support, and the school feeding programme were broadly effective.

There is strong evidence that the food component of the maternal and child health and nutrition programme acts as an incentive for increased access to health services, but there is much less evidence that it achieves its primary aim of improving the nutritional status of its intended beneficiaries.

There have been some notable successes in capacity development but achieving sustainable capacity improvement across service delivery sectors remains an enormous challenge. The Ministry of Education chose to take over full responsibility for the school feeding programme and to change the school feeding strategy without continuing WFP's involvement. A systematic approach to handover of the maternal and child health and nutrition programme to the Ministry of Health was initiated in November 2012, but could not plausibly be carried through before the Country Programme's current end-date of December 2013.

Assessed against WFP's corporate gender commitments, the country office's incorporation of gender in its work has been weak.

All of the main operations were underfunded (about half of requirements) which negatively affected achievements. The number of donors has reduced over time, but the Timor-Leste government has become a significant contributor for the local production of the fortified basic food (Timor Vita).

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** WFP should extend the CP so as to enable the country office to follow up on the transition strategy set out in the Concept Note of November 2012.

**Recommendation 2.** WFP should ensure that hand-over strategies are developed in a timely fashion, recognizing that effective hand-over requires a timeframe of at least two to three years.

**Recommendation 3a.** There is urgent need for a joint review of SISC's role in health service delivery and its corresponding requirements for support.

**Recommendation 3b.** The Ministry of Health and WFP should discontinue targeted supplementary feeding for children aged 24–59 months and provide targeted supplementary feeding for children aged 6–23 months and pregnant and lactating women.

**Recommendation 3c.** Improve the quality of monitoring and evaluation, both of programme delivery and of its results, to meet the minimum standards required for assessing programme delivery and results.

**Recommendation 3d.** There is need to support longer-term, country-specific nutrition research such as a nutrition causality study and analysis.

**Recommendation 4.** WFP and the Government should jointly undertake a rigorous strategic review of the future role for Timor Vita.

**Recommendation 5.** A comprehensive strategic review of the school feeding programme should be undertaken to map out a sustainable approach.

**Recommendation 6.** WFP Headquarters needs to do further work on developing indicators and practical guidance to assist country offices in designing and implementing effective capacity development strategies.

**Recommendation 7.** WFP Headquarters needs to do further work on developing indicators and practical guidance to country offices for implementing effective gender mainstreaming strategies.

## Reference:



Full and summary reports of the evaluation and the Management Response are available at [www.wfp.org/evaluation](http://www.wfp.org/evaluation)

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