



Executive Brief: Timor Leste Emergency Food Security Assessment

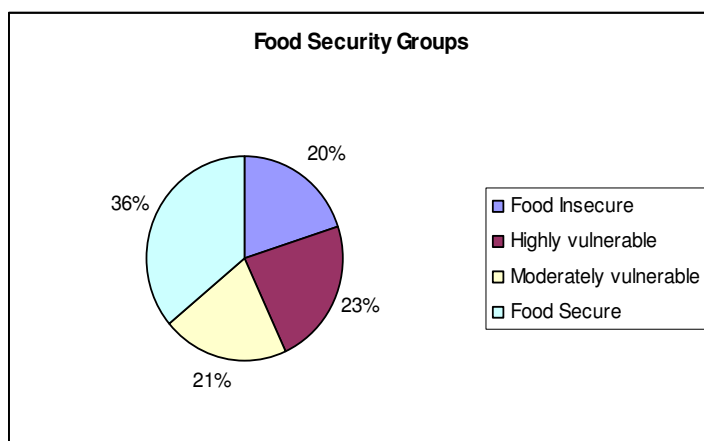
Overview

Food insecurity is already prevalent across Timor-Leste. The civil unrest which began in April and May 2006 has only served to heighten concerns about a worsening of the food security situation in the country, a point highlighted by the Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA) in Dili district in June 2006. The EFSA in 12 districts outside Dili thus sought to assess the impact of the current crisis on livelihoods at the district level and identify the need for food and non-food assistance for the next 3-8 months.

The assessment shows that the crisis has increased the vulnerability of IDPs, who have been forced to move away from their homes and traditional sources of income. Families hosting them in the districts are also feeling the strain of having additional members in their households over an extended period of time. The impact of the crisis may appear to be less significant than expected, however, and this is largely because underlying factors such as low purchasing power and poor agricultural practices, among others, continue to have a much greater impact on food security and livelihoods in Timor-Leste. The recommended response to the crisis should therefore include a mix of strategies, aimed both at meeting the specific needs of IDPs and their host families, as well as at addressing the food security situation in the country as a whole.

The EFSA was carried out in August 2006 and included the survey of 1,380 randomly selected households in 12 districts outside Dili and the sub-district of Atauro in Dili District. Besides the National Statistics Directorate at the Ministry of Planning and Finance, which provided GPS units and 13 teams of enumerators, the assessment was supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests and Fisheries (MAFF), Seeds of Life, local NGOs, including Rai Maran, LODA and CVTL, and prominent community members. Key informant and small trader surveys were also carried out as part of the assessment, as was the analysis of secondary data from a variety of UN, NGO and other sources.

Who is Food Insecure?



Pre-crisis data indicates that approximately 213,000 people (20 percent of the total population) are food insecure. An additional 468,000 people (44 per cent of the total population) are vulnerable to food insecurity.

The unrest in April and May 2006 has led to the emergence of newly vulnerable groups, including the 150,000 IDPs living in camps in Dili and in the districts with approximately 105,000 host family members.

Why are they Food Insecure?

The underlying causes of food insecurity in Timor-Leste include *inter alia* prevalent poverty, limited purchasing power, poor access to adequate farmland, low soil yields, underdeveloped agricultural markets, and outdated farming techniques.

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The EFSA shows that the unrest in April and May 2006 has increased the vulnerability of certain population groups, especially IDPs who have been cut off from their traditional sources of livelihoods. Host families in the districts are also feeling the strain of having additional mouths to feed over an extended period of time. This pressure on their food stocks and cash reserves can only be expected to increase as the traditional lean season wears on; added to that are indications from the EFSA that a fair share of IDP families do not intend to return to their homes in Dili in the near future.

While the overall food security situation post-crisis has deteriorated, it should be emphasized, however, that underlying factors such as prevalent poverty and poor agricultural practices continue to play a predominant role in perpetuating food insecurity in Timor-Leste. The impact of the crisis thus may appear to be less significant than expected – this has thus more to do with the fact that Timor-Leste already has some of the lowest nutritional and food security indicators in Asia, rather than a natural resilience of its population to man-made or natural shocks. In addition, the large amount of households affected by worse than usual post-harvest maize losses also plays a contributing role to the deterioration.

The following are some of the EFSA's key findings:

- Some 20% of the sampled households indicated that IDPs were either currently staying with them or had done so in the past 3 months. IDPs in over a quarter of such households mentioned that relying on their hosts would be their main survival strategy over the next 6 months.
- Over 72% of the sampled households have approximately 50% less food stored than normal compared to the same time last year. Of these, nearly a quarter cited more mouths to feed as the main reason for less food this year while two-thirds attributed it to losses.
- A third (33.6%) of the sampled households indicated that there was a difference in the number of meals consumed than was normal practice at this time of the year. 78% of them gave less food as the main reason.
- The most common coping strategy among 45% of the households surveyed is to rely on less preferred and less expensive food sources, such as eating tubers instead of maize or imported rice. The EFSA also shows that some 23% of the households reported having used root crops quicker than was usual at this time of the year; an additional 33% indicated that they had already finished their stores of root crops.
- At the end of August in average years, some 58% of households still have maize stored from the previous harvest. The EFSA shows that this year that proportion has gone down to 37.5%.
- In terms of food consumption (diversity and frequency), the proportion of groups regarded as having a good food intake has declined to 4% from a pre-crisis level of 14%, while that having a poor food intake has increased from 24 % to 31%.
- 24% of the sampled households reported having sold off some of their livestock for money since the crisis. Moreover, 17% of the households that have or had IDPs indicated they plan to sell productive or non-productive assets as a survival strategy in the coming months.
- In 26% of district households with IDPs, the first member of the IDP family who intends to return to Dili will do so sometime in the next 6 months, while in over 32% of households the first returnee will not return for at least 1 year or more.
- Secondary data from mobile medical clinics indicates that the crisis has not had any significant impact on the prevalence of malnutrition in the districts, which remains at the high pre-crisis level. There also does not appear to be any change in the frequency of health-related problems in the districts for similar reasons.
- With regards to local markets in the districts, the prices reported by traders and key informants are higher than pre-crisis levels (before April), but lower than the prices observed at the peak of the unrest. Market analysis shows, however, that the increased prices strongly correlate to the rise in the international price for fuel.

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Where are the Food Insecure Households?

Pre-crisis data indicates that food insecurity is prevalent across Timor-Leste, with the highest concentration of food insecure people living in the country's northern and central areas, followed by Oecussi and districts in the northwest.

The EFSA indicates a greater influx of IDPs in Baucau district in the east as compared to other districts. Some 48% of sampled households in Baucau district confirmed hosting IDPs either currently or over the past 3 months, followed by Bobonaro (28%), Manufahi (28.1%), Lautem (27.9%) and Viqueque (25.6%) districts. These figures suggest that the impact of the presence of IDPs will largely be felt in the traditionally more food secure areas of the country, although even these areas have extremely high levels of food insecurity.

Recommended Food and Non-Food Assistance

WFP's current PRRO: The November 2005-November 2007 PRRO already addresses several of the recommendations and includes the three components of School Feeding (58,393 primary school students), Maternal and Child Health (23,741 malnourished children under the age of 5 and pregnant and lactating women) and Emergency Preparedness and Response (20,000 households most affected by natural disasters, victims of emergencies). WFP and the Government have additionally been providing rations of rice, beans and vegetable oil to over 150,000 IDPs in camps in Dili or with host families in the districts.

Several additional measures are recommended, both to specifically target IDPs and the food insecure population in Timor Leste as a whole. While recommendations focus largely on WFP related operations, all activities require commitment and/or participation from other stakeholders:

- **Expand Safety Net activities:** The Safety Net activities of School Feeding and Maternal and Child Health should be expanded to cover all districts in Timor Leste as per agreement and in collaboration with GoTL.
- **Target IDPs:** Continue to target IDPs through the general food distribution in the short-term. Additional support to IDPs and other vulnerable populations will be needed through the lean season and as a contingency through election period in May 2007. Further recommendations for targeting will be incorporated into the final report.
- **Host Families:** As the survey was designed to evaluate the overall food security situation at the district level, further analysis of the data is required to determine what impact, if any, the crisis has had on these households. Corresponding recommendations will be made in the final report.
- **Food-for-work (FFW) and food-for-training (FFT) programmes:** Develop FFW and FFT programmes that aim to increase rural income by, for example: improving agricultural practices, reducing post-harvest losses and augmenting irrigation facilities. These projects tackle long-term underlying causes rather than immediate food insecurity caused by the political conflict. These programmes can however be used as an exit strategy from general food distributions as well as a means to self-target the most vulnerable populations including IDP and non-IDP households.
- **Monitoring:** Monitor the food security situation in the districts on a quarterly basis to assess continuing needs and possible changes in programming.
- **Nutrition Education:** Further efforts should be made to incorporate nutrition education targeting the general population, with a specific focus on areas with higher levels of malnutrition as utilization remains a contributing factor to the high levels of chronic food insecurity.

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