



Timor-Leste Nutrition Strategic Review

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

December 2017

Summary Report

Background

Despite ongoing efforts to improve nutritional status, undernutrition continues to be a major development challenge in Timor-Leste. Timor-Leste's malnutrition rates represent a serious public health problem. Timor-Leste's rates of stunting are among the highest in the world.

To respond to this challenge, Australia has invested in a range of initiatives aimed at improving nutrition. These include:

- **technical assistance** to the National Council for Food Security, Sovereignty and Nutrition in Timor-Leste (KONSSANTIL);
- support to the **President's Nutrition Program (2014–2017)**. This initiative aimed to raise awareness about the nutrition situation and reward community effort in seeking solutions;
- **Hamutuk (2016–2019)**, a collective action program, which aims to develop and deliver targeted, multi-sectoral behaviour change messages.
- **TOMAK (2016–2020)** (To'os Ba Moris Diak – Farming for Prosperity), a nutrition-sensitive agriculture program; and
- **Nutrition-sensitive programming** through the **Australia Timor-Leste Partnership for Human Development (PHD) (2016–2020)** in the sectors of health, education, water and sanitation, nutrition, gender, disability and social protection.

Australia has developed a draft Nutrition Strategy. The objective of the strategy is to support the Government of Timor-Leste (GoTL) to reduce the prevalence of stunting in children aged 0–23 months.



Purpose

Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) commissioned this Strategic Review to:

- determine whether the Australian Aid program has the right approaches and strategy in place to contribute to reducing malnutrition in Timor-Leste, and
- to identify broad opportunities for improvements.

The review addressed the following key questions on relevance and strategy.

Relevance: To what extent are existing initiatives relevant to the current context of undernutrition and the development priorities of the governments of Australia and Timor-Leste?

Strategy: Does Australia have the right objectives and strategies? Which approaches and outcomes to improving nutrition-related indicators are most appropriate to the needs and capacity of Timor-Leste?

The scope of this Review is limited to the DFAT bilateral aid program as above. The review did not assess the effectiveness of the initiatives. However, a more targeted, discrete evaluation of the President's Nutrition Program (PNP) was included as part of this Review. The specific findings of the PNP review are available from the DFAT Timor-Leste office.

Methodology

To maximise the use of the Review's findings and recommendations, a collaborative approach was used with the primary audience, DFAT Timor-Leste. In particular, DFAT participated in determining the scope of the Review, verifying the broad findings, and contributing to the development of recommendations. The review took place in August and September, with a 16 day in-country visit from 13-30 August 2017.

The methodology for the review included:

- an initial document review;
- conduct interviews with more than 70 key stakeholders engaged in the sector;
- visit sites in Baucau and Manufahi to meet with recipients of the President's National Healthy Families Nutrition Award, TOMAK partners, Hamutuk partners and community-based nutrition activities; and
- present preliminary findings and recommendations and receive initial feedback and comments.

Main Findings

Relevance: DFAT's current nutrition program in Timor-Leste is in line with the following Australian Aid priorities:

- enabling human development through attention to global food security,
- reducing childhood malnutrition, and
- meeting maternal and child health-based commitments to promote good nutrition.

DFAT's nutrition program is also closely aligned to the GoTL's growing commitment to address the urgent problem of malnutrition. The GoTL has stated its commitment to reducing malnutrition. As a leading g7+ post-conflict country, Timor-Leste has prioritised the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: *End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture*.

As a strategy to engage important sectors in combating malnutrition and food insecurity, the GoTL established a high-level National Council for Food Security, Sovereignty and Nutrition in Timor-Leste (KONSSANTIL). While this represents a very positive commitment, KONSSANTIL's ability to fulfil its ambitious mandate at both the national and sub-national levels remains a challenge and requires ongoing support. The GoTL's renewed focus on nutrition under SDG 2 presents a timely opportunity for Australia, as a trusted leader in the area, to build on its responsive and valued support in future programming.

Strategy: While the draft nutrition strategy identifies the importance of a multi-sectoral approach, the current DFAT portfolio of investments do not yet adequately reflect an effective multi-sectoral approach. The key limitations are:

1. the need to have the range of programs in the same geographic area to enable nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive activities to complement and strengthen each other, and
2. an adequate balance of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions.

As a result, while there is the potential for measurable results, specific outcomes of TOMAK and in nutritional status beyond those of TOMAK and Hamutuk are recommended.

The Partnership for Human Development (PHD) has inherited a set of geographically dispersed activities with limited focus on nutrition outcomes.

With both PHD (which now includes Hamutuk) and TOMAK there is an opportunity for comprehensive nutrition-related sectoral coverage, and with the strong focus on gender inclusion across both programs, there is a unique opportunity to adequately address all elements of a multi-sectoral approach.

A more deliberate multi-sector approach in a defined geographic area, for example at municipal level, would also increase the scope to define expected nutritional status outcomes, and provide a broad basis on which to carefully and sustainably build capacity and ownership of successful approaches for eventual expansion into other locations.



Summary Recommendations

Based on the Review findings, the Review team makes the following recommendations for DFAT Timor-Leste's consideration:

Maintain a highly relevant nutrition program that meets an urgent priority in Timor-Leste.

Recommendation 1: The focus of the DFAT Timor-Leste Country Program to support the nutrition goals of the GoTL is in line with the priorities of the Australian Government. It addresses an urgent country need; is well aligned with GoTL priorities and is broadly very well received. ***Addressing malnutrition should continue to be a high priority of the overall aid program in Timor-Leste.***

Achieve this urgent nutrition priority by adopting a location-specific, multi-sectoral program...

Recommendation 2: DFAT needs to increase its focus on nutrition across its overall portfolio. To demonstrate current good practice in nutrition programming, and in line with Australia's status as the largest bilateral donor to Timor-Leste, the Review Team recommends that DFAT adopts ***a more intentional, multi-sectoral strategy for nutrition with a geographic focus in a single municipality.***

Converging the nutrition-sensitive activities of PHD and TOMAK, and including key nutrition-specific interventions in a single municipality – for example starting in a single suco and progressively increasing coverage across the municipality, has several benefits. It will: provide the scale to align the required sectors, provide significant learning on cross-program and cross-ministry cooperation, enable greater attribution of real nutritional outcomes, and is potentially within DFAT's financial capacity to support. Selection of the municipality should ideally preference Bobonaro, Manufahi or Baucau, where KONSSANTIL currently plans to trial a converged approach at suco level. Additional selection considerations should include:

- the interest of the municipal government and their capacity for municipal coverage in partnership with DFAT;
- the relative prevalence of malnutrition;
- existing service gaps; and
- existing DFAT nutrition-related program coverage.

...with a more manageable focus on priority interventions...

Recommendation 3: The fifteen nutrition priorities that will emerge from the KONSSANTIL-led 2nd roundtable process in May 2017 represent a promising agenda for action around which to plan a more convergent approach in the selected municipality. It can be assumed these priorities will align closely with the priorities of the new government, as they have been derived from the recommended actions of the Food and Nutrition Security Policy, the National Nutrition Strategy and the Zero Hunger Action Plan (PAN-HAM-TL). ***The 15 priorities from the roundtable process could guide the selection of DFAT's future interventions while also drawing on the existing global evidence base of 'what works'.***

...balanced with some key nutrition-specific support (which may also be scaled up nationally).

Recommendation 4: The focus on DFAT's current activities is on nutrition-sensitive programming. ***DFAT should undertake a detailed review of options for investing more in nutrition-specific (direct cause) interventions.*** This could include reviewing ways to reduce anaemia and underweight (BMI \leq 18.5) in women of reproductive age to interrupt the low birth weight cycle. Strengthening supply chains for supplementary feeding and micronutrients could also be addressed. Priority nutrition-specific interventions that are most aligned with current needs in Timor-Leste could include:

- intermittent iron/folic acid supplementation for adolescent girls;
- supplementary feeding for underweight pregnant women;
- multi-micronutrient supplements (which should include iron and folic acid) for pregnant women;
- supplementary feeding for wasted infants and young children and use of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) protocols; and
- scaling-up of community-based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM) protocols for more moderately malnourished infants and young children, including the use of multiple micronutrient powders.

While focusing on achieving adequate scale in a selected municipality, DFAT could consider partnering with other donors (UNICEF, WFP, WHO, EU, UNFPA, etc.) already involved in assisting Timor-Leste's Ministry of Health. Deciding what intervention and who to partner with, requires a more detailed joint review of the current needs and implementation issues than was possible during this Strategic Review.

Recommendation 5: DFAT should make available the evidence-based learning from ongoing operational research (such as Hamutuk in Manufahi), applied research (such as TOMAK's nutrition-sensitive agriculture innovations) and emerging lessons from any future multi-sectoral programming across a municipality. ***Support should also be provided for progressive rollout of 'proven' approaches to the other two municipalities in which KONSSANTIL have selected vulnerable suco. The extent of support will depend on available resourcing and KONSSANTIL's progress, interest and capacity in the vulnerable suco initiative.***

In pursuit of more ambitious nutritional status outcomes with joint accountability...

Recommendation 6: Assuming a more converged multi-sector approach with an increased focus on nutrition-specific interventions, ***DFAT should consider the inclusion of more specific nutritional status outcomes for their converged Nutrition Strategy, and systematically monitor and report on them.*** These could include committing to the GoTL's SDG 2.2 targets, which are that by 2025, Timor-Leste will achieve:

- a 40% reduction in stunting in children aged under 5 years
- less than 5% wasting prevalence in children aged under 5 years
- a 30% reduction in low birthweight; and
- a 50% reduction in anaemia in WRA aged 15-49 years

DFAT should work with KONSSANTIL to estimate the achievable percentage reduction in the selected convergence municipality within an agreed timeframe. Other medium-term, intermediate outcomes relating to aspects of behaviour change across sectors and workforce capacity outcomes (for example) would also need to be progressively developed under each sector.

...action should be consolidated under a single, programmatic strategic framework which amalgamates results...

Recommendation 7: Given the near-complete amalgamation of nutrition-related initiatives and sectors under the flagship PHD and TOMAK programs, development of an overarching Nutrition Strategy which captures the synergies of both programs and reports on outcomes of a converged nutrition program in the selected municipality should be considered. This would require agreement between the respective managing contractors, and would need to take into account resource implications. This strategy would seek to achieve and report on the nutritional status outcomes in **Recommendation 6**.

Once an overarching nutrition strategy for a converged municipal program is developed, DFAT should consider the need for an Embassy-wide nutrition strategy. The need for such a strategy and the type of outcomes it could expect to achieve will be dependent on the extent to which DFAT finances and implements *additional nutrition-related* activities beyond PHD and TOMAK's program (for example, the nationwide roll out of nutrition-specific interventions in **Recommendation 4**, and the support to national KONSSANTIL strengthening in **Recommendation 8** below). If these broader recommendations are actioned, an Embassy-wide nutrition strategy would also need to be developed to articulate and capture expected outcomes.

...with a strong capacity development focus.

Recommendation 8: DFAT should focus on strengthening KONSSANTIL at both the national and sub-national levels.

At the sub-national level, DFAT under GoTL leadership should focus on strengthening KONSSANTIL to effectively plan, implement and monitor a converged, multi-sectoral program in the selected convergence municipality.

National-level KONSSANTIL should be seen as a key driver of this process. National-level KONSSANTIL would have an oversight role with implementation being the responsibility of sub-national KONSSANTIL. Encouraging practical, joint sectoral planning at sub-national

level will offer lessons for strengthening both municipal and national planning approaches. Potentially national-level KONSSANTIL can then support other municipal KONSSANTIL to undertake planning.

At the national level, DFAT, under GoTL leadership and in close consultation with other stakeholders, should focus on strengthening the capacity of national-level KONSSANTIL to carry out its mandate. This would require a strategic capacity review of KONSSANTIL against the extensive expectations of its current role and purpose and the fundamental barriers it faces in fulfilling them. It would also take into consideration the priorities of the new government and the support other donors provide. The capacity review could also consider the benefits of elevating KONSSANTIL institutionally to empower its coordination capacity, and resourcing a dedicated secretariat. Other areas for support could include strengthening capacity in broader strategic, inter-ministerial planning; nutrition budgeting / finance planning; ongoing advocacy to keep nutrition on the national agenda; the development of a common results framework to facilitate tracking of progress against SDGs; and advocacy for policy changes (including, for example, addressing overweight and obesity rates, and the regulation of breastmilk substitute formula usage).

In summary, this Strategic Review of DFAT's Nutrition Program addressed key questions about the relevance of DFAT's existing initiatives to the current context and development priorities in Timor-Leste, and whether DFAT has the right objectives and strategy in place to achieve them. The review findings have led to eight recommendations from the Review team for DFAT's consideration.





DESIGN

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Acknowledgements

This Review was commissioned by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Timor-Leste, and overseen by a Steering Committee. The views included in the report do not necessarily reflect the views of DFAT. M&E House (Buka Hatene) in Timor-Leste developed and managed the Review, and provided quality assurance reviews for this report. M&E House is funded by DFAT in Timor-Leste, and implemented by GHD Pty Ltd in association with Clear Horizon Pty Ltd. Helen Moriarty led the independent Review team; Professor Ian Damton-Hill AO provided expert nutritional advice, and Agustinho Caet provided guidance and support. Ms Moriarty and Professor Damton-Hill are the authors of this report. A full report is available on request or online.

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