

Project Summary

Food Security Program Timor-Leste



School students at the school garden in Malata tending to their crop of bok choy



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Country Context

Timor-Leste is a very young country, having only been internationally recognised as an independent nation in May 2002. This followed over 400 years of Portuguese colonization and 24 years of Indonesian occupation. Timor-Leste has a high unemployment rate, and approximately half of the population is illiterate. Approximately 40% of the population is below the age of 15 and the country's median age is 20 with a total population of around 1.3 million. The country faces the challenge of building a strong democracy and vibrant economy against a background of developing its institutions. The young demographic provides both a challenge and an opportunity for this developing nation.

The main languages spoken are Portuguese, Bahasa Indonesia, English and Tetum. There are also other local languages widely spoken. This linguistic diversity is reflected in the country's constitution which designates Portuguese and Tetum as official languages and English and Bahasa Indonesia as working languages.

Project Summary

The main objective of the project is to support and empower community members to lead the implementation of projects aimed at improving agricultural development and food security.

Based on their community consultations, Jesuit Social Services Timor-Leste (JSS-TL) has identified four priority interventions:

1. Capacity building through training and information sessions on agriculture and nutrition, and exchange programs with other communities;
2. Reforestation through tree planting;
3. Strengthening of existing school gardening programs; and
4. Identifying and protecting water sources located within the communities.

The three targeted villages are Matata, Railaco Kraik, Samalate. All groups of people in these villages have been affected by severe chronic food insecurity over the years and the situation has not improved. The groups of people involved children, women, men, elderly, young people, and people with disabilities. The estimated number of total households in each village is 229 households in Matata (2016 data), 174 households in Railaco Kraik (2016 data), 360 household in Samalete (2019 data).

The garden project at Matata is having success in the second year of the project, The first year the lack of knowledge and techniques hindered the project. JRS provided a team of experts to re organise the garden, including advise on organic fertilisers and pesticides. Along with Increased community involvement, including school children, the community garden is starting to see real results. These results include using the profits from the sales of excess produce to purchase more seeds.

This project is planned to run for three (3) years from 2022 to 2025.

1. The first 12 months of the project was dedicated to shaping the project through identifying the most relevant and efficient ways to run this project, capacity building through training and information sharing, strengthening community network to support community led-project activities, and identifying and protecting (and restoring) water sources in communities.
2. The second year is focused on the implementation of programs such as a school garden, exchange program between communities, and the continuation of the tree nursery and planting, protection, and restoration of water sources in communities.

3. The third year will involve the exit and handing over the model program to the community and ensuring the community to work or function independently. The model can be implemented to different villages. In ensuring sustainability for the communities, 3-5 potential persons of any age group and gender can be selected to continue the program independently.

Conclusion

The project is still in its early stages of development. In walking the long journey towards achieving food security in Railaco, one of the JSS reiterates the importance of building relationships with the communities. “We put a lot of weight on community empowerment and community participation,” she says. “We believe that the communities are the key actors in this entire process. They should be given the opportunity to harness their local knowledge and use their creativity for the development of their own community.”

The project is still in its infancy however some of the project achievements to date include strong relationships with the communities in Samalete and Matata including close cooperation with the Chief of Village.

Budget

In 2024, the project funding requested by the Food Security Program to Jesuit Mission Australia is \$81,103 total. As there is existing donor commitment to 50% this project the Pilgrims100 commitment would be **\$40,551**. The partner budget has been converted from USD at 0.62