Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme for South and Southeast Asia (RFLP)

GCP/RAS/237/SPA

Timor-Leste
A visual guide of key baseline survey findings
About RFLP

The Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme for South and Southeast Asia (RFLP) sets out to strengthen capacity among participating small-scale fishing communities and their supporting institutions in Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam. By doing so, RFLP seeks to improve the livelihoods of fishers and their families while fostering more sustainable fisheries resources management practices.

Funded by the Kingdom of Spain, the four-year (2009 - 2013) RFLP is implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) working in close collaboration with national authorities in participating countries.

RFLP focuses on a number of key areas as follows:

- Strengthening co-management mechanisms for sustainable utilization of fishery resources
- Improving safety at sea and reducing vulnerability for fishers and communities
- Improving the quality of fishery post harvest products and market chains
- Strengthening and diversifying livelihood income opportunities for fisher families
- Facilitating better access to micro-finance services
- Sharing knowledge and lessons learned both nationally and regionally

RFLP in Timor-Leste

In Timor-Leste RFLP operates along the north coast, (including Atauro Island), the south coast and the Oecussi enclave. Amongst RFLP’s objectives in Timor-Leste are to increase information available on coastal fisheries; support Government attempts to enhance fish landing centres; improve post-harvest actions and to boost safety at sea. The National Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture (NDFA) is the main implementing agency. The RFLP Coordination Office is located in the NDFA complex in Dili.

The Timor-Leste baseline survey

The baseline survey in Timor-Leste took place from January to March 2011 and was conducted in Baucau, Dili, Bobonaro, Covalima and Oecusse districts. The survey methodology mixed qualitative and quantitative approaches including Focus Group Discussions, in-depth interviews and observations as well as household questionnaires.

The full version of the baseline survey can be downloaded from: [www.rflp.org](http://www.rflp.org)

Five surveyed districts:

1) Baucau
2) Dili
3) Bobonaro
4) Covalima
5) Oecusse

Source: wikipedia
Socio-economic background

General demographic data

**Baucau**
- **Population** (2010): 111,484
- Area (km²): 1,600
- No. of sucos (villages): 59
- Average household size (2010): 5.2
- Growth rate (% pa): 1.69

**Cova Lima**
- **Population** (2010): 53,063
- Area (km²): 1,225
- No. of sucos (villages): 30
- Average household size (2010): 5.4
- Growth rate (% pa): 2.07

**Oecusse**
- **Population** (2010): 57,616
- Area (km²): 815
- No. of sucos (villages): 18
- Average household size (2010): 4.7
- Growth rate (% pa): 2.14

**Dili**
- **Population** (2010): 234,331
- Area (km²): 372
- No. of sucos (villages): 31
- Average household size (2010): 6.7
- Growth rate (% pa): 4.8

**Bobonaro**
- **Population** (2010): 83,579
- Area (km²): 1,368
- No. of sucos (villages): 50
- Average household size (2010): 5.4
- Growth rate (% pa): 1.19

RFLP survey specific data

- Respondent households had up to 5 persons or more. This high number of individuals living in one household is a common trend in Timor-Leste coastal households and communities.

- Most respondents have attended elementary school with a small number completing high school.

- Most respondent household individuals were adults, ranging from 30 - 60 years of age. It is often the older men that perform fisheries related tasks while the women attend to domestic tasks.

- Respondent households had up to 5 persons or more. This high number of individuals living in one household is a common trend in Timor-Leste coastal households and communities.
The concepts and terminology of co-management are poorly understood by the local fisher groups.

Fisher groups mainly tend to be informal in nature with local villagers working together in fishing activities. More formal groups appear to be in place mainly as a means to receive government/NGO assistance.

*Tara bandu* - traditional knowledge

This traditional system of natural resource management exists in certain districts and protects an area from exploitative actions by specifying activities that are prohibited. *Tara bandu* is agreed amongst traditional local leaders and elders and operate as an unwritten agreement at both subdistrict and district levels.
There is generally no functioning system of customary law related to marine resource management in Timor-Leste. Very few fishers possessed knowledge on the existence of village bodies responsible for marine resources management.

Further inquiry revealed that:

> Of the identified village bodies, only 11.1% are currently active.

> Very few written regulations/agreements exist relating to the utilization of marine resources.

Conflicts between local fishers are rare. Incidents are usually related to intrusion of fishers from different communities, destructive fishing methods and unequal harvest sharing.

There is a clear separation of gender roles with regards to fisheries related activities. Aside from general domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning and childcare, women mainly manage household finances and are more active in the selling and processing of landings.
Fishers frequently experience problems at sea but regard accidents, injury and death as part of their job although they acknowledged the impact of negligence. The perceived number of fatal accidents is low and therefore concern for safety is not a priority.

Many fishers believe that most safety equipment is overly expensive and not necessary therefore it is not a priority.

Fisheries offices are the main source of safety at sea information but access to reliable and meaningful weather forecasts is an issue declared and faced by fishers.
Most fishing is conducted close to shore and in small non-motorised boats. If larger boats and engines extend fishing range, safety at sea becomes more of an issue for fishers.

Flash lights, life buoys, and lifejackets are the three most important safety at sea items declared necessary by respondent fishers. When problems actually occur fishers mostly seek help from other fishers. This response is based on the nature of fishing close to other fishers who also mostly use small wooden non-motorised boats.
Post harvest and marketing

Most fish is unprocessed and sold fresh to traders. Sale of fish is often controlled by these traders with up to three stages of intermediaries. Little market and bargaining power is therefore in the hands of the fishers themselves.

Post harvest processing is mainly for household consumption purpose. However, post harvest activities are limited as most respondents preferred consuming fresh fish.

Icing is the main method utilized for preservation. However, ice is used by a very small number of fishers as it is expensive, with Dili being the only real source of production.

**Ice Shortage**

In Baucau - only 15% of the respondent fishers use ice. The low utilization rate of ice is mostly due to:

- Lack of local ice producers
- Production limited to small-scale
- Poor road conditions
- Long travel distances

Post harvest actions prior to selling (%)

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<th>Baucau</th>
<th>Dili</th>
<th>Covalima</th>
<th>Decusse</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not processed, sold fresh</td>
<td>76.3%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large amount is processed</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small amount is processed</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All processed before sale</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The importance of traditional knowledge

91.8% of the knowledge on how to salt fish comes from traditional sources (learning from parents). Only a small number of fishers learn post harvest skills from their neighbours or from outside training courses.

Main species landed throughout the study areas

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<tr>
<td>Snapper</td>
<td>Sardine</td>
<td>Mackerel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
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Some women have tried to make dried fish and market them in local *Laga Pasas* (market) but the products were not popular with consumers.
Many fishers declare that product quality is often poor. Training to produce higher quality goods and access to more modern processing equipment are the discussed means to improve post harvest capacity.

A variety of basic constraints are reported by most fishers including difficult physical access to market and the generally low quality of products for sale. Many also felt that inappropriate product packaging is a constraint on successful marketing.

Local markets are the most popular locations to sell products. Road side sales are also a significant means of selling post harvest products.

**Reef gleaning** to collect fish, molluscs and crabs during low tide is a popular activity. Undertaken by most coastal communities it involves both fishers and non-fishers as well as many women and children. Products are either sold or consumed fresh.
Livelihoods

Fishing is the main occupation. Much of it is conducted along the coast within 2 km in reef areas and occasionally further offshore. December-February and July-August are the months with least fishing efforts depending on the district/subdistrict.

Fishers generally fished every day in groups of 2-3 for periods of 6-12 hours with hook-and-line the most common fishing method used by the respondent fishers.

Larger, motorised boats with better equipment increase the fishers’ range and catch capacity. While many types of marine life are harvested including squid, prawns, crabs, snails and oysters, fish is the primary target with sardines and snapper being the main species caught and sold.

Farming and husbandry are the most common means of livelihood diversification declared by fishers. The mentioned alternatives are often agriculture/food related.
Monthly incomes range from less than $100 to over $600 but most earn between $100 - $300. About half of the respondent fishers also gain income from other sources such as seaweed farming.

- **60%** earn between 100-300 USD
- **11%** earn less than 100 USD
- **5%** earn over 600 USD

Many fishers purchased/owned fishing vessels, indicating the high importance of fishing for families.

Inadequate fishing gear and non-motorised vessels are the major constraints for small-scale fishers to earn greater income. Lack of market support, marketing access and low education levels were other constraints that limit earning more.

Fishers often discussed climate change and the perceived impact it was having on seasons. This was making the planning of fishing more and more uncertain. These changes in coastal resources, locations of fishing grounds and fishing periods have created uncertainties in coastal livelihoods.
Micro-finance

Financial institutions exist but are not well known and very few fishers use existing savings and loan services from financial institutions. An NGO, Moris Rasik, was the best known financial service provider.

**Borrowing**

The main barriers to fishers borrowing from formal institutions were not understanding the application process, high interest rates and fear of being unable to repay loans. Consequently, most fishers preferred to borrow from family or friends.

**Saving**

Aside from lacking money, fishers do not save with existing financial institutions because they are unaware of the service, with many fishers fearing that savings at financial institutions are not safe.
Fishers are generally very keen to access micro-credit services for capital (boats, engine, gear) and for working capital (for daily operations both in fishing and in other jobs such as farming) as well as for children’s education and for daily expenses.

Saving on a month to month basis is the most common means for fisher households. Most of the savings would be spent on fishing-related expenditures, perceived as the main need for financial assistance.

Women utilise micro-credit services more readily. Arisan was revealed to be a particular popular means of informally accessing credit for housewives.

Arisan: the fixed lottery

Arisan is a social gathering where a group of friends and relatives meet monthly for a ‘private lottery’. Each member in the group deposits a fixed amount of money into a pot, then a name is drawn and that winner takes home the cash. After having won, the winner’s name is removed from the pot until each member has won and then the cycle is complete. Arisan is fair to all participants where each member wins an equal amount over the cycle and no interest is charged.
This publication has been made with the financial support of the Spanish Agency of International Cooperation for Development (AECID) through an FAO trust-fund project, the Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (RFLP) for South and Southeast Asia - GCP/RAS/237/SPA. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the opinion of AECID, FAO or RFLP.

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