



# National agrifood systems and COVID-19 in Timor-Leste

## Effects, policy responses, and long-term implications

This country profile covers responses and effects up to end of August 2020

### INTRODUCTION

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The COVID-19 pandemic has put significant pressure on health systems all around the world. The drastic measures established to contain its spread are creating serious impediments to economic activity (including agrifood systems) and, consequently, to livelihoods and food security and nutrition.

The COVID-19 outbreak demonstrates both how health and food systems are linked to one another, and how local food systems are linked to global systems. High rates of urbanization and the globalization of trade and travel have contributed to the spread of the virus across countries. Lockdowns and movement restrictions within countries and across borders have disrupted national and local food and agricultural output and input markets and have caused sharp reductions in overall economic activity globally. In poorer countries, disruptions have further exacerbated the fragility of systems (including agrifood systems) and livelihoods.

The Global Report on Food Crises 2020 found that 135 million people in 55 countries and territories are facing acute food insecurity at “crisis” level or higher – a situation that requires urgent action. The report further concluded that over 183 million people were experiencing a “stressed” level of acute food insecurity and bore a high risk of sliding into a “crisis” level if confronted by with additional shocks (FSIN, 2020). The situation is particularly worrisome in light of the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the situation evolves, the question arises as to how, or whether, food, health and financial and economic systems could become better prepared to prevent similar outbreaks from escalating into a full-blown economic and social crisis.

This report is part of a series of country profiles that describe: (i) policy measures enacted by governments to contain the spread of the virus; (ii) policies and measures to stabilize the functioning of agri-food systems; (iii) potential effects of policies on agri-food systems and vulnerable groups. Finally, the profiles also assess longer-term options for agri-food system policies and investments so as to make them more resilient.

## POLICY MEASURES TO CONTAIN COVID-19

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### What major measures have been taken to contain the spread of the virus? How are they evolving?

A state of emergency was declared on 27 March 2020 by decree of the President of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste and extended until 26 June 2020. Initial sanitary and control measures included the following:

- physical distancing, including a restriction on gatherings of more than five people; cancellation of social, cultural, religious and sports events; and the compulsory isolation of people with COVID-19 symptoms;
- no public transportation; stay-at-home messages broadcast to the entire population;
- specific measures applied to supermarkets, shops and businesses (e.g. physical distancing, hand-washing stations, face masks);
- suspension of universities, training activities and schools (including school feeding programmes);
- border closed to all citizens except for those working on oil extraction platforms and involved in the transportation of food and medical supply items.

Most of the measures in place under the state of emergency were enforced. Only essential government, United Nations, international non-governmental organization (INGO) and private sector staff were allowed to work during the initial phase of the state of emergency; non-essential staff were required to stay at home. Essential services include health and emergency transportation, security and defense, civil protection, water and sanitation, production and distribution of electricity, air and maritime traffic control.

As of 27 July 2020, there had been 24 confirmed cases and no deaths from COVID-19 (WHO, 2020). Compared to many countries, Timor-Leste has so far avoided the worst of the pandemic.

Food and agriculture-related services were not considered essential during the state of emergency. The imposition of travel and transport restrictions is probably the measure that had the greatest short-term impact on agriculture and food security.

A rapid food security assessment conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) in May, with support from several INGOs, indicated that most households were aware of COVID-19 prevention measures. Ninety-nine percent of respondents had received information on COVID-19 and 97 percent felt that the information had helped them to understand and prepare for the pandemic. The top three sources of information cited were television (71 percent), community leaders (54 percent) and radio (52 percent). Ninety-nine percent of respondents reported washing their hands regularly to keep their household safe from the virus; 76 percent reported wearing a mask and 76 percent confirmed that they employed physical distancing (MAF, 2020a).

Starting on May 26, the government removed most restrictions, retaining only those related to travel across borders. There were some exceptions, however all individuals permitted to enter or leave the country were (and still are) subject to mandatory health controls. The transport of imported goods has continued and local markets reopened on 26 May. Some measures remain in force: mouth and nose protective masks must be worn at all times; hands must be cleaned before entering facilities; everyone must remain at least a metre and a half distant from each other (The Government of Timor-Leste, 2020a).

The municipal administrations are responsible for enforcing the measures pertaining to local markets. On 26 May, the markets reopened – either fully or partially – in all municipalities.

National transport channels and logistical arrangements for agricultural and food products are now open and functioning normally. Only Oecusse, a coastal exclave in the western part of the island of Timor (both a municipality and a special administrative region) is still affected by the impact of shipping price and measures for goods delivery because of its special status, administrative and geographically isolated situation.

The government established a high-level task force to formulate policy and programmatic responses by the end of August with the aim to:

- continue, adapt and accelerate administrative reforms around the crisis;
- prioritize actions for economic recovery;
- build resilience to future economic, climatic or health crises.

## **AGRIFOOD POLICY MEASURES TO RESPOND TO THE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS**

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### **What are the major measures (in place or expected) to be enacted aiming at the food system directly?**

**Timor-Leste is a food deficit country, where up to 70 percent of the rice consumption needs are met through imports.** In the context of COVID-19, the main concern has been to guarantee the supply of imported rice and other staple foods amid concerns that the global food supply would be strained or limited. In March, the government announced that there were no remaining food stocks in the National Logistic Center (CLN) warehouse. All stocks had been distributed to flood victims on 13 March 2020, prior to the declaration of the state of emergency.

On 14 April, the importers reported a total stock of 8 000 tonnes of rice, down from 47 000 tonnes a month previously. Stockpiling of food at the household level and trader/merchant levels could explain the rapid drop in food stocks. To put the numbers in perspective, 47 000 tonnes of rice represents between 35-50 percent of Timor-Leste's annual commercial import requirement.

**Commercial and government negotiations for further rice supplies continued throughout the crisis.** The government decided to import 30 000 tonnes of rice from Vietnam via the National Logistic Center (NLC) at a cost of USD 15 million.<sup>1</sup> As of 29 July, the distribution of the imported rice, which is equivalent to +/- three months of national demand, has yet to be defined; the rice is likely to be preserved in the national reserve.<sup>2</sup>

Data recorded by the Ministry of Finance show that the private sector imported 30 226 tonnes of rice from January through May, mainly from Vietnam (including 21 000 tonnes in May alone), which is consistent imports during a normal year. In total, approximately 70 000 tonnes of rice were imported during the first two quarters of 2020 (WFP, 2020). This data seems to indicate a certain level of resilience among Timorese rice importers, as well as their extreme dependency on a single supplier. If the ban on exports from Vietnam had been extended, Timor-Leste probably would have experienced a serious national shortage of rice. As it turned out, the ban lasted only a month and was lifted on 1 May.

The World Food Programme's (WFP) Aviation Global Passenger Air Services, authorized by Timor-Leste, launched its chartered flights linking Dili to Kuala Lumpur in June. These flights

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<sup>1</sup> Vietnam, a traditional supplier of rice to Timor-Leste, announced export quotas (400 000 tonnes) for the months of April and May but these were lifted on 1 May 2020 so the impact was minimal.

<sup>2</sup> Importing such large quantities of staple foods brings with some challenges, especially related to the national capacity to handle significant staple food stocks given earlier uncontrolled pest outbreaks in national logistic centre/retailer warehouses (e.g. the khapra beetle in 2019).

ensure that humanitarian workers, development partners and medical personnel are not restricted by commercial transport closures and can rapidly reach the most affected areas in full compliance with public health procedures.

A food security task force, led by the MAF, was established under the government's Integrated Crisis Centre. In April, MAF received USD 2.4 million in COVID-19 funding, which was mainly dedicated to supporting smallholders, who are a large majority of Timorese farmers. The funding aimed to:

- provide seeds, fuel and machinery maintenance for 6 500 ha of maize and 4 200 ha of rice;
- provide fuel and heavy equipment to ensure the functioning of key irrigation schemes;
- provide seedlings for horticulture;
- extend the cultivation of beans and potatoes;
- provide fish feed for aquaculture and small tools for fishermen;
- support livestock vaccination campaigns.

A second transfer to the MAF of USD 2.5 million was approved in August for the maintenance of irrigation schemes with: i) high production potential; ii) the capacity to be irrigated during two seasons; and iii) sufficient technical, material and organizational capacity of farmers.

Although relatively small, the total additional budget allocated to the MAF as a response to the COVID-19 crisis is 28 percent higher than the MAF budget originally proposed for 2020 (MoF, 2020).

## **2.b. What policy measures are in place or expected that aim to mitigate the effect of the crisis on vulnerable groups and their livelihoods?**

The government's immediate priority, beside COVID-19 containment, has been the social protection of vulnerable groups.

On 20 April, the government approved a stimulus package of USD 250 million (16.7 percent more than the annual state budget) to mitigate economic and financial risks.<sup>3</sup> The package included: i) monthly cash transfers for three months to at least 214 000 households, which were selected based on income;<sup>4</sup> ii) wage subsidies (60 percent of the wage cost) for formal sector employees; iii) the purchase of a three-month emergency supply of rice (beneficiaries and distribution modalities have not yet been defined); iv) the maintenance of transportation channels for essential goods and medical/emergency goods; v) waving the payment of electricity bills (USD 15 per month), water bills and social security contributions; vi) the provision of stipends to over 4 200 Timorese students studying overseas. The authorities also included a credit programme with reduced interest rates, credit guarantees for importers of essential goods, emergency loans to avoid bankruptcies, keep businesses open and help households resolve their financial difficulties. Other noticeable support programmes included a 60 percent wage subsidy for certain workers, including microlet and taxi drivers; micro-loans for certain businesses; and *Eskola ba Uma*, a remote learning programme for students who self-quarantine at home.

On 21 July, 299 725 households received a cash transfer from the government cash transfer programme above mentioned (more than 40 percent of the initial target), with support from the United Nations and other development partners (UN Timor-Leste, 2020). The programme

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<sup>3</sup> These funds were withdrawn from Timor-Leste's sovereign wealth fund and are managed by the Ministry of Finance.

<sup>4</sup> The programme (Government of Timor-Leste, 2020b) consisted of three monthly payment of USD 100 to households with monthly incomes up to USD 500. It was under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion and received technical support from the International Labour Organization under the UNCOVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund.

targeted households based on their level of income only (not on their activity or livelihoods); there has been no specific credit or financial package arranged for smallholder farmers or labourers in the informal sector.

In the face of school closings, no measures were taken to compensate for the disruption of the school feeding programme. Nor have there been any nutrition interventions specific to the COVID-19 context. However, UNICEF included breastfeeding and complementary feeding messages to the government cash transfer. These messages reached 93 percent of households benefiting from the programme (UN Timor-Leste, 2020). The Ministry of Health's Community Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) programme ran out of therapeutic food stocks prior to the pandemic (and largely has not been operational throughout the crisis).

Other interventions undertaken to mitigate the immediate impact of the pandemic on food security and diets include:

- The distribution of healthy and locally sourced food baskets: A USD 1 million grant from the Asian Development Bank and the Government of Japan, managed by UNDP, was designed to reach 25 000 households in the most vulnerable areas of five districts.
- Two-month emergency food assistance provided to 60 households in the Cova Lima municipality by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO): maize and beans were locally procured and imported rice and oil were procured from local shops.

## IMMEDIATE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS ON MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND THE AGRIFOOD SYSTEM

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### What are the immediate effects of the crisis and the different sets of measures on agrifood systems?

The effects of the pandemic on people and institutions are compounded by pre-existing conditions, including multi-dimensional poverty, inequalities, food insecurity, malnutrition, poor health, limited water and sanitation infrastructure and services, low education levels, limited social safety nets, unequal access to information and high levels of domestic violence. With the return of migrant workers from Dili and abroad<sup>5</sup>, the livelihoods of vulnerable households that relied on remittances has already been negatively affected.

According to the latest data, the 2017-2019 prevalence of undernourishment was 30.9 percent (FAO, 2019). The 2015-2017 average dietary energy supply adequacy was 102 percent (FAO, 2017), indicating that the national food supply, if equally distributed, could provide just enough dietary energy to meet aggregate population needs. However, given unequal calorie distribution, income reduction due to the economic crisis, and the disruption of agrifood supply chain due to transport restrictions, the prevalence of undernourishment in the short (and possibly medium term) is likely to increase.

The IPC (Integrated food security Phase Classification),<sup>6</sup> which was conducted for the first time in 2018 indicated that 36 percent of the population was moderately to severely food insecure prior to the crisis. The IPC also highlighted the high vulnerability of the Timorese population to shocks,

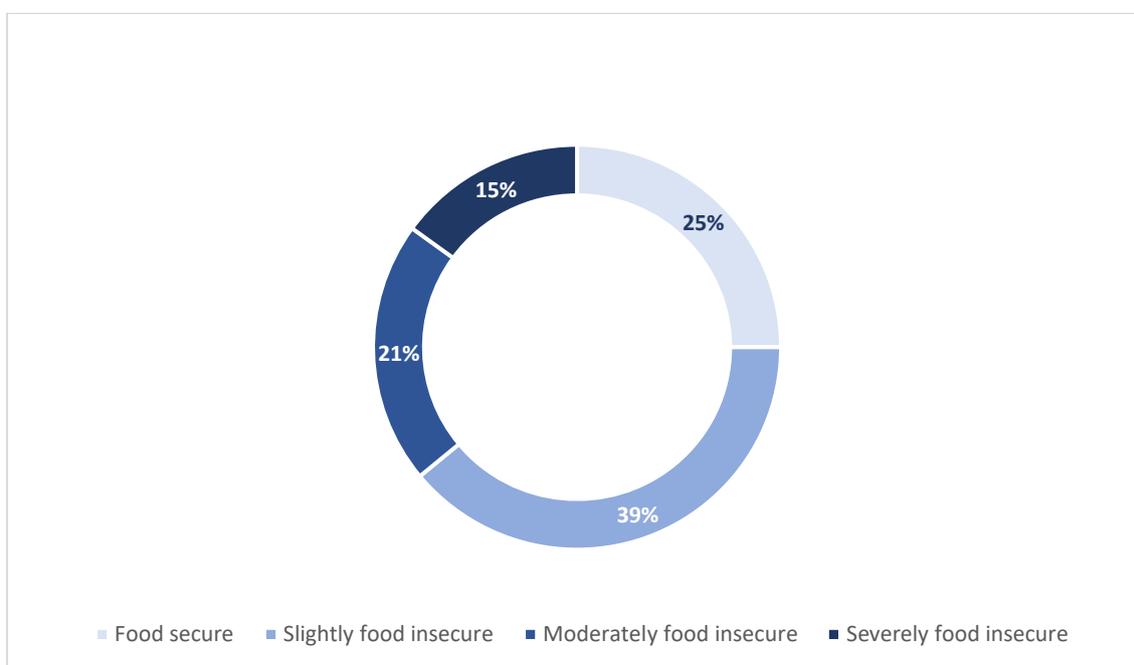
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<sup>5</sup> Several reports and surveys mentioned in the following sections reported significant numbers of people returning to rural areas from Dili and abroad.

<sup>6</sup> The IPC provides a standardized scale integrating food security, nutrition, and livelihood information to produce a clear statement regarding the nature and severity of food insecurity, as well as implications for potential strategic responses to periods of food crisis.

and recommended improvements in the following areas: i) livelihoods and economic empowerment in rural areas; ii) food availability and diversity through climate-smart agricultural practices and sustainable and nutrition-sensitive food systems; iii) basic infrastructure; iv) human capital; v) agriculture, rural statistics and food security monitoring system; and vi) financial services (MAF, 2020b).

#### INTEGRATED FOOD SECURITY PHASE CLASIFICATION PRIOR TO THE CRISIS



In Timor-Leste, rates of undernutrition in children under five years (both boys and girls) and women of reproductive age exceed the acceptable WHO cut-off values in both urban and rural areas, in all municipalities. In addition, only 13 percent of children (ages 6-24 months) have a minimum acceptable diet, the lowest rate in Southeast Asia. The disruption to agrifood value chains, health services and income that has been caused by the COVID-19 crisis is expected to affect a broad range of people, starting with the most vulnerable.

With support from the World Food Programme (WFP), the prices of food and non-food items have been monitored since 4 May and there have been no significant variations due to the COVID-19 crisis. However, there have been several reports of food shortages (including of staple foods, fruits and vegetables) and food waste, mainly at the farm level where farmers were unable to access markets due to travel restrictions. It is possible that these reductions in availability were compensated by reductions in demand due to a drop in incomes, thus leaving prices fairly stable.

In April, FAO conducted two rounds of assessment in 21 *sucos* (villages), which yielded some interesting findings concerning the short-term impact of the crisis on local agrifood supply chains and the livelihoods of rural people (FAO, 2020):

- 15 out of 21 *chefes de suco* (elected village leaders) reported that a significant number of villagers returned from urban centers to the rural *sucos* following the declaration of the state of emergency.
- 18 out of 21 *chefes de suco* perceived that the restriction of movement had a negative impact on farmers' access to markets and resulted in the loss of agriculture products at the farm level (mostly fruits, vegetables and corn).

- 19 out of 21 chefes de suco reported concerns about the effect of market disruption on access to food.
- According to the chefes de suco, the villagers' coping strategies included eating less food, selling animals and productive assets and borrowing from neighbors and kiosks. On the positive side, they reported an increased production and consumption of local food products.
- All chefes de suco emphasized that, in addition to food, assistance packages should include support for agriculture activities (e.g. horticulture seeds, fertilizers, mechanization – pre and post-harvest – as well as sanitary equipment (such as soap).

### Households in Mape Suco, Cova Lima District

According to the chefe de suco in Mape, an estimated 50 out of 59 households experienced extreme difficulties as a result of the pandemic. Normally reliant on small trade activities in four sucos (Suai, Bobonaro, Atsabe and Maliana), households found themselves unable to access sufficient food during the two weeks prior to the survey due to the closure of local markets. As the situation was expected to deteriorate further, The chefe called for an evaluation and urgent support (FAO, 2020).

The rapid food security assessment conducted by the MAF in May, with support from several INGOs, provided additional data; these are generally consistent with other studies, revealing an accumulation of vulnerabilities:<sup>7</sup>

- **Households are experiencing food insecurity during what is normally the most food secure time of the year.** More than 40 percent of the households interviewed for the study are already engaging in coping strategies, which limit the amount of food they eat at least once a week.
- **Household food security has been impacted by COVID-19.** Eighty-one percent of households reported that restrictions around COVID-19 had affected their food and income sources. In 75 percent of households, more than one food and income source had been affected. Fifty percent of respondents had experienced food shortages in shops and markets and 35 percent reported shortages of non-food items due to COVID-19.
- **Livestock levels have dropped dramatically in the last 12 months.** Eighty-two percent of respondents reported that they had been affected by African swine fever.
- **Agriculture shocks are widespread.** Eighty-eight percent of households have been impacted by livestock disease (including African swine fever), 77 percent of households have been impacted by crop pests (including the fall armyworm), and 73 percent of households have been impacted by unseasonal or erratic rain.
- **Affected households are struggling to recover.** Between 42 percent and 69 percent of respondents rated the impact of the top three shocks to agriculture (livestock disease, crop pests, and unseasonal/erratic rainfall) as either 'strong' or the 'worst that had ever happened.' Between 35 percent and 51 percent of these households said that they have 'not at all' or only 'partially' recovered from these shocks.

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<sup>7</sup> The results of this assessment should be considered with care because respondents were chosen using an intentional sampling approach, inducing a potential bias.

- **Rural households are absorbing more people.** Fourteen percent of the surveyed households increased by an average of 3.2 members during the two months preceding the survey due to in-migration which also meant a drop in remittance income.
- **Eight percent of households had their remittances from Timor-Leste affected and 6 percent from overseas.**
- **Reliable access to water** – particularly in rural communities – will be a serious issue for domestic consumption and other livelihood activities during the impending dry season and will also pose a significant challenge to basic sanitation and hygiene, including continued hand washing.

The Asia Foundation’s COVID-19 survey, also conducted in May, reported that 70 percent of households interviewed had cut meal sizes or skipped a meal in the past 30 days because they did not have enough money for food. Seventy-nine percent of the households receiving financial support from the government used it primarily to purchase food (Asia Foundation, 2020).

### Which groups are most likely to be severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated measures?

Timor-Leste’s health system is fragile, poverty levels remain high and unequal access to services and opportunities continues to be a challenge. Thirty-six percent of the total population is chronically food-insecure (IPC, 2018); the prevalence of undernourishment is 30.9 percent, (FAO, 2019) and 46 percent of children under five years are stunted (DHS, 2016).<sup>8</sup> Rural communities, women, early adolescent girls and boys, children under five and people with disabilities are the most vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization. Such vulnerabilities are exacerbated by the health and non-health impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Smallholder farmers, labourers in the informal sector and people employed in small and medium enterprises are known to be particularly vulnerable to economic shocks. These groups have not benefited from any specific credit or financial package and are thus expected to be disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Mobile populations and migrants are also disproportionately vulnerable to the direct and indirect impact of the crisis. COVID-19 transmission potential will increase due to their living and working conditions and the barriers they face in accessing the health system.

While no significant increase in local food prices has been observed so far, any future increase would affect the food security of vulnerable urban households, who primarily rely on markets for their food (unlike rural households who mostly produce their food). Some households will run out of coping strategies (such as the sale of assets) to deal with the effects of disruptions.

Several aspects need further investigation in order to fully assess the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on agrifood systems and on the most vulnerable groups in particular:

- The impact of migration (including internal) on income and remittances. The increase in the size of rural household due to the COVID-19 crisis has already been documented but an analysis of trends in the short- and medium-term would be useful to inform policy response.
- The impact of the downscaling the main food markets in Dili (due to movement restrictions), which has resulted in a temporary loss of employment for thousands of urban-dwelling poor people;

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<sup>8</sup> Due to data quality issues, the 2016 DHS anthropometry data for children should be viewed with caution.

- The impact of domestic violence, sexual exploitation and abuse as a result of lockdown and containment measures, and loss of livelihood and educational opportunities for women.<sup>9</sup>

## FOOD FOR REFLECTION: LONG-TERM POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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**This section serves to initiate thinking and dialogue on the longer-term implications of COVID-19 in terms of management of the food system to prevent a health crisis and that a health crisis turns into a food security and nutrition emergency.**

High poverty levels, food insecurity and malnutrition, the very low resilience of agricultural systems, significant dependence on food imports, and little diversification of the economy, which relies almost exclusively on revenues from oil and remittance, have exacerbated the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis in Timor-Leste. In the meantime, Timor-Leste has also experienced political shifts with the recent change of party alliances in Parliament and the appointment of eight new ministers. Of major concern are the long-lasting impacts of the state of emergency and strategies for economic recovery.

It is too early to predict how food systems will evolve in the short- to medium-term but the issue of food sovereignty is likely to be put higher on the policy dialogue agenda, based on new evidence and lessons learned at the national as well as global level. The COVID-19 crisis has revealed some weaknesses in the Timorese food system, exposing an urgent need to tackle the root causes of food insecurity. The fact that official negotiations with Cambodia immediately followed the ban on rice exports by Viet Nam illustrates the willingness of the Timorese government to secure and diversify its options for importing staple foods. The government has already begun to increase its investments in strengthening local agricultural production.

The fall in international oil prices has had a significant impact on Timor-Leste, which relies heavily on oil revenues, further emphasizing the need to diversify the national economy.

There are also signs that resilience to climate, health and economic shocks will be prioritized in the framework of the economic recovery plan. The nomination of the Minister of Social Protection as Deputy Prime Minister on 24 June may also indicate the government's willingness to put more emphasis on social protection and to reform important programmes that may provide significant long-term support to the most vulnerable groups.

Disparities between regions in terms of food accessibility and availability and the important role played by subnational stakeholders during the crisis may accelerate the decentralization process and give more weight to territorial approaches and local agrifood value chains. Municipal authorities took very different approaches to containment and mitigation measures and, as a consequence, the impact of the crisis on agrifood systems is expected to vary significantly by municipality.

There has already been government discussion at all levels on the link between the health crisis and the food shortages generated by the COVID-19 with the result that the adoption of a powerful strategy linking human, animal and environmental health may be accelerated. Likewise, the crisis may be an opportunity to give new priority to food safety and the control of zoonotic diseases and plant pests.

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<sup>9</sup> UN Women in partnership with Rede Feto (July 2020) will explore how women in the informal sector (market vendors, weavers, domestic workers and caregivers) have been affected by the crisis, how they have benefitted from the cash transfer and what they need from future economic recovery measures.

In Timor-Leste, the crisis shone a light on the potential of the private sector and civil society to play a role in the policy dialogue, as well as to formulate priorities and take actions around governance and economic recovery. It is too early to know how the relative roles of private, public and non-governmental actors will evolve over time, but the increasing pressure on the government to better protect the population against food crises and economic shocks is an opportunity to foster a broader-based response.

The government and, to a certain extent Timorese society have confirmed their capacity to quickly react to an emergency, adopt evidence-based recommendations and allocate a significant budget to social protection. This is an important precedent that will certainly be referenced in the future when opportunities arise to enact consensual social measures in the context of transformational strategies, especially in relation to food systems. The COVID-19 crisis can thus play a catalytic role in accelerating the transformation of agrifood systems in Timor-Leste. In the short- to medium-term, this may take the form of a transition to green value chains, the diversification of rural livelihoods, universal access to basic services (including water, sanitation and hygiene), enhanced agricultural practices (e.g. adapted mechanization, nutrition-sensitive agriculture, sustainable plant and livestock protection), and a strong and integrated health strategy. Many people and organizations from the civil society and the private and public sectors are already calling for such a transition and are ready to invest.

## INFORMATION AND GOVERNANCE

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The COVID-19 crisis highlighted some interesting political economy trends. For example, the National Council for Food Security, Sovereignty and Nutrition (KONSSANTIL) which is in theory the the highest level coordinating body established to guide the national multisectoral food and nutrition security initiatives, including in times of emergency was not mobilized during the crisis. High level, multi sector and multi stakeholder coordination and decision-making was overseen by the Prime Minister's office. The prominent role of decentralized authorities was made evident by the decision of certain municipal administrators to impose bans on food exports to other municipalities. The role and involvement of civil society in the high level coordination mechanisms must be acknowledged. Finally, the pandemic occurred in the middle of a political crisis and has triggered a national, nonpolitical call for unity, at least initially.

A range of stakeholders continue to reflect on the government's policy response and to assess the impact of the crisis. The upcoming budget discussion will be interesting to follow in this regard.

It is important to recognize that the United Nations mobilized USD 17.6 million to support the government's COVID-19 response. In addition, over USD 2.2 million worth of reprogramming was approved, thanks to the flexibility and quick response of the country's development partners.

The crisis highlighted the critical lack of socio-economic data and surveillance systems (including on food security and nutrition) and a limited capacity to collect such data in remote areas of the country. Several surveys and initiatives have begun to assess the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in Timor-Leste and others will follow:

- April 2020: FAO conducted two agriculture and food security assessments with 21 local leaders (chefes de suco) in six municipalities around five themes: i) population movements in/out; ii) farmers' access to market; iii) impact on agriculture production; iv) concerns about food access. and v) preferred response options.
- May 2020: A rapid food security assessment was led by MAF with support from several INGOs.

- July 2020: A socio-economic impact assessment was undertaken by the Ministry of Finance (MoF) with support from UNDP.
- May 2020: An exercise in food price monitoring was undertaken by MAF and MoF with support from WFP.
- May 2020: A Timor-Leste COVID-19 Survey was led by Asia Foundation.
- May and July 2020: A rapid market resilience assessment was led by MAF with support from Mercy Corps, Oxfam and WFP.

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