Cost and affordability of nutritious diets informs design of social protection programmes in response to COVID-19 in Timor-Leste.

December 2020

Mr Filipe Da Costa
Coordinator for Civil Society Affairs and Special Representative of the Prime Minister’s Office for Food Security and Nutrition
High-level Political Focal Point to the SUN Movement.
Context:

Despite achievements in recent years, high prevalence of malnutrition

- 50.9% Chronic Malnutrition (stunting)
- 40% Anaemia prevalence among women
- Only 28% of infants and young children have diets that meet minimum diversity.

Supportive Policy Environment for Nutrition

- Well represented across multi-sectoral policies.
- Government working to translate policy into tangible actions.
- **Results used to advocate for consideration of nutritious diet access in COVID response.**
Current diets for breastfed Infants and Young Children are **Nutritionally inadequate; Non-diverse**, based mainly on **starchy staples**.

*Estimated proportion of total food quantities, based on qualitative data.*
Modelled **Nutritious Diets** would require a greater diversity and quality of foods to meet nutrient needs. *This would cost more.*

* Proportion of total food quantities, based on Cost of the Diet Analysis

- Breastmilk: 38%
- Grains, Roots, Tubers: 27%
- Vit A-rich F + V: 5%
- Legumes/nuts: 23%
- Flesh foods: 3%
- Other F+V: 4%
Nutritious household diets meeting energy, protein and micronutrient needs would cost 3-5 times more than diets meeting energy needs only.
Is a nutritious diet affordable? Diet costs compared to household food budget.
Almost **all households** could afford the **energy only diet**, yet only **1 in 4** could afford a **nutritious diet**.

![Bar chart showing the percentage of households that can afford each modeled diet in different municipalities.](chart-url)

- **Baucau**: 100% energy only, 37% nutritious diet
- **Bobonaro**: 95% energy only, 21% nutritious diet
- **Dili**: 97% energy only, 18% nutritious diet
- **Ermera**: 94% energy only, 21% nutritious diet
- **Manufahi**: 100% energy only, 28% nutritious diet
- **Oecusse**: 95% energy only, 15% nutritious diet

*Fill the Nutrient Gap 2019*
Many nutritious foods available at markets

Yet diets are poor and non-diverse

Physical access, production, reliance on imports and behaviour also contribute.

Affordable for only 1 in 4 households

Nutritious diets would cost ~$177 per month
Evidence suggests that diet cost and affordability has been negatively impacted by COVID-19.

- Closure or limitations to markets, food stocks and agricultural supplies especially during lockdowns.
- Transport challenging and access to markets limited by movement restrictions.
- Prices of foods, especially fresh foods impacted, especially in the capital.
- Change in buying patterns, reduced demand.
- Strains on businesses; 3% closed, 44% operating at reduced capacity, 94% affected financially; implications for reduced staff incomes/employment.
- Food expenditure likely affected by reduced/lost incomes or uncertainty about the future.

Highly likely that the proportion of households unable to afford a nutritious diet increased over the past six months.

Consumer Price Index 2020
Market Resilience Assessment, June 2020
Timor-Leste Government Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic have included:

**Short-term:**
- Establishment of a universal cash subsidy.
- Introduction of food baskets for vulnerable households.
- Ongoing provision of existing social-protection measures.

**Long-term:**
- Village-level social development grants and social credits for small business development.
- Establishment of national minimum wage.
- Economic stimulus and service provision via national budgets for basic education, water and sanitation infrastructure.
Cost and Affordability of Nutritious Diets Findings applied to:

- Demonstrate **high cost of meeting nutrient needs**, especially for **nutritionally vulnerable target groups**.
- Demonstrate the need for a **tailored approach** across municipalities, based on food availability and costs.
- Advocate for **consideration of nutrition** in the design of food baskets and decisions on cash transfer amounts.
- Advocate for **targeting** of cash subsidy to reach **nutritionally vulnerable households**.
- Encourage the use of **vouchers for nutritious, locally-produced foods**, to improve access to and build demand for nutritious diets and provide income for smallholders.
Achievements to date:

• Nutrition has been a key consideration during the design of cash transfer and food basket interventions.
• Option of providing fresh, nutritious foods as part of transfer is firmly on the national agenda.
• Stakeholders currently discussing possibility of procuring fresh, nutritious foods from local farmers for food baskets.

Other achievements:

• Increase in school feeding budget and pilot of fresh, local food procurement.
• Government commitment to introduce locally produced, fortified rice into programmes.

Advocacy for nutritious diet access is ongoing by multiple partners.
Acknowledgements:
Thank You