

CARE Australia ‘HATUTAN’ Proposal to stop malnutrition in Timor-Leste

Malnutrition has an adverse effect on children’s cognitive development and working memory – the ability to remember information for short periods of time. Working memory is a critical cognitive function for learning: when reading a sentence, we need to remember it from beginning to end to understand its meaning. Students with limited working memory typically struggle to learn to read and understand written text.

Timor-Leste, one of the world’s newest countries, has made substantial progress in recent years in reducing malnutrition, but there is still progress to make. By 2020, 47% of the children under five were stunted, with 32% underweight.

CARE is breaking the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition and persistent hunger in Timor-

Leste by enabling access to resources and knowledge so people can produce, sell, and buy healthy food. The HATUTAN program seeks to improve literacy outcomes, health, and nutrition and dietary practices for primary schoolchildren in three municipalities of Timor-Leste (Manatuto, Oecusse and Ainaro).

Since 2019, the HATUTAN program has collaborated with the Government and schools in Timor-Leste to improve student reading and health practices at home and school. HATUTAN’s success demonstrates the positive impact of regular school meals throughout the school year with improved student attendance and attentiveness; improved scores for reading and cognitive abilities, and increased parent participation at schools.

The need for support

Adelina is a devoted mother of four, living in a rural part of Timor-Leste’s Manatuto municipality. She has always felt a strong sense of responsibility to contribute to her neighbours’ wellbeing. For her, the rise of malnutrition amongst the local children is the most pressing concern.

In many rural areas, where schools often face underfunding and a lack of resources, parents like Adelina play a crucial role in ensuring children receive nutritious meals that support their learning and growth.

Families have to choose between harvesting their vegetables to feed their families or selling them at the market for income. Many decide to sell their food, which Adelina sees as a missed opportunity. “When children don’t eat the right food, it affects their experience at school,” she says. “They lose the will to study, and they are always tired and sleepy in the classroom.”



“ [HATUTAN] is a collective effort to ensure children receive the right nutrients while at school. Now, parents contribute fresh produce to the program as well. [HATUTAN is] helping us create real change in the lives of our children and families.”

HATUTAN program

Malnutrition has an adverse effect on children's cognitive development. In Timor-Leste, the HATUTAN program is reducing malnutrition by providing nutritious meals to school children in 449 remote and rural areas. The HATUTAN program currently supports the delivery of food for school meals to over 70,000 children in the municipalities with the highest rates of malnutrition in the country (Oecusse, Ermera, and Ainaro) during the lean season of the year.

How you can help schoolchildren like Florentina to thrive at school and in their communities

HATUTAN will support 165,535 students (50% girls) through improved literacy, nutrition, health, hygiene, and gender outcomes over the next five years. CARE Australia supports the work of HATUTAN and other programs in Timor-Leste, such as the Lafaek literacy program.



Data driven impact: protein in school meals



Literacy

Reading skills: In Oecusse, the percentage of second-grade students able to read increased from 2% to 27%.

Classroom Reading Corners: 76.6% of schools now have at least one reading corner, with Oecusse jumping from 0% to 40%.

Reading at Home: Over 90% of schools have a book lending system, up from 74.5%.

Teacher Attendance: In Oecusse, teacher attendance improved from 64.6% to 83.2%, the highest increase among municipalities.

HATUTAN Geographic Location



Location	Impact	CARE Staff
1. Ermera	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 151 schools (school feeding support); 84 schools full package support- 87 VSLA	36 CARE staff
2. Oecusse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 90 schools (school feeding support); 47 schools full package support- 12 Village Savings and Loans (plus VSLAs of LNGOs)	24 CARE staff
3. Ainaro	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 100 schools (school feeding support); 55 schools full package support- 14 farmers/groups 195 members (84M, 111F)- 54 Village Savings and Loans	25 CARE staff
4. Dili		33 CARE Staff

How you can help

Our details for making a tax-deductible donation via bank transfer are:

Account Name CARE Australia Project Fund
Bank name Westpac
Branch Dickson
BSB 032730
Account No 254738
Reference: TimorLeste

We will be happy to keep you updated on our work in Timor-Leste and to provide you with a tax receipt. Please get in touch with Saffura on saffura@care.org.au for further information.

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