

# Extending integrated analysis for improved food system outcomes in Timor-Leste and the Pacific region



## Key details

### Location

Kiribati, Timor-Leste

### Duration

**Start** Oct 2023

**End** Sep 2026

### Budget

AUD 2,500,000

### Commissioned organisation

University of Wollongong

### Partners

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation; International Centre for Living Aquatic Resources Management; Ministry of Environment, Lands & Agriculture Development; National Council for Sovereignty, Food Security and Nutrition in Timor-Leste; Pacific Community; University of Sydney; University of Wollongong

### Project Leader

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### ACIAR Research Program Manager

Dr Todd Sanderson

### Program

Social Systems

### Project code

FIS/2022/121

## Overview

This project aims to support healthy, resilient, and equitable food systems in Timor-Leste and the Pacific. It will extend place-based, multi-scale responses to food system challenges developed through ACIAR project [FIS/2018/155](#) by strengthening the Pacific Community's (SPC) integrated data systems, supporting coherent and coordinated national and subnational food systems policy, and highlighting the important role of different formal and informal food environments.

This research focuses on addressing information gaps across nationally representative data, building coherent

food system governance, and understanding the role of different food environments for food and nutrition security. It also focuses on improving food system outcomes for women, girls, and marginalised groups.

Food systems in many small island developing states, including Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and Timor-Leste, largely fail to provide people with healthy diets. Micronutrient deficiency and undernutrition rates are chronic, particularly for women and children. Where data are available, stunting prevalence rates in children average 20% in Pacific Island Countries and more than 50% in Timor-Leste. At the same time, many Pacific Island Countries are experiencing the triple burden of malnutrition, the coexistence of under-nutrition, over-nutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. Non-communicable diseases are now the leading cause of death in most Pacific small island developing states, with diet a key attributable factor. While Timor-Leste's obesity prevalence is lower than the regional average, the country is not progressing towards achieving diet-related non-communicable disease targets.

Progress toward addressing these challenges through improved diets is often slowed by ongoing political and economic instability, global shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and natural disasters, which are increasing in frequency due to climate change.

An informed understanding of national food systems is required to underpin policies that explicitly embed food system interconnections and that are integrated across sectors to enable and empower governments, businesses and communities to solve food systems problems in a coherent way. Food systems operate across multiple levels, and understanding interactions between and across global, national and local levels is critical. Yet, national and local food system data remains largely inadequate for accounting for food system complexity in policy development.

Therefore, the development challenge is to better understand how national food systems in small island developing states evolve and the implications of changes for food and nutrition security and environmental, economic, and social sustainability.

## Activities

- Enabling informed policy-making and evidence-based reporting on food system challenges through integrated data analysis.
- Supporting effective multi-sectoral food systems governance, building on successes in national policy innovation, coordination and implementation, and community governance.
- Developing and validating tools to highlight the influence of different food environments in diverse local contexts and identify how healthy food environments can be actively strengthened.
- Defining key lessons learned through integrating diverse data sets to inform action on food system challenges in different contexts and scales, particularly for communities vulnerable to malnutrition and food insecurity.



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