

MEDIA RELEASE

Media are welcome to attend

Embargo: 9am 13 August 2018

NUTRITION-SENSITIVE AGRICULTURE IN TIMOR-LESTE

Nutritive-sensitive agriculture approaches seek to maximise the contribution of agriculture to improved nutrition outcomes for farming families, and have much to offer in countries with serious under-nutrition. TOMAK, a program supported by the Australian Government in Timor-Leste, is applying a variety of strategies, with a particular focus on women and their infants, for systemic and sustainable change.

This program will be the focus of a case study presented by Annie Major, Senior Manager, Adam Smith International, Asia Pacific at *“Reshaping Agriculture for Better Nutrition: The Agriculture, Food, Nutrition, Health Nexus”*, the 2018 Crawford Fund annual conference in Canberra on 13-14 August. Ms Major will join other international and Australian specialists to consider how to reshape agriculture to address the increasingly urgent and competing needs of the hungry and the over-nourished, and the finite resources of our environment.

“In Timor-Leste, 40% of rural households are living below the poverty line, and many of these households are engaged in subsistence agriculture. Stunting of children is a particular problem with 46% of children under 5 stunted. A range of strategies is needed to maximise the contribution of agriculture to improved nutrition outcomes,” said Ms Major, who brings experience from Timor Leste, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

“TOMAK (To’os Ba Moris Di’ak/Farming for Prosperity), works to increase the consumption of nutritious foods with a particular focus on women and young children. The program works with and through partners who have long standing relationships in the communities where we are working, a vital network to underpin systemic and sustainable change.”

“A contributing factor to malnutrition in Timor Leste is a lack of access to and consumption of nutritious food at the local level,” she said.

“On the supply side, TOMAK aims to improve year-round access to nutritious foods, particularly for women and children, by strengthening knowledge and skills and promoting gender equitable decision-making in households. TOMAK is also influencing demand for nutritious food at the household level through social behaviour change communication, such as engaging families around deep rooted cultural beliefs on food and feeding practices,” said Ms Major.

She explained that TOMAK partners have started exploring a range of nutrition-sensitive approaches including kitchen gardens, perma-gardens and fish farming. The program is also supporting the government’s village-based agricultural extension service to be trained in nutrition-sensitive agriculture, in order to provide ongoing support to rural families.