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2007 Parliamentary Elections

“Defending Timor-Leste’s independence”

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FRETILIN government’s main agricultural achievements

Increased rice yields, construction of grain silos and rehabilitation of agricultural schools are among many achievements of the first FRETILIN government in agriculture and fisheries in Timor Leste (East Timor).

Francisco Benevides, current Minister for Agriculture and parliamentary candidate, said today the FRETILIN government has succeeded in establishing an institutional framework to manage the country’s agriculture, forestry and fisheries since the restoration of independence in 2002.

Benevides listed the following achievements of the Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:

1. Increased rice production from an average 1.5 tonnes per hectare to 2.2 tonnes per hectare. The Ministry has also launched the Integrated Crops Management program which is designed to raise productivity from 2.2 to 3.5 tonnes per hectare. The program is mainly being run in Bobonaro district west of Dili and Baucau district east of Dili and involves 172 farmers. If successful it will be implemented all over the country.
2. Introduction of new varieties of crops, such as rice and maize, to diversify food crops and increase food production.
3. Reduction of imported rice needed to feed the population from two thirds to one third of domestic consumption.
4. Introduction of the Community Development Fund under which each of the 442 sucos (administrative level) will receive USD \$10,000 for community development programs. The total cost of the Community Development Fund is just under USD\$4.7 million. The FRETILIN government is now looking at continuing this program for the next five years.
5. Creation of a comprehensive national food security policy and the building of 212 silos to improve food security. The Ministry also disseminates information to farmers about optimal times to plant crops so as to maximize production.
6. Creation of medium term and long term policy and strategy for the Ministry.
7. The capacity in several areas for double cropping, as compared to only one harvest a year during the Indonesian occupation. These areas are in Manufahi district south of Dili, Manatuto district east of Dili and Bobonaro district.
8. Rehabilitation and reforestation of sandalwood plantations following over-exploitation during the Indonesian occupation. Sandalwood quality in Timor-Leste is ranked amongst the best in the world and the FRETILIN government has taken measures to ensure this valuable renewable product is developed properly and sustainably.
9. Regeneration of coffee plantations following mismanagement during the Indonesian occupation. The Ministry has also planted new coffee plantations in coffee growing regions throughout the country.
10. Establishment of a legal framework for fishing, including restrictions and a licensing framework. The Ministry has granted four fishing licenses to private businesses and will in the next few years invite more businesses, including foreign businesses to invest in Timor-Leste. The Ministry is now looking at

setting a cap on the number of licenses it will grant which will take into consideration the Ministry's stated desire for sustainable development of its maritime resources.

11. Rehabilitation of three agricultural schools in Maliana in Bobonaro district, Natabora in Manatuto district and Fuloro in Lautem district east of Dili. The schools teach a three year course on agriculture equivalent to secondary education, to 600 students. The agricultural schools in Natabora and Maliana are managed by the Ministry, whilst the school in Fuloro is managed by the Catholic Church. A national curriculum is being developed with assistance from the governments of Germany, Brazil, USA and Portugal. The Ministry is now looking at offering tertiary education in areas such as agribusiness and animal husbandry.
12. The Ministry has rehabilitated or set up community based irrigation schemes and medium scale irrigation schemes covering respectively 12,672 ha and 13,202 ha. In relation to large scale irrigation schemes, the Ministry has rehabilitated irrigation in Carau Ulun, Manufahi district covering 1,030 ha and is next year planning to rehabilitate several large scale irrigation schemes in Viqueque district east of Dili. The ministry has also funded small scale community based irrigation systems throughout Timor-Leste.
13. Construction of a water harvest in Acrema, Atauro island off the coast of Dili to increase the availability of water on the island.
14. Annual vaccination of livestock, including 300,000 buffalo, 2.7 million poultry and 300,000 pigs.
15. Development of policies governing use of pesticides, land use, seeds, fertilizer, quarantine and fisheries.
16. A real focus on developing sustainable practices and policies.
17. Development of the coconut oil and candle nut oil industries to prepare these products for export. Last year Timor-Leste exported 100,000 litres of candlenut oil to global markets.
18. A focus on capacity building within the Ministry. The Ministry has sent students to Australia to complete courses in agribusiness, forestry management and geographical information systems. It has also entered into a memorandum of understanding with two Indonesian universities, the Agricultural Institute, Bogor and Brawijaya University, to send students to complete their undergraduate and postgraduate courses.
19. Real commitment to research and development with the establishment of four research stations in the districts of Manufahi, Aileu south of Dili, Baucau and Bobonaro. The stations currently focus on adaptive tests for different varieties of crops. As a result of the tests, the Ministry has released different varieties of crops of maize, peanut, rice and sweet potato.
20. Implementation of a marine resource survey along the coast five miles from the beach, from Dili to Jaco Island, the most eastern tip of Timor-Leste. The study is carried out in conjunction with Charles Darwin University, James Cook University, Australian Marine Science and the Australian National University. In the next financial year, the Ministry is planning to do same study along the coast from Dili to the border with West Timor, along the coast of Atauro Island and along the coast of the enclave district of Oecussi which is located in West Timor.

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