

# La'o Hamutuk

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Dili, 6 July 2020

**To: His Excellency Coordinator of the Economic Recovery Commission,  
Dr. Rui Gomes and his team**

**Regarding: Suggestions and recommendations from La'o Hamutuk**

For two decades, La'o Hamutuk has supported Timor-Leste's development process through monitoring, analyzing and evidence-based advocacy grounded in our people's reality, and also worked to help the public understand and participate in policy processes in Timor-Leste. For years, we have urged Timor-Leste to move in a strong and sustainable economic direction, which actively involves the population and uses our nation's limited resources for the citizens who need them most.

To begin, we thank Dr. Rui Gomes and his team for meeting with and listening to civil society. Through this letter, we would like to underline what we said during the meeting. Once again, we would like to emphasize that petroleum reserves will not sustain our Nation's economy and security for the long term, and events in today's world have made the global economy unpredictable. People have to live in the real world. Therefore, we suggest cancelling petroleum projects, including Greater Sunrise and Tasi Mane, and concentrating on human resources, using our finances, time, and focused energy to organize productive sectors which will improve people's lives.

Although most of our people – 66% according to the agriculture census – live from farming and food production, politicians consider that agriculture has less value than other professions. For the future, we need to value, encourage and support the important mission that our farmers provide.

Until today, Timor-Leste has not made appropriate efforts to address endemic poverty, malnutrition and to fix sanitation within the country. Many efforts come with project models or emergency models, but don't offer long-term solutions to these problems. For the longer term, we need serious and consistent effort investment in productive sectors, especially agriculture which is key to resolving food shortages and malnutrition.

In the agriculture sector, we could begin to reorganize and reallocate extension workers in each suco and aldeia, and organize farmers so that they can produce in more sustainable ways. Extension workers also need better training about the nutritional value of various foods, which can help farmers understand the nutrition from their produce. This can help families reduce food insecurity and malnutrition.

Through this process, we also need to re-orient the work of international agencies in the agriculture sector, to implement programs which don't make farmers depend on funding from donors or the government, or to abandon their principal productive role. We also need to collaborate more closely with universities, so they can assign students to stay with groups of

farmers to share scientific knowledge about agricultural production, while at the same time learning from the farmers' wisdom.

We also suggest organizing progressive experts to help farmers' conditions and to help them mobilize, working with them every day, to advance sustainable production. Timor-Leste should begin to develop processing industries in various sectors, sustainable and based on reality, to begin to establish pathways for food processing, to provide for people and meet the demands of the local market.

We also suggest that the Government invest strongly in water and sanitation to help improve people's lives, as well as for farming and animals. Investment in water should avoid practices which merely extract water from the soil without thinking about conservation, or using it more sustainably. The State could organize all available resources to ensure water as a fundamental human right. We reject water "solutions" which involve privatization or commercialization, which, as many nations have learned, create other problems.

We also suggest to organize available resources to build an appropriate, relevant and sustainable education system. We need to strengthen the curriculum we already have, to support students' capacity in both official languages. We need to continue to train teachers, prepare new teachers, improve basic school infrastructure (including water and sanitation), start libraries and laboratories to help students advance themselves, especially in science and technology. Teachers' and students' learning processes should be oriented toward our society's realities, adapting appropriate science and technology for this nation's present and future realities.

We also suggest to mobilize available resources to invest in health, organize our doctors better, use skilled leaders and improve the capacity to manage human and organizational resources to provide hospital care, medication, and other facilities. This can save our people and reduce their risk of dying. Purchase equipment to detect illness, as well as for operations and cures so that we can provide treatment within the country, rather than spending a lot of money to send patients abroad for services we could organize to provide here.

We also suggest to strengthen the health agencies which work on prevention, and for them to collaborate with education, water, sanitation and agriculture to promote public education and campaigns about how local, organic food and better nutrition and water can prevent disease.

We hope that the Government will adopt these recommendations, which we all believe are good for Timor-Leste's people, and will help our people quickly rise above difficulties, eliminating poverty and hardships.

This is La'o Hamutuk's contribution to the efforts which you lead; we continue to be available for discussion and collaboration.

Two blue ink signatures are written in a cursive style. The first signature on the left is shorter and more compact, while the second signature on the right is longer and more elaborate, with a prominent flourish at the end.

Marta da Silva and Adilsonio da Costa Junior  
Coordination Team