Project Background

East Timor is a small (19,000 km sq.), lightly populated (750,000), mountainous country that occupies about half of the island of Timor, 300 km. north of Australia at latitude 8-10 degrees south. Per capita income was around US$450, before independence and is estimated at approximately half that now. The economy is predominantly agricultural, with 90% of the population living in rural areas, where they work as subsistence or small-scale farmers of rice, corn, vegetable gardens, tree crops, and livestock. On August 30, 1999, a majority of the people of East Timor voted for independence from Indonesia. That decision unleashed widespread violence by anti-independence supporters, and in succeeding weeks many people were killed, many (perhaps 150,000) were forcibly moved to West Timor, the majority of houses were burned, and there was widespread looting.

The proposed Agriculture Rehabilitation Project (ARP) is an emergency recovery project, which aims at achieving the following two objectives:

- Improving food security of selected poor households; and
- Increasing agricultural production in selected project areas and promoting rural growth.

News this month

On 11 August 2000, a meeting was held with NGO’s. The objective was to explain the project and how they might be involved with the project. Each unit head presented its component and spelt out where the assistance of the NGO’s might be needed in order to implement the activities. It was a very fruitful meeting, which provoked a lot of debate. Specific outcomes of the meetings were:

- Component heads should design terms of reference for the activities they would like NGO’s to assist in the implementation; and,
- It was agreed that monthly meetings with NGO’s would be held in order to update them on project activities implementation progress.

Following the completion of the NGO’s meeting, the District Agricultural Officers were also invited to attend a meeting on August 16, in order for project staff to explain the project to them. As usual, each unit head explained in detail the activities to be implemented in the component. While the Agricultural Officers were upbeat on assuring the implementation of the project at the district level, they expressed lack of transportation facilities as a major hindrance to work. The following points were agreed:

- District Officers will assist the Social Team which is currently visiting the districts in order to select the list of beneficiaries; and,
- A monthly meeting will be held with District Agricultural Officers in order to update the Project Management Unit (PMU) with progress in project activities and implementation in their districts.

Update of components' activities

1. Priority Productive Asset Restoration

During the month, major activities in this area included field visits by the Social Team. The objective was aimed at selecting project beneficiaries. The Team held meetings with Agricultural Officers, Chef de Suco, Church leaders, NGO’s and other notables in the Districts. At the meetings, the Team explained their mission, selection process, method and preparation of lists of beneficiaries for the distribution of assets (buffaloes, Bali Cattle, chickens, and hand tools). The following districts were visited: Manufahi, Baucau, Manatuto, Viqueque, Lautem, Ermera, Liquica.

Another activity was the selection of appropriate tools for vaccination and contacts with companies to supply the equipment.

2. Irrigation/Rural Infrastructure Rehabilitation and Maintenance
Key activities undertaken by the irrigation/rural infrastructure rehabilitation and maintenance component were:

- Development of terms of reference for both local and international consultants;
- Selection of SNC Lavalin International Company to conduct the irrigation feasibilities studies; and,
- Interviewing of candidates to fill the positions in the irrigation component. The list of successful candidates for the positions will be informed on September 1, 2000.


3. Pilot Agricultural Services Centers (PASC)

After spending some time to develop the components’ strategies on how to go about the selection of the sites for the establishment of the Centers, the PASC team began field visits. The objectives of the field visits were to:

- explain the project to district community leaders; and,
- discuss with the leaders the conditions/criteria that would be used to determine where the Centers would be established.

Three Center sites have so far been identified (Lautem, Dili and Bobonaro)

4. Project Management Unit (PMU)

The Director of the PMU Mr. Serge Verniau has been on annual leave and in his absence, Mr. Peter Achuonjei, served in his place as Acting Director. Major activities of the PMU were centered on:

- finalization of the Subsidiary Agreement so that the Conditions of Effectiveness of the project could be met. It involved heavy communication with the World Bank and, finally, the project was declared effective;
- weekly meetings with project staff to discuss progress and upcoming activities' implementation plan of action; and,
- attending meetings for the rehabilitation of the Fomento building (future premises of the Agricultural Division and ARP) so that the project should have a conducive work space for the staff. Financial Management

The Senior Financial Specialist has not yet been recruited. The candidate has, however, been identified and efforts are being made to bring the candidate as quickly as possible on board.

Procurement

The Senior Procurement Specialist (SPS) Mr. Art. Capellan arrived on August 25 to resume his post. On arrival, he was introduced to project staff and the Division of Agriculture. He immediately began work and has been putting together a procurement plan for the purchase of project equipment. He has also held meetings with the budget staff in order to acquaint himself with UNTAET’s procurement and disbursement procedures.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Senior Operations, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist (SOMES) Peter Achuonjei was quite busy. Despite the time-consuming administrative duties of acting director of PMU, the following were achieved:

- a post workshop meeting was held with project staff to review and remind each staff of the indicator monitoring plan that was established during the workshop;
- completed the workshop evaluation report;
- designed a brochure for the project;
- designed a newsletter for the project;
- recruited a counterpart Mr. Fernando dos Santos;
- finalized a baseline survey to be completed by a random sample of project beneficiaries. It has also been translated in Tetun and Bahasa languages.

Up-Coming Activities

- Field visits for the Social Team continued;
- Procurement of project equipment;
- Field visits by SOMES; and,
- PASC stakeholders' meeting is scheduled for Baucau and Viqueque on September 12 and 13 2000 respectively.

Announcements

- Resumption of duty by PMU director on September 6, 2000; and,
- Submission of monthly progress reports by components to SOMES, starting in September 2000.