



SCHOOL DROPOUT PREVENTION PILOT PROGRAM

PRESS STATEMENT

Launch of the SDPP Program in Timor-Leste

DILI, TIMOR-LESTE – The School Dropout Prevention Pilot Program (SDPP) will be officially launched on October 23, 2012, at the Bazartete Primary School in Liquiça. Minister of Education Bendito Freitas will attend the ceremony, along with U.S. Ambassador Judith Fergin, USAID Mission Director Rick Scott, and other senior government representatives. This marks the official kick-off of school-based activities to reduce dropout rates among students in grades 4, 5 and 6 in five districts of Timor-Leste. The SDPP Program is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and builds on the history of education collaboration between Timor-Leste's Ministry of Education and the U.S. Government.

Children leaving school too early is a major challenge to reaching the objective of education for all in many countries, including Timor-Leste. SDPP is part of USAID's global campaign to increase enrollment and ensure that every child receives a basic education. This SDPP pilot program is underway in four countries: Timor-Leste, Cambodia, Tajikistan and India.

The Ministry of Education's Strategic Plan for 2011-2030 aims to increase student retention in basic education. Although more children are enrolling in primary school, many drop out before completing basic education. SDPP is finding ways to reduce dropout rates in primary and secondary school in Timor-Leste. SDPP will design, implement and assess the effectiveness of interventions to prevent dropout in grades and areas where the problem is most acute.

Ministry of Education data indicate that the highest rates of school dropout occur during grades 4, 5 and 6. Five districts with some of the country's highest dropout rates are participating in this pilot program: Bobonaro, Ermera, Liquica, Manatuto and Viqueque. Working with the Ministry of Education, SDPP has analyzed the factors that affect dropout in grades 4, 5 and 6, and developed school-level interventions to address them and will measure the success of those interventions. In the future, successful strategies from the program can help prevent children from leaving school throughout Timor-Leste and across the region.

"President Barack Obama has often said that education is the gateway to opportunity." said U.S. Ambassador Judith Fergin. "This pilot program supports the Government of Timor-Leste's goal of ensuring that all children receive the education that will open the gateways to opportunity for them. By addressing the reasons why children drop out of school, the School Dropout Prevention Program will touch the lives of more than 10,000 girls and boys in nearly 100 schools across the country. The children who stay in school will have the opportunity to become the teachers, doctors, nurses, builders, market farmers, police officers, civil society



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activists, journalists, and businesspeople of their communities. The United States is proud to support the Government and people of Timor-Leste in building this nation's future through children's education."

"The School Dropout Prevention Pilot Program can help us reach the goal of giving every child a basic education," said USAID Timor-Leste Mission Director Rick Scott. "To get that education, every child must stay in school. This program is helping us find out why children stop going to school and how we can reduce the dropout rate. Today's students are tomorrow's leaders - we need well-educated leaders to face the challenges of the future."

After analyzing the factors that contribute to student dropout, SDPP presented the findings during a consultative workshop chaired by the Director General of Basic Education and attended by Ministry of Education representatives, district education officials, education specialists and development partners engaged in the education sector. Drawing on evidence provided by these studies, international best practice and experience in Timor-Leste, the participants proposed an intervention to respond directly to the Timorese context and conditions: an Early Warning and Response System to identify and work with at-risk students and extracurricular activities.

A total of 191 schools in five districts are participating in the program. Teachers and school officials in 97 schools will implement an Early Warning and Response System and provide extracurricular activities to increase school attractiveness. Already, 430 teachers and school directors have attended workshops to learn to implement the program in their schools. "Stay in School" Community Groups have been established to support teachers to follow up on cases of truancy and to raise community awareness to prevent dropout in each target school. Throughout the school year, schools will closely monitor the students' attendance, grades, and behavior, and strengthen partnerships with parents and community members to enable them to better support their children to succeed and stay in school. SDPP will compare dropout rates with the 94 'control' schools that will not have the SDPP interventions to determine the most effective strategies to keep students in school.

The USAID SDPP Program is implemented through a partnership between the Ministry of Education, Creative Associates International and CARE International in Timor-Leste. Implementation plans and strategies are being closely monitored by The Country Coordination Body will monitor SDPP work closely. This body is chaired by the Ministry of Education and includes Ministry senior staff, district education officers, representatives from national and international organizations and institutions with recognized education expertise.



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The SDPP Program is one of the many assistance projects in Timor-Leste provided by the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). USAID's partnership with Timor-Leste supports education, health, economic growth and democracy and governance.

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