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### **Strengthening Disaster Risk Reduction policies in Timor-Leste**

Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Humanitarian Action are vital priorities for the World Health Organization and Governments throughout South East Asia. Between 2001 and 2010, 46% of all deaths due to disasters worldwide occurred in the 11 countries of WHO's South-East Asia Region. In order to assess disaster risk reduction and emergency humanitarian action capacity in Timor-Leste, a series of national and district workshops are being carried out between July 15<sup>th</sup> and July 19<sup>th</sup> 2013.

The workshops, supported by WHO, were conducted at a time when the Government was responding to extensive floods in Covalima and Viqueque, which killed three people, displaced thousands, destroyed crops, roads and bridges. The recent disaster highlights the urgent need to strengthen Disaster Risk Reduction plans and emergency response mechanisms in Timor-Leste.

WHO South East Asia Regional Office is presently conducting assessments in all 11 member countries to analyze capacity in the areas of legal framework, coordination mechanisms, disaster preparedness and emergency plans for health sectors, human resources, emergency finance, community response plans and early warning systems. Once the benchmark assessments have been carried out, WHO SEARO will examine the possibility of implementing joint programmes for DRR development between countries and identify how to support coordination and collaboration within the region should an emergency or disaster occur.



Participants present recommendations during Benchmark Assessment workshop

The first 'National Benchmark Assessment for the Disaster Management Program in the Health Sector' took place in Delta Nova Conference Centre, Dili on July 15<sup>th</sup>. Participants from Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Solidarity, World Health Organization, NGO's and academic institutions took part. This was followed by three regional workshops in district health service headquarters in Baucau, Covalima and Aileu to gather further evidence and field observations for the assessment. A second national workshop was held in Dili on July 19<sup>th</sup> to compile the information and propose follow up actions.

A team of three experts, led by Dr Sri Henni, the Chief of the Center for Health Crises Management, Ministry of Health Indonesia, travelled to Timor-Leste to share lessons learned from Indonesia's experience of natural disasters risk reduction and crisis management. Dr. Henni explained that, "this workshop is not just for Timor-Leste. It is for the South East Asian Region because we know that now every emergency, every disaster could come from anywhere. Timor-Leste is one of our border countries and that's why we need to know the benchmark results so we can develop the collaboration between the two countries. Indonesia and Timor-Leste can do better when we work together on the risk factors and hazards we are facing."



**Dr Sri Henni, Chief of the Centre for Health Crises Management, Indonesia addresses the participants during the Benchmark Assessments workshop**

The benefit of learning from Indonesian experience and future collaboration cannot be underestimated. Between 2004 and 2010 there were 2260 emergencies and disasters in Indonesia including volcanoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, social conflict and flooding. Over 237,000 people died, almost 930,000 were injured and 4.9 million people were internally displaced. The Center for Health Crises Management has extensive knowledge and experience in emergency risk management and in 2012 it became a WHO Collaborating Centre for Training and Research in Disaster Risk Reduction. Indonesia also conducted their own benchmark assessment recently, so the team of experts was able to provide support to the Ministry of Health and WHO Country Office Timor-Leste during the assessment process. This collaboration between the two countries will serve to strengthen and build the capacity of their respective Disaster Risk Reduction Programmes for Health Sectors in future.

As recent events demonstrated, Timor-Leste is most at risk from flooding with significant threats also posed from drought, landslides, earthquakes and social conflict. With the adverse effects of climate change being experienced worldwide, it is certain that communities in Timor-Leste will face increased risks from natural hazards and disasters in future. It is hoped that through the WHO SEARO benchmark assessment process, collaboration between countries can be bolstered, national disaster preparedness and response systems can be strengthened and the risks to people's health and lives can be reduced.



**Participants from Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Solidarity, WHO, academic institutions, Dr. Sri Henni, Dr Imron Crises Health Management Centre Indonesia and Mr Gde Yuliam Yogadhita, WHO Indonesia**