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Global Hunger Index misrepresents progress in Timor-Leste

The Global Hunger Index [GHI] released on Monday prompted the news headline broadcast via Reuters that “Burundi, Eritrea, East Timor top global hunger index.”

Complete with its diagram of “Winners and Losers” the index is one of many rankings compiled on developing countries presenting as authoritative sources on development progress. Apart from its questionable scores and rankings, what is most alarming about the 2014 GHI is that it represents a scenario that Timor-Leste is failing to make progress. This trend, shown by the country score rising from 25.7 in 2005 to 29.8 in 2014, is contradicted by available data, including data that the authors of the GHI claim to use.

In countries, such as Timor-Leste, where challenges are considerable, steady progress should be celebrated and used to motivate even more achievement. Misrepresentation is potentially demoralizing and destabilizing.

In all three components of the Global Hunger Index, undernourishment, child underweight and child mortality Timor-Leste has made steady progress in recent years.

In the first GHI component, the proportion of under nourished people as a percentage of the population, the authors claim to use figures from the 2014 UN Food and Agriculture Organization. Whilst these are not supported by conclusive data, what they do show is improvement with a steady decrease from 34% in 2005-2007 to 28.8% in 2012-2014. How the GHI authors can claim 38.3% for the period 2011-2013 is a mystery.

The second GHI component is “child underweight”, a considerable challenge being addressed in Timor-Leste on many fronts with positive outcomes. Reliable data from the 2007 TLSLS, 2009-2010 DHS and the 2013 Food and Nutrition Survey supported by UNICEF show levels steadily dropping from 48.6% to 44.7% and now to 37.7%.



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In the area of child mortality Timor-Leste has achieved a remarkable reduction in the under-five mortality rate from 125 per 1,000 live births in 2002 to 64 per 1,000 as reported in the 2009-2010 DHS. Although there is still much to be done this progress is something Timor-Leste should be proud of.

Spokesperson for the Government, Minister Agio Pereira, noted that “the GHI is not accurately representing what is happening in Timor-Leste and undermines the hard work being done by Timorese and international partners to improve conditions. We hope that other g7+ countries have been more accurately measured. The data in fact shows that we **are** making steady progress against formidable challenges. The Government continues to welcome contributions that are helpful and useful to our efforts to lift the quality of life of the citizens of Timor-Leste”. **ENDS**



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