

Speech delivered by Patrizia DiGiovanni, UNICEF Country Representative
Launching of the Implementation of the Operational Research on
Assessing the Effect of the Simplified and Optimised Integrated
Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) in Timor-Leste
(9 December 2025 | UNTL)

Excellencies,
H. E. Vice Minister of Health,
Rector of UNTL,
Distinguished colleagues from Government and academia,
Investigators and research partners,
INSP-TL team,
CEMUBAC colleagues,
Representatives from the Ministry of Health – especially the Nutrition Directorate,
Our supervisors and 75 dedicated enumerators,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is a great honour for UNICEF to join you today for the official launch of this important operational research on *Assessing the Effect of the Simplified and Optimised Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition in Timor-Leste*. Today, we celebrate not only the start of a study, but the strengthening of a national commitment: commitment to evidence, to innovation, and to the wellbeing of every child.

Acute malnutrition remains one of the most urgent public health challenges in Timor-Leste. Every child affected is a child whose future is at risk either dying from it or remaining stunted. Yet what unites us here today is hope; hope anchored in the power of research, the strength of partnerships, and the dedication of those working every day to protect children's health.

The simplified and optimised approach for Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) has the potential to transform how wasting is identified, treated, and prevented.

This research demonstrates Timor-Leste's leadership in embracing innovative solutions to resolve nutrition problems ensuring each child needing treatment of wasting gets treatment. By undertaking this study, Timor-Leste positions itself as a pioneer in the region, demonstrating commitment to obtaining domestic and right evidence, to deliver powerful for children's results even in modest systems.

This work also reflects the remarkable collaboration among national and international partners. I would like to express UNICEF's deep appreciation to the following who have initiated and will jointly undertake the research:

- The Ministry of Health, especially the National Nutrition Directorate, for its leadership, vision, and commitment to advancing nutrition interventions.
- The Investigators and INSP-TL, whose scientific leadership and technical rigor ensure that this research meets the highest standards.
- CEMUBAC, for your expertise, collaboration, and continued support in strengthening research capacity and analytical excellence.
- UNTL, an academic institution for their capacity as co-investigator hosting this important research and for your active engagement in national research efforts.
- And to our 75 enumerators and 7 supervisors, who are the backbone of this work. Your commitment, dedication, and service to your country to collect data and conduct this research.

Your collective efforts reflect the best of what true partnership looks like; shared responsibility, shared purpose, and shared commitment to improving the lives of children.

Excellence, colleagues,

As Timor-Leste deepens its engagement within ASEAN and strengthens regional collaboration, initiatives like this showcase the country's readiness to lead with data, innovation, and evidence-based practice. The quality implementation of this operational research will not just be a national milestone; it will contribute to the global knowledge on how to effectively manage and reduce waste among children under five years.

UNICEF remains fully committed to supporting the Government of Timor-Leste in scaling up nutrition interventions, enhancing the quality of services, and ensuring that no child is left behind. Together, we can build a future where waste is rare, treatment is accessible, and every child in Timor-Leste has the chance to survive, grow, and thrive.

On behalf of UNICEF, I extend my heartfelt congratulations and appreciation to all partners involved. This launch is an important milestone: and we look forward to the valuable insights and positive change this research will bring.

Thank you, and congratulations to everyone for your dedication and hard work.