

[Timor-Leste Ministry of Finance](#)

Opening Remarks from the Minister of Finance, H.E. Rui Augusto Gomes at the 2021 Quarterly Development Partners Meeting

19 February 2021



Excellences:

Ministers, Vice-Ministers and Secretary of State.

Ambassadors and the UN Resident Coordinator.

Chiefs of Missions.

Directors-Generals.

Representatives of the Civil Society and Private Sector.

Members of the Press.

Excellences.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the first Quarterly-Development Partners' Meeting since our last meeting almost two years ago. This is a very special moment to share our views and commitments. The reason why we want to reactivate this Quarterly Meeting and make this a platform for constructive dialogue, building on the spirit and initiatives of partnership to move forward the economic recovery agenda.

Development partners have been crucial to Timor-Leste's recent history. From the birth of our Nation, the Restoration of Independence nineteen years ago, and throughout the development trajectory, the work and experience of partnerships have been significant for a country arising out of destruction and long-suffering, be it in the form of sharing knowledge and expertise, building infrastructures, providing financial resources and transferring technologies to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

On behalf of my Government, I would like to sincerely thank you for your continuous support to our development process and for assisting us in dealing with the challenges facing the country.

This is the opportunity to share your views of what makes partnership work and produce concrete results and transform people's lives.

Your presence in this auditorium is indeed a true testimony of partnership's response to our development agenda.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The year 2020 was particularly the most challenging one. After two consecutive years of negative growth, the recovery in 2019 was not enough to create productive and decent jobs, raise incomes, and reduce inequalities. The small gain in 2019 was simply erased by the application of a ten-month duodecimal regime due to rejection of the budget by Parliament and the Covid-19 pandemic which, combined, made the economy fall into a third recession just in four years.

Thankfully, Timor-Leste has, so far, been one of the countries with the lowest active cases of Covid-19 and with no fatalities.

Our success is largely due to swift Government action, including the closing of borders and the establishment of the Covid-19 Fund, as well as effective support and cooperation from our Development Partners.

Allow me to express my sincere gratitude to all the assistance that our Development Partners have provided during such a critical time.

Let me also take this opportunity to personally thank our frontline workers, nurses and doctors, as well as the security forces who have tirelessly kept our borders under control.

But, Timor-Leste will have to recover its economy and return to its growth path toward a more inclusive development, with people at the center, where no one is left behind. I believe that this can be realized, because partnerships have produced results.

In fact, in our projections, we expect to see, in this year, a rise in the contribution of the Development Partners to the non-oil GDP (gross domestic product) to 5.7%, after a significant drop of 23.4% in 2020, breaking a long term trend of this GDP component. Most of the expenditure will be allocated in health supplies, including vaccines to prevent and mitigate the impacts of Covid-19.

More detailed information on vaccines will be presented by Honorable Ambassador of Australia, Mr. Peter Roberts, who will be speaking on the Development Partners' response to Covid-19.

So, the Development Partners' contribution will certainly be important to stimulate growth of our non-oil GDP.

We all know that the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed serious vulnerabilities across many countries, and Timor-Leste is not an exception.

The arrival of Covid-19 to our land was neither contemplated by the Strategic Development Plan nor by the Program of the Government. This is the reason for the approval of the Economic Recovery Plan in August last year.

However, the Government will have to secure additional financial resources in the event of potential waves of the pandemic, whilst at the same time, trying to get its growth trajectory back on track to achieve the development agenda. This is the reason for upscaling investments in education, health, housing, water and sanitation, and productive sectors like agriculture and tourism, which are much needed.

The State Budget that was passed by 67% of the votes in Parliament and fairly soon promulgated by His Excellency the President of the Republic confirms the end of the political impasse and we hope to see a growth rate of close to 4% this year.

This year's budget is based on programs—a transition from the item-based budget, that has been in place since the Restoration of Independence. It is guided by the Economic Recovery Plan. More on the State Budget will be presented by Director-General of Planning and Budgeting, Mr. José Alexandre.

In a few minutes, we will also be sharing the progress of the Economic Recovery Plan, as well as provide an update on the Government's response to Covid-19, which Excellency Vice-Minister of Health, Dr. Bonifácio Mau Coli and Director-General Dr. Odete Viegas have agreed to present.

Also, the Commission for the Coordination and Monitoring of Institutional Reforms will be presenting their work to inform us where we stand and where we are heading to. The Commission was established in August 2020 to streamline the Government's commitment to major reforms that had begun in 2015, including reforms in the areas of state asset management, public finance management and fiscal. Dr. Fausto Gama, from the Office of the Minister of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers will make the presentation.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I came to this meeting today with a renewed conviction that together we can achieve major progress this year and beyond, because we share a vision which puts people at the center of our actions.

It is certainly important to put our attention on the quality and results of our partnership.

So, I look forward to hearing bold commitments to act and invest towards a more inclusive development, where people are at the center. A tour-de-table will provide the opportunity to our Development Partners to share insights and provide high-level updates regarding programming and assistance.

Borrowing the words of Great Leader Nelson Mandela who once said, and I quote: "It always seems impossible, until it's done."

With those words, I declare this Quarterly Development Partners Meeting to order.

I thank you.