

Seeds of Life program extension

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Seeds of Life Program

The Centre for Plant Genetics and Breeding (PGB) at the University of Western Australia will continue to assist farmers in Timor-Leste through to mid 2016. Professor William Erskine, Director of PGB, is pleased to announce that the Seeds of Life program (SoL) in Timor-Leste will have its funding increased by \$1.3 million to complete research, seed multiplication and seed distribution activities plus capacity building for an extra five months. SoL is a program within the Timor-Leste Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) focused on improving the productivity of key food crops in this small nation. Commencing in 2000, the program first concentrated on identifying higher yielding varieties of maize, rice, peanut, cassava and sweet potato suitable for Timor-Leste conditions. Breeding material was imported by relevant Consultative Group of International Research Centres (CGIAR) members and evaluated under research station conditions. Identified higher yielding varieties were then evaluated on farmers' fields under local conditions. Once recommended by farmers, the program multiplied seed and helped the MAF establish a national seed system for multiplying and extending the seed.

Since 2007, SoL has released 11 varieties of maize, rice, peanut, cassava and sweet potato having higher yield potential and farmer acceptability compared with traditional varieties. At the end of this year, SoL plans to release more varieties of legumes such as red bean, winged bean, mungbean and more rice and sweet potato. The extra five months will help the program consolidate the national seed system and help spread of these new varieties to all thirteen districts in Timor-Leste. During this time, three more T-L scholars will complete their MScs at UWA and return to work in the MAF.

SoL is an ACIAR (Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research) project funded by ACIAR, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Government of Timor-Leste. It is managed by the Centre for Plant Genetics and Breeding (PGB) in the Faculty of Science at UWA.

More details of the Seeds of Life program in Timor-Leste can be found at <http://seedsoflifetimor.org/>

