

Timor-Leste



■ CSEP visits to primary school in the very remote areas

Executive Summary

Civil Society Spotlight Report on the SDG 4 Implementation Status in Timor-Leste

COUNTRY FACTS AND FIGURES



POPULATION:	1.296 million (UNESCO, 2017)
POPULATION AGED 14 YEARS AND YOUNGER:	565,000 (43.59%) (UNESCO, 2017)
GNI PER CAPITA:	US\$ 1,790 (World Bank, 2017)
INCOME GROUP:	LOWER MIDDLE INCOME STATUS (WORLD BANK, 2018)
HDI VALUE AND RANK:	0.625, 132 OUT OF 189 (UNDP, 2017)
POVERTY HEADCOUNT RATIO AT NATIONAL POVERTY LINES (% OF POPULATION):	41.8% (WORLD BANK, 2014)
OUT OF SCHOOL RATE:	19.7% (UNESCO, 2019) 42,619 children- 19,242 female and 23,377 male (UNESCO, 2017) 12,323 adolescents- 5,718 female and 6,605 male (UNESCO, 2017)
LITERACY RATE: (15-24 YEARS):	79.53%; FEMALE 78.57%; MALE 80.49% (UNESCO, 2017)
LITERACY RATE: (15 YEARS AND OLDER):	58.31%; FEMALE 52.96 MALE 63.59% (UNESCO, 2017)
EDUCATION EXPENDITURE:	2.69% OF THE GDP AND 6.77% OF THE TOTAL BUDGET (UNESCO, 2014)

Country and Education Context

As the youngest country in Asia, Timor-Leste achieved its formal independence in 2002 and remains one of the poorest countries in the region with two-thirds of its 1.17 million population living on less than US\$2 a day.

Most of Timor-Leste's population live in rural areas, heavily relying on subsistence agriculture with little or no access to markets. The country is one of the most oil-dependent countries in the world, with oil and gas revenues accounting for 70 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and almost 90 per cent of the total government revenue between 2010 and 2015.1

Published by the Ministry of Education in 2011, the government's National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) for 2011-2030 stated the following vision:

"In 2030, the population of Timor-Leste will be educated, knowledgeable and qualified to live a long and productive life, respectful of peace, family and positive traditional values. All individuals will have the same opportunities to access to a quality education that will allow them to participate in the economic, social and political development process, ensuring social equity and national unity." (p. 12)

Notable progress has been seen in improving basic education and health care in the country. The net enrolment rate for primary school rose from 65 per cent in 2001 and 96.6 per cent in 2014, thus growing at an average annual rate of 4.10 per cent.

However, in the 2015 National Education for All (EFA) Review submitted by the Government of Timor-Leste to UNESCO in preparation for the World Education Forum (WEF), the government acknowledged the serious challenges in education which will bear on whether or not the vision set in its 2011-2030 NESP will be achieved.

Country Implementation of the SDGs and SDG 4

The Government of Timor-Leste adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through Government Resolution No. 34 of 2015 on 23 September 2015, just two days before they were formally adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs was subsequently ratified by a resolution of the National Parliament on 18 November 2015. Resolution No. 19/2015 also recommended that the Government of Timor-Leste align its planning and budget systems with the SDGs through the Sustainable Development Program (SDP). The government then issued a directive (Directive No 038/2015/XII/PM of 22 December 2015) establishing the SDG Working Group under the Prime Minister's Office and a Decree (Government Decree No. 1, 1 February 2016) mandating that the SDGs be reflected in the annual plans and budgets.

The coordination mechanism is led directly by the Office of the Prime Minister together with the line ministry representatives in the SDG Working Group acting as a permanent member. Other stakeholders, including civil society organisations (CSOs), international agencies, and the private sector, play the roles of both an observer and a contributor with the task of providing input and/or data sources in the coordination and consultation processes to feed into the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process of the government. In the context of Timor-Leste, CSOs include community-based organisations, local and national NGOs, religious institutions, women's networks, youth groups, education-focused organisations, trade unions, media groups, and teacher's unions/associations, among others.

The SDG Working Group in Timor-Leste is currently chaired by the Prime Minister's Office and co-chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There is strong representation from line ministries and units responsible for the VNR consultation, data collection, and coordination with relevant stakeholders in preparation for the presentation during the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2019. This working group will continue to monitor the implementation of all SDGs to ensure alignment with the country's National Strategic Plan 2011-2030 and Sustainable Development Goals implementation mechanism in the future.

CSO Spaces and Engagement with the Government in Implementing the SDGs and SDG 4

The SDGs processes in the country, particularly on SDG4, have been open to the participation of CSOs and other education stakeholders. The strong collaboration between CSOs and the government fostered an open dialogue and space for engagement with line ministries.

CSOs have strongly taken part in the SDG Working Group meetings and consultations to actively engage with the entire and relevant line ministries to endorse and raise important issues on the SDGs implementation roadmap, with particular focus on SDG 4. CSOs were invited to contribute their ideas, data, and best practices to the VNR processes and the ways to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Leading the engagement with the government, particularly with the education sector, is the Civil Society Education Partnership (CSEP), an education coalition in Timor-Leste with 15 active members who are working on monitoring, research, and advocacy for education policy changes to ensure the right to quality education for all. CSEP leads its members, together with other education development partners and stakeholders, to actively engage discussions on Education Sector Plan (ESP) and SDG Working Group through the Local Education Group (LEG) that is chaired by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MEYS), Education Cluster Group.

CSEP has made positive and interactive coordination with the MEYS to address cross-cutting education issues around equity, quality, and financing. This means focusing on increasing the education budget and challenging the trend of education privatisation. The coalition has also actively engaged not only in the national level processes but also in the regional and global SDGs processes.

In 2016, the Government of Timor-Leste has created an open space for CSOs to monitor the government's implementation programmes through a Social Audit Partnership between the government and CSOs in which the formal Memorandum of Understanding with Forum NGO Timor-Leste (FONGTIL) was signed to monitor four strategic sectors, namely Agriculture, Education, Infrastructure, and Health. The social audit report has been launched by the government and delivered directly to the Prime Minister in 2018 for further actions, particularly on the SDP.

CSEP has actively engaged the government during the Timor-Leste VNR processes and consultations together with other development partners consisting of persons with disabilities, women's networks, youth groups, NGOs, and local authorities. CSOs have shared various monitoring and research results to the government through the SDG Working Group. These results were highly appreciated and considered as rich resources and contributions to the VNR processes in the country.

During the 6th Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) held in Bangkok, Thailand on 27 to 29 March, the strong collaboration between CSOs and government representatives was clearly demonstrated in the greater and sustained interaction and collaboration on the VNR and SDGs development in Timor-Leste. The government has also committed to including CSOs representatives in its delegation to present the Timor-Leste VNR in the HLPF on July 2019.

SDG 4 Achievements and Challenges

The implementation process of SDG 4 in Timor-Leste right after the adoption of the SDGs in 2015 has been very slow due to some political challenges encountered leading to and after the national elections in 2017, with extended electoral processes and political appointments until mid-2018.

Nevertheless, some SDG 4 indicators are seeing progress, such as the provisioning of free basic education, access to schools by gender, and the increase in enrolment rates based on the data provided by the MEYS. Further, the repetition rates by grade have decreased, and promising results were anticipated from the efforts of the government to transform public secondary schools into technical vocational education with the aim of delivering targets 4.3 and 4.4 and responding to SDG 8.

One of the main challenges that hinder progress is the low financing of education in the country. Timor-Leste is among the countries in the Asia-Pacific region with the lowest education budget, allocating just under 10 per cent of its annual budget to education. This has always been a critical point in the advocacy work of civil society, especially CSEP, that continues to put pressure on the government to demonstrate greater political will to achieve SDG 4 by increasing the budget and ensuring that it is efficiently managed free of corruption.

The insufficient education budget is clearly reflected in the poor and limited school infrastructures for marginalised people, especially those in rural areas. The quality of education is

Youth in Action for the SDGs and SDG 4 in Timor-Leste

Recognising the pivotal role of the youth in the SDGs, the government and civil society organisations interacted with the youth in the VNR process and review of the SDGs and SDG 4. In the run-up to the 6th Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD), there had been three youth consultations. On 4 March 2019, the SDG Secretariat conducted a national youth consultation in Dili. Two days later, the SDG Secretariat further engaged the youth in municipal consultations on the SDGs in Baucau. Then, on March 8, the Civil Society Education Partnership (CSEP) held a consultation on Youth and SDG 4 in Dili at the MAHON Training Center.

Policies for Youth Development

Timor-Leste has one of the youngest populations in the world, with 72 per cent composed of children and youth ages one to 35 years old in 2018. This prompted the Secretary of the State for Youth and Sports to sign the National Youth Policy (Government Resolution No. 27/2016) with the aim to guide the government in the development of the youth in all aspects. It states that:

"This Youth policy seeks to respond to great challenges and concerns that both young men and women are facing in their daily lives. It is also considered a political stand to acknowledge the participation of young women and men in the struggle for self-determination."

"The National Youth Policy was developed taking into consideration national norms and legislation derived from the Constitution of the Republic of Timor-Leste. It also recognises and considers international norms and conventions that promote, stimulate, and act as catalysts to accelerate the development of the youth sector in Timor-Leste."

The government recognises education as a fundamental human right. It thus provides free and compulsory twelve years of education. To respond to the labor market needs and align education with SDG targets 4.3 and 4.4, the government approved the education policy that converted 52 public secondary schools to technical-vocational schools.

Youth Perspectives on SDG 4

During several consultations, the youth shared their views on the implementation of the policies and commitments made by the government. Some of the key issues raised by the youth are on:

Inequality in Education

- There are 56,000 people with disabilities in Timor-Leste and the deliberations on how to address their education through the Inclusive Education Policy is still being deliberated in the Council of Ministers.
- Most PWDs are not able to finish secondary education because schools are not accessible and fail to provide safe and enabling learning environments. PWDs in rural villages experience the worst forms of discrimination.
- In secondary education, many young people from marginalised communities do not finish secondary education. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics fact sheet, in secondary education, the net enrolment ratio for both sexes is 59.32 (female – 63.73, male 55.09) in 2017.

- Access to tertiary education is even more elusive for the youth.
- Cultural norms, such as early marriage and restrictions on mobility, hinder girls and young women from completing secondary or tertiary education.

Limited Access to Technical and Vocational Education

- The conversion of the 52 public secondary schools to technical-vocational schools needs to be reviewed in terms of quality of education provision and impact on the teachers.
- Non-formal and technical and vocational training can only be accessed in the capital and not reach throughout the municipality levels.
- Non-formal education and training programmes are mostly provided by non-profit organisations and the private sector. These programmes face issues of sustainability and challenges in reaching out to more young women and men in the communities. (to be confirmed with CEPTIL/Jose)
- The young people also lack access to proper training in ICT and schools do not have the necessary technology to equip young people with digital skills. (to be confirmed with CEPTIL/Jose)

Policy Recommendations to Government

It is thus recommended that the government take the necessary actions to address the concerns of the youth by:

- Investing in youth development and allocating higher and targeted financing for the SDGs, such as in education, health, agriculture, tourism, and infrastructure; working towards an education budget share of 18 to 20 per cent of the national budget;
- Accelerating the implementation of the SDGs and act on political interventions and changes in the administration that hinder efforts to deliver on the SDG commitments;
- Supporting non-profit organisations to expand non-formal and vocational training for the youth throughout the country; and
- Creating more meaningful and institutionalised spaces for CSOs to participate in policy development, to conduct research and consultations, and to monitor the implementation of the SDGs and SDG 4 in the country.



NGOs and church groups in rural areas. Unfortunately, the government does not support or even recognise the training centres established by NGOs.

The high persistence of illiteracy among the adult population vastly limits employment and development opportunities, especially for women who are greatly hindered by social and cultural barriers and gender-based violence. This is an education area in which data is not regularly collected as acknowledged by the government's National EFA Review Report in 2015. Based on the 2010 census data as cited in the 2015 EFA Report, 54 per cent of people and 60 per cent of female adults in rural areas are not able to read and write Tetum, Bahasa Indonesia, Portuguese, and English.

Recommendations and the Way Forward

While much of the government's efforts in education remain focused on rebuilding and strengthening its education and government infrastructures and systems after it suffered from major destruction in the lead up to the country's independence in 2002, the country's population is also increasing every year with accompanying demands for social services such as education.

The government, through the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MEYS), needs to muster the political will and support to increase the education budget to at least 15 to 20 per cent of the national budget, build capacities of local governments to manage resources for education, and upgrade public education infrastructures that provide safe and hygienic washrooms or water facilities, and are easily accessible to persons with disabilities. There is also a need to improve data collection and access, especially through the Education Management and Information Systems (EMIS). It is also equally important to reduce incentives or subsidies to private schools and increase support to public schools, recruit more permanent and qualified teachers to accommodate all students and ensure the quality, as well as reduce the number of students to 30 students per class to improve teaching quality.

Equitable targets in education, especially the removal of barriers to the marginalised sector's access to quality education, are also of utmost importance to fulfil the SDGs' promise of leaving no one behind. •

another major concern, considering the plight of teachers with low capacities and limited education background and training. Cultural barriers and early marriage issues also severely limit girls' access to obtaining and continuing quality education.

Pre-primary schools remain inaccessible in many rural areas. Existing preschools, mostly established by communities, NGOs, and church groups, are mostly located in the capital, while only a few exist in rural areas or even none at all. CSEP has conducted monitoring and a survey to look into the access to education of marginalised groups and the condition of school infrastructures in the Municipality of Ermera. It showed that 50 to 78 per cent of schools are not in the proper condition to foster learning for both students and teachers, which limits the access to education of children and youth, particularly girls, from poor families, rural communities, and remote areas.

Most of the schools in the country are not accessible to persons with disabilities, while library facilities are either not available or of poor quality standards with severely limited learning materials for students and teachers. What's more, several public secondary schools have been converted to Technical Vocational Schools to orient the graduates to labour market needs. There are, however, no appropriate facilities and building available for students and not enough teachers with the appropriate background to teach according to subject orientation.

Challenges in the country's education data management and information system also adversely impact the government's response to education needs and realities, and limit the drive towards needed policy and programmatic reforms. Non-formal education and training programmes for marginalised out-of-school children and youth are mostly provided by



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Civil Society Education Partnership (CSEP) is a membership base platform established on July 06, 2017 in Dili and accredited formally by the government through the Ministry of Justice in Timor-Leste. With 15 active members consisting of youth, women, grassroots, and marginalised-based organisations, CSEP works on educational policy advocacy and actively engages with key decision-makers, such as the government, national parliament, and community leaders to prioritise the education in the national development to ensure quality education for all Timorese in Timor-Leste. CSEP is the member organisation of ASPBAE as well as the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) in the global level.



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 Learning Beyond Boundaries

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