

# Timor-Leste

## Civil Society Spotlight Report on SDG 4 for HLPF **2023**



Students of the Technical Vocational School of IT-Fomento who participated in the Interview on CSEP's research on Accessibility and the Quality of Technical Vocational Education 2022

### I. Country Context

As one of the world's youngest countries both in nationhood and demography, Timor-Leste is a small island developing State that regained its independence only in 2002. The country is classified by the United Nations as a least developed country, mainly due to its economic and environmental vulnerability, and at the same time, by the World Bank as a lower middle-income country because of its gross domestic product.

More than two-thirds (69%) of the Timorese live in rural areas and many rely on the agricultural sector for subsistence. The economy is overly dependent on the exploitation of the country's gas and oil fields, despite some progress towards economic diversification through agriculture and tourism. A large percentage of the population lives in poverty, although this has improved over the years.

Timor-Leste has made significant progress by completely rebuilding its education system. More and more children and young people are now going to school as shown in the data of the World Bank. In 2020, there has been a 110% gross enrolment rate in education while the literacy rate increased to 69.90%. Eighteen per cent (18%) of adolescent boys and girls

dropped out of school and 27% of youth completed their secondary level and did not continue to the higher education opportunities during the COVID-19 impact from 2021 to 2023. While quality education for all is a key government priority from 2017 to 2022, many factors continue to hinder progress, including repetition and dropout rates, the diversity of languages, poor teaching methods, and limited facilities in rural and remote areas.

The Education Management and Information System (EMIS) from the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport (MoEYS) is not visible and accessible online due to technical issues since 2019. Therefore, all the educational data are offline, proving to be difficult for the public to access.

Timor-Leste joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on 10th May 2023 as an observer, which is good for the expansion of the country's economic, social, cultural, educational, and political development at the regional level.

### II. Progress towards the Achievement of SDG 4

At the national level, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were

adopted through Timor-Leste's government resolution no 34/2015, on 23rd September 2015, National Parliament resolution no. 19/2015 on the 18th of November, Prime Minister's Directive 038/2015/XII/PM on the 22nd of December 2015, Government Decree no. 1 on the 1st of February 2016.

The SDGs Working Group was introduced immediately after the adoption. It was designated to identify the linkages between the SDGs and indicators that are harmonised with the Strategic Development of Timor-Leste (SDP) 2011 to 2030 targets. The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports (MoEYS) launched the National Education Sector Plan 2020-2024 as an updated sector plan for the 8th constitutional government. However, the SDG Working Group that was co-convened by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Office of the Prime Minister is no longer active as a particular body or institution due to changes in the government's body under the Prime Minister's office.

Timor-Leste, through the MoEYS, still needs to change the previous executive bodies of relevant SDGs and SDG 4 bodies that were established in 2019, such as the SDG Working Group. Until now, there is no particular SDG body, except for the National Agency for

Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation / Agencia Nacional Planeamento, Monitorização e Avaliação (ANAPMA). It is under the Prime Minister's Office that is coordinating the line ministries to consult the SDGs including SDG 4 and developing the Timor-Leste's Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2023 as the second VNR report.

The MoEYS has made affirmative actions on the expansion of 230 new schools and classroom expansions in 2022. They are also planning to construct 230 new schools and new classroom expansions in 2023 to ensure student distribution and ratio, as well as water and sanitation accessibilities for students and teachers.

#### A. SDGs and SDG 4 Structures in Timor-Leste

The Local Education Group (LEG) or Ação Conjunta para a Educação Timor-Leste (ACETL) is coordinating the overall discussions on SDG 4 implementation, consultation, and evaluation, together with relevant stakeholders, such as the line ministries (Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Solidarity), CSOs, as well as bilateral and international agencies in Timor-Leste.

There are no other SDG 4 discussions at the municipality authorities and village levels- all still centralised in the national government only then the implementation of SDG 4 and the National Education Sector Plan (NESP 2011-2030).

The MoEYS approved the Inclusive Education Policy and established a Social Inclusion Department in 2018 as

a base for the government to ensure inclusive education for all Timorese. However, the implementation and financing are still weak and are not able to fully implement the policy. A member of the Civil Society Education Partnership (CSEP), the Associação Halibur Defisiensia Matan Timor-Leste (AHDMTL), found that 40-57% of teachers do not understand the inclusive education policy and are not able to address the learning needs of persons with disabilities.

#### B. The most significant challenges the state had to or is dealing with in achieving SDG 4

Based on these perspectives on the main challenges for the government to achieve SDG 4 in Timor-Leste are the following:

- Limited education financing that allocated less than 10% annually (CSEP's Education Budget Analysis 2022) to respond to those education needs such as insufficient school classrooms (50-75 students per class per teacher based on CSEP's Research Reports on Technical Vocational Schools facilities and accessibilities in 2022), water and sanitation services in the schools (girls are most affected during the menstruation cycle and toilet needs), teacher's capacities on Portuguese language, science and pedagogy, deductive or practical materials/laboratories for technical vocational students to undertake the real practices.
- Many young people, especially marginalised girls in rural areas are still neglected as they are not able to

access higher education opportunities due to the patriarchal systems, and social and economic barriers to access to education. As a result, girls are oriented to early marriage.

- The MoEYS and the Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) partnership implementing the Basic Education System Transformation (BEST) which is one of the projects that is using the GPE accelerated funds and concessional loans from the World Bank to support the Basic school infrastructure, learning pedagogy including teacher's training in Timor-Leste. However, the MoEYS capacity to execute project funding is still challenging and there have been no significant improvements with this project so far.

### III. Systemic Barriers that Impede SDG Progress

- a. The main systemic barriers are political instability in the country from 2017 until 2023 impacting and hindering educational development during the long years.
- b. The changes in government structures or positions at the Ministry level made the slow implementation of SDG 4 targets.
- c. Education budget allocation is less than 10% every year, which contributed to the slow-moving implementation of SDG 4 and the 2030 Education Agenda.
- d. The Inclusive education policy and the National Education Sector Plan 2011-2030 are not properly implemented due to limited education financing allocation and political instability in the country.



## IV. Civil Society Engagement in the SDG 4 Implementation, Follow-up, and Monitoring

Civil society participation is crucial to the full implementation of the SDGs at local, national, regional, and global levels. In Timor-Leste, the consultation on the SDGs is only through the Timor-Leste Development Partners Meeting (TLDPM), which is held annually with all the development partners, CSOs, Private Sectors, Youth, Women and line ministries.

At the regional and global levels, Timor-Leste is actively participating in SDG coordination through the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the Asia Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Asian People Forum (APF) and other regional and global forums. At the national level, SDG 4 is only discussed in the Local Education Group (LEG) or in Portuguese, Ação Conjunta para a Educação Timor-Leste (ACETL).

In terms of coordination and engagement mechanism is good between the government and the CSOs, however, there are some gaps in responding to those identified as important to implement at the government level. Implementation is challenging, hampered by political interventions, limited education budget allocation to the education sector, and the capacities of the Ministry to implement the plans and budget.

While there appear to be no significant challenges for CSOs to deal with the government or external groups in terms of advocacy, there are some limitations for the external groups to execute those recommendations from CSOs and school leaders due to the insufficiency of the education budget.

CSEP recognises the international support provided by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the Basic Education System Transformation (BEST) project to aid the government in achieving the SDGs and SDG 4. Unfortunately, there are limitations and weaknesses in the capacity and decision-making management of the Ministry's people to execute the supported funding from international donors.

Timor-Leste has the good and meaningful participation and

engagement of the marginalised youth, disadvantaged communities, and the CSOs in the decision-making process, monitoring, research, and advocacy for the SDGs and SDG 4. CSEP has built its youth constituency over the years and established a Marginalised Youth Forum (MYF) in the districts of Timor-Leste. The MYF, as well as people with disabilities, were actively involved in the Youth-led Action Research (YAR) initiative that is steered by ASPBAE. The report has been disseminated widely to line ministries and was shared with the third Country Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2023 and relevant stakeholders to be considered in the implementation.

## V. SDG 4 Interlinkages with Other SDGs

### A. Interlinkages between education, sustainable cities and communities, technology, and financing and financial inclusion.

Timor-Leste is not yet fully aware of the learning city systems. A very small number of schools implemented the green school and the school garden programmes. In 2022, the MoEYS expanded the 230 school classrooms to ensure quality education for children, but there are also very limited technology systems to provide to schools even though the law has been adopted to install internet technologies in all schools. 60-90% of schools do not have internet access, public and private libraries, and limited water sanitation and hygiene for girls to access.

The community learning centres (CLCs) are not actively running as the government does not prioritise them as an important department to provide learning opportunities for those who dropped out of school, and marginalised boys and girls to access.

Five CSEP members of NGOs deliver capacity-building training for marginalised youth on soft skills



■ Interview for the Youth-Led Action Research (YAR in 2021)

systems and four CSEP members are partners with the bilateral agencies in supporting the new school construction facilities in the rural areas with 3-4 schools per year.

### B. SDG 4 in relation to SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government and partners installed clean water and sanitation in each school for all students and teachers to access. Unfortunately, it was not sustained in the long run because these served as emergency support. The facilities of 230 new schools have been completed, with clean water supplies, yet about 78% of schools in the country do not have access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

In all 130 new school buildings that are currently being developed, all have installed clean water and sanitation facilities for all students and teachers to access especially girls.

Education financing investment is still a major concern and it remains insufficient to be able to effectively respond to challenges, especially in improving



■ CSEP National Coordinator and Research and Advocacy Officer delivers its research report to H.E. Vice Minister of Education, Youth, and Sports (October 2022)

access to technology in rural areas on technology, libraries and learning facilities, teachers' capacities, inclusion, adult learning and education, and infrastructure.

Children and youth living in rural areas are still left behind as they are not able to access quality public education due to many barriers. The support of GPE funds and international donors has been valuable for rural communities' access to education. The government, however, needs to do much more in order to fulfil and achieve the SDG 4 targets in full.

## VI. Key Messages and Recommendations

CSEP puts forward the following recommendations to the Government of Timor-Leste:

1. Allocate sufficient state budget to the education sector by reaching the internationally agreed benchmark of 15-20% of public expenditure.

2. Strongly implement the Inclusive Education Policy by functioning well in the inclusive education department under the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport (MoEYS), Basic Education Law to ensure quality education for all Timorese, and the National Education Sector Plan 2011 -2030 to improve the quality, equity and inclusion to not left any Timorese behind in education.
3. Invest in public secondary schools, technical vocational schools, and national universities to ensure the principles of equity, inclusion, and quality in education.
4. Invest in teacher capacity-building training on leadership, pedagogy, digital literacy and language to deliver quality education and services.
5. Prevent corruption and political interventions in the leadership decision-making processes for improved education management.
6. Implement the policy on gender-responsive education for all marginalised groups, including girls and persons with disabilities, to be able to access learning opportunities in both formal and non-formal education.
7. Establish preschool systems in all sub-villages or villages for all marginalised children to access learning opportunities and approve the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Policy.
8. Strengthen the digital technology system and the recurrent education systems for marginalised youth, including girls, to improve their education levels and access to opportunities, such as quality learning, economic empowerment, employment, and democratic spaces. •



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**Civil Society Education Partnership (CSEP)** is a membership-based coalition established in 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, people with disability, grassroots, and marginalized-based organizations, CSEP works on educational policy advocacy and actively engages with key decision-makers, such as the government, national parliament, municipality authorities and community leaders to prioritize education in the national development to ensure quality education for all Timorese in Timor-Leste. CSEP is a member organization of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE).

With support from



**Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education**