The Second Voluntary National Review Report on Progress of the Implementation of the SDGs, 2023 (VNR-2)

People centred sustainable development: Leaving no one behind

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<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANAPMA</td>
<td>Agency of National Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<td>CGIC</td>
<td>Integrated Crisis Management Center</td>
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<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
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<td>CNAP-NFS</td>
<td>Consolidated National Action Plan for Nutrition and Food Security</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil society organization</td>
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<td>DFAT</td>
<td>Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade</td>
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<td>DHS</td>
<td>Demographic and Health Survey</td>
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<td>EdTL</td>
<td>Electricity of Timor-Leste</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization</td>
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<td>FONGTIL</td>
<td>NGO Forum of Timor-Leste</td>
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<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender-based violence</td>
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<td>GDS</td>
<td>General Directorate of Statistics</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>GoTL</td>
<td>Government of Timor-Leste</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information, communications and technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<td>IPC</td>
<td>Integrated Food Security Phase Classification</td>
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<tr>
<td>INETL</td>
<td>National Institute of Statistics (previously GDS)</td>
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<td>INFF</td>
<td>Integrated National Financing Framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>KOICA</td>
<td>Korea International Cooperation Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>KONSSANTIL</td>
<td>The National Council on Food Security, Sovereignty and Nutrition</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDC</td>
<td>Least developed country</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBTIQ</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer</td>
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<td>LFS</td>
<td>Labour Force Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAF</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries</td>
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<tr>
<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and evaluation</td>
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<td>MCAE</td>
<td>Coordination Ministry of Economic Affairs</td>
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<td>MoF</td>
<td>Ministry of Finance</td>
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<td>MoH</td>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
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<td>MEYS</td>
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Message from the President of the Republic

“Hau nia vizaun mak Timor-Leste ida ne’ebé la-iba labarik ida mak mate wainhira moris, no kada labarik saudavel, hetan nutrisaun diak, apende no seguru.”

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S.E. José Ramos-Horta
Presidente República Democrática Timor-Leste
Discurso feito ba: “Hau Nia Vizaun: Presidencial da Timor-Leste na Desenvolvimento”
10 Julya 2022

“My vision is for Timor-Leste to have no child dying at birth. And for every child to be healthy, receive proper nutrition, learn, and be safe.”

- President J. Ramos-Horta

Our journey towards achieving the SDGs is driven by our unwavering commitment to eradicating poverty and ensuring the well-being of our children and mothers. We recognize that poverty disproportionately affects these vulnerable groups, and it is our duty to uplift their lives and provide them with the opportunities they deserve.

Education stands at the forefront of our efforts. We firmly believe that investing in the education of our children is investing in the future of our nation. We have taken significant steps to improve access to quality education, enhance school infrastructure, train teachers, and develop curricula that equip our children with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world. However, challenges remain, and we must continue to prioritize education, ensuring that no child is left behind.

The well-being of our mothers and children is paramount to our sustainable development. We have worked diligently to improve access to healthcare services, including prenatal care, immunization programs, and nutrition support. Yet, we must intensify our efforts to reduce maternal and child mortality rates further. By prioritizing health alongside education, we are nurturing a brighter future for our nation, where individuals can thrive and contribute to sustainable development.

I hope that the Voluntary National Review report can be a reference for our young people – to learn about development trends, exchange information with their peers in other countries and propose solutions. At times when countries grapple with a new generation of challenges – from energy transition to digital transformation, we count on our young people to be a source of ideas and drivers of change.

None of our achievements would have been possible without the assistance of our global partners. We extend our deepest gratitude to the international community for their support and collaboration.
However, we recognise that sustainable development is a collective endeavour, and we must continue to leverage global partnerships to advance our progress. Given our leading role in the g7+, we are also ready to continue assisting the group and sharing our experience with member states and other platforms. The importance of South-South cooperation and knowledge sharing among developing nations cannot be overstated. Let us learn from one another’s experiences, exchange best practices, and support each other in our collective pursuit of sustainable development. Together, we can create a world where no child goes hungry, where every mother receives quality healthcare, where all children are educated and where poverty becomes a thing of the past.

As we present our second Voluntary National Review, let us be proud of our accomplishments, mindful of our challenges, and united in our commitment to the SDGs. Together, we can create a better future for all Timorese, inclusive and resilient. Let us seize this opportunity to showcase our progress, learn from our experiences, and strengthen our resolve to build a sustainable and prosperous Timor-Leste.

J. Ramos Horta

President of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
Opening statement from the Prime Minister

This second Voluntary National Review (VNR) report arrives at a pivotal moment in our nation's history. As we witness the youth, who were born after the Restoration of Independence in 2002, exercise their right to vote for the first time, it signifies a clear turning point in our political cycle, aligning with the recent Parliamentary elections held in May 2023. This milestone holds great significance, highlighting the progress we have made as a nation in establishing democratic processes and ensuring the active participation of our younger generations.

Our first VNR, focusing on SDG 16 with its overarching theme of peace, institutions, and justice, served as a valuable foundation, setting the baseline for measuring our progress towards the SDGs. We acknowledge the usefulness of this initial review, which has provided insights that have guided our endeavours thus far.

This report reaffirms Timor-Leste's unwavering commitment to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. In the spirit of prioritizing sustainable development, the second VNR report underscores our focus on our people. With utmost honesty and transparency, we present both our achievements and the setbacks we face. Over the past four years, Timor-Leste, like many other countries, has encountered multiple shocks, including political impasses, the COVID-19 pandemic, and natural disasters, all of which have hindered our progress towards the SDGs.

Challenges persist. Stunting and malnutrition affect over half of our children under the age of five, while 22% of our population lives in acute food insecurity. Economic diversification has been impeded, particularly due to the impact of the pandemic. Additionally, one third of our youth are unemployed and disengaged from education and training, depriving us of the opportunity to harness the demographic dividend. While our economic recovery is ongoing, we have not yet reached pre-pandemic levels of growth, and we continue to grapple with global challenges such as volatile food and commodity prices, further exacerbating our situation.

Amidst these challenges, the 8th Constitutional Government has implemented flagship public policies and innovative programmes aimed at improving the lives of our citizens and addressing setbacks. Notable among them is the Bolsa de Mae-Jerensun Foun social protection programme, which effectively reduces vulnerabilities among women and children, thereby positively impacting health and nutrition. We have also increased investments in food security and nutrition through initiatives such as the School Feeding Programme. These programmes not only enhance the nutritional well-being of our population but also stimulate local economies, improve learning outcomes for children, and address water and sanitation challenges in schools. The budget allocated to the School Feeding Programme has been nearly tripled between 2022 and 2023. The Bosla Hakbiit scholarship programme provides educational opportunities for children from vulnerable backgrounds leveraging the...
Government’s Human Capital Development Fund. Furthermore, we have made significant improvements in data availability and systems, successfully conducting the Census in 2022 despite delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and restructured the National Institute of Statistics alongside a new 10-year National Statistics Development Strategy.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have taken decisive actions to protect the well-being of our people and businesses. Our Economic Recovery Plan has provided support to individuals and businesses affected by restrictions, demonstrating a multi-sectoral approach to mitigate risks while maintaining trust in our own people. Despite the multiple shocks faced, we have maintained social cohesion and peace, with the majority expressing trust and satisfaction in the Government’s pandemic response.

As we emerge from these challenging times, we have learned valuable lessons that will guide our path forward. We recognize the importance of addressing institutional factors, enhancing the quality of public spending, improving public financial management, and maintaining transparency, accountability, and democracy. Our governance and institutional reforms emphasize the principle of "Leaving No One Behind," with the implementation of a gender marker system and the launch of the Integrated National Financing Framework. International partnerships and cooperation remain crucial as we progress in our accession to the WTO and ASEAN, presenting new opportunities for sustainable development.

Looking to the future, we prioritize investment in our people. We aim to improve the quality of spending, strengthen public financial management, and initiate strategic investments in economic diversification through the green and blue economy. By reducing our dependence on imports and accelerating the digital transformation in our institutions, we will build a climate-proof and climate-resilient future. Our plans also involve updating the Strategic Development Plan (2011-2030) to adapt to the ever-changing environment and emerging challenges.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the VNR Commission, whose dedicated efforts have been instrumental in developing this report. I also express my appreciation to the diverse range of stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society organizations, youth representatives, women’s groups, people with disabilities, and the LGBTIQ community, for their active participation in the VNR consultations at national and local levels. Your contributions have enriched this report and reaffirmed our commitment to leaving no one behind.

I encourage all stakeholders to utilize this report and join us in our endeavours to accelerate the SDGs. Let us stand united in our commitment to build a sustainable and prosperous future for Timor-Leste, where the well-being of our people remains our utmost priority.

Dili, 31 May 2023

Taur Matan Ruak

Prime Minister of Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
Highlights

Timor-Leste’s commitment to people-centred sustainable development is at the core of its pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Second Voluntary National Review (VNR-2) highlights both successes and setbacks in implementation of the SDGs sectors, providing valuable insights and lessons for other nations.

The socio-economic impact of multiple shocks in Timor-Leste has been detrimental for gains in development. Triple shocks from political impasse, pandemic effects, and natural disasters have hindered sustainable economic growth and diversification. Job losses and income reductions for households and businesses were high. These shocks have hit the country during the time when Timor-Leste’s main source of income, the Petroleum Fund could be depleted by the end of the decade.

As a result, a crucial trade-off has emerged between achieving fiscal consolidation and maintaining robust social protection, particularly during times of multiple shocks. On one hand, the necessity of fiscal consolidation and structural reforms to ensure long-term fiscal sustainability is apparent. This will necessitate an increase in domestic tax revenue beyond the contributions from the Petroleum Fund, as well as a rationalization of government expenditures in upcoming budgets. On the other hand, there’s an immediate need to safeguard our citizens through comprehensive social programmes during these challenging times. The Government of Timor-Leste has prioritized the latter. In order to effectively manage this trade-off, the Economic Recovery Plan was formulated, guided by the principle of ‘transforming better’. This approach underscores the government’s commitment to both immediate social protections and long-term economic sustainability.

Against this context, the nation’s progress in line with the SDGs presents a mixed picture. Out of the 17 SDGs, progress is observed in 9 goals, with SDG 16 showing the most robust advancement. However, in a more granular look at the 93 SDG targets that were assessed. Out of these, 16% are on track; progress needs to be expedited for 56% to meet the 2030 target. It is concerning that 28% of the targets assessed are regressing moving away from the baseline.

Timor-Leste has made significant strides in its pursuit of SDGs. Underpinning these advancements is the nation’s political and societal stability, fostered by a robust democratic foundation and reinforced by a strong social contract between the government and its citizens. In the realm of education and social policies, remarkable progress is evident. Girls’ education and women’s political participation have been prioritized, contributing to a more equitable society. High-level units have been established to tackle pressing socio-economic issues, reflecting a steadfast commitment to the ‘Leave no one behind’ principle.

The progress is also measurable in several sectors. Under SDG3, the number of births attended by skilled health personnel showed an upward trend. Child mortality rates have been declining, while Malaria has been effectively controlled with no reported deaths from 2015 to 2022 while vaccination coverage saw a boost. SDG4 completion rates for primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary
education levels all improved. Notably, adult female literacy rates saw a significant surge, indicating substantial advancements in gender equality in education.

In terms of policy and system improvements, evidence-based policy formulation and implementation of social programmes target the most vulnerable. Regarding public services and resilience, the provision of free universal healthcare and basic education underlines Timor-Leste's commitment to human development. The nation's resilience, evident in its response to the Covid-19 pandemic and natural disasters, signals its ability to tackle future challenges.

It is evident that Timor-Leste adopted a holistic and cross-sectoral system for the protection of children, mothers, youth and the vulnerable, encompassing services related to health, education, housing, childcare and access to food. Consultations and expert interviews revealed that the most welcome and mentioned programmes were Bolsa de Mae – Jerasaun Foun; Merenda Escolar; Scale-Up Nutrition initiative; Social Housing for the Vulnerable (UKL); Bosla Hakbiit. These programs contributed to improving food security and nutrition, health, income, education, safety and well-being of the mothers, children, the elderly and youth. They also improved inter-ministerial coordination.

However, Timor-Leste faces significant setbacks hindering its progress towards sustainable development. Inadequate public service efficiency and heavy reliance on oil revenues undermine the impact of public spending. The weak enforcement of laws and regulations further exacerbates these challenges. High poverty levels, youth unemployment, and limited social protection coverage affect a large portion of the population.

Key SDGs requiring focus and effort include poverty and social protection (SDG1), food and nutrition (SDG2), quality education (SDG4, early childhood education and technical and vocational education and training and tertiary education enrolment rates have also seen a regressive trend). An inclusive economy and decent work for all (SDG8) has seen the greatest regression and least likely to be achieved by 2030 at the current rate of implementation. Statistics reveal that an alarmingly high levels of food insecurity, malnutrition, and stunting persist, particularly among children and pregnant women. Enrollment rates in early childhood education and technical/vocational education have regressed, and employment targets, especially for youth, women, and people with disabilities, have not been met. Fluctuating government expenditures also pose a challenge. A significant portion of the population lives below the international poverty line, with limited social protection coverage.

Administrative and infrastructure obstacles, including a shortage of human resources and underdeveloped financial sector, hinder service delivery. Inadequate data collection and limited connectivity impede evidence-based policymaking and access to essential services, particularly for remote communities and people with disabilities.

Since the first VNR was reported, there were several good practices that were identified by the VNR-2 findings in the areas policy integration, technological advancements, poverty eradication, gender equality, crisis response, human capital investment, and innovative financing. The country has aligned sectoral plans with the national Strategic Development Plan (SDP) and SDGs. This approach
ensures that issues such as malnutrition and food insecurity are addressed comprehensively and in a coordinated manner. Timor-Leste has demonstrated its **ability to respond swiftly and in a coordinated manner to multiple crises**. This was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic, where the country implemented cash transfer programmes and collaborated on laboratory responses. The Tropical Cyclone Seroja response showed the concerted efforts of civil society, development partners and private sector led by the GoTL coordinating bodies. These efforts highlighted the importance of having a capable and responsive government during times of crisis.

**Investment in people centred sustainable development** has been a focal point for Timor-Leste. The country has expanded access to higher education through scholarships and prioritized youth employment through skill development and entrepreneurship programmes. The country has implemented initiatives like the Spotlight Initiative and Together for Equality to address gender disparities. The Disability National Action Plan has also been established to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities. Additionally, community-based preschools led by female veterans have been set up to provide inclusive educational opportunities.

**Technological advancements** have played a crucial role in enhancing public administration efficiency and transforming supply chains for family planning. The adoption of digital innovation has led to more effective public services and streamlined processes, contributing to improved outcomes. **In terms of financing**, Timor-Leste has embraced innovative approaches. For instance, the country has leveraged remittances as a means of financial diversification. By exploring non-traditional financing sources, Timor-Leste has shown the potential to mobilize resources for national development. Overall, these good practices showcase Timor-Leste’s commitment to pursuing a holistic, inclusive, and innovative approach to SDGs. Other nations can learn from these practices in several ways.

As a result of this VNR-2 and the strategic analysis of SDGs acceleration in Timor-Leste presents a set of strategies to accelerate the attainment of the sustainable development goals. Priorities identified include:

**Scaling up social protection programmes and services.** With malnutrition being a prevalent issue, increased investments and attention should be directed towards its mitigation, aligning efforts with poverty reduction strategies. This also entails enhancing agricultural productivity for improved food security. Malnutrition and food insecurity should be treated as emergencies. Recognizing the interconnectedness of poverty, malnutrition, and health, it is crucial to secure funding for various social protection initiatives targeting vulnerable populations, adhering to the principle of “Leave No One Behind. Foundational learning challenges can be addressed by developing and implementing a national plan, providing more training opportunities for pre-school teachers, and increasing the budget for pre-school education. Measures to integrate young people and informal workers into the social protection system should be initiated. Further, the expansion of digital infrastructure within schools and the establishment of a Center of Excellence for teacher training are proposed.
With more substantial investments directed towards export-oriented industries targeting robust markets, economic diversification can be bolstered. The blue economy, comprising fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, and shipping, has shown promise and should be nurtured. Given Timor-Leste’s agricultural reliance and potential infrastructure threats, it is crucial to invest in risk reduction and explore financial preparedness strategies. Investment is needed to reduce factors hindering public service delivery and economic diversification. This includes enhancing the civil registration system, advancing ICT development, expanding access to financial services, transitioning towards renewable energy, and accelerating land reform.

With the Prime Minister’s Office leading the reform agenda, the ongoing public service reform initiatives should continue. Policies should aim to enable the achievement of SDGs by reducing duplication of autonomous agencies, streamlining structures, and increasing coordination. Improving public financial management and accelerating the progress of decentralization are necessary. This includes improving the budgeting process, expanding the tax base, and endorsing the Municipal Level Public Financial Management Law. The creation of a SDG Commission to assist the Prime Minister’s Office in streamlining national SDG planning, financing, monitoring and evaluation, and data collection efforts is necessary.

Engaging with international entities and the private sector is essential. The Public-Private Partnerships framework should be exploited, especially in sectors like green and blue economies, and connectivity and infrastructure. Advocacy for more country programmable aid can ensure greater resource allocation and showcase Timor-Leste’s reliability as an investment-worthy partner.

By adopting these strategies, Timor-Leste can accelerate its path to achieving the SDGs. Timor-Leste has showed yet again it is one of the strongest electoral democracies in Southeast Asia with 40 percent of parliament seats held by women. Amid Covid-19, the country conducted a successful presidential election, civil liberties are widely respected. To ensure that the aspirations of all its citizens at the outset of independence are met by 2030, Timor-Leste is ready to strengthen institutions using the existing strong social contract between citizens and state, its leaders commit to avoid future political impasses and continue working with other nations, private sector and partners to deliver for its people.
Welcome: How to read this report?

Welcome to the Timor-Leste Voluntary National Review (VNR) report, a comprehensive assessment of the country’s progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This report aims to provide a detailed analysis of people centred sustainable development, highlighting achievements, challenges, drivers for changes and priorities for accelerating SDG implementation.

**Report structure and format:** This report follows a structured format based on key informant interviews, offering valuable context and interpretation alongside quantitative indicators. Each chapter focuses on specific topic areas, featuring insights from multiple interviewees, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the SDG indicators and progress assessment. Key challenges, achievements, policies, programs, and underlying drivers are discussed to shed light on the current situation and the way forward in each SDG area.

**Incorporating the impact of Covid-19 and natural disasters:** Rather than dedicating separate chapters to the impact of Covid-19 and natural disasters, these significant factors are integrated throughout the entire report. Their effects on development, both challenging and offering opportunities, are considered in the analysis of each SDG.

**Understanding SDG progress and indicators:** Each chapter begins with a description of current SDG progress using the SDG Progress Assessment. This assessment provides insights into whether the country’s current progress is sufficient to achieve the targets by 2030. The Statistical Annex of this report provides the sources of the indicators, which are based on internationally validated data.

**Visualizing SDG interlinkages:** To illustrate the interconnectedness of the SDGs and their relevance in the context of Timor-Leste, interlinkages graphics are presented at the beginning of each main chapter. These graphics demonstrate how different SDGs relate to each other and highlight the specific interlinkages addressed in each chapter.

**Transparency and consultation results:** The report incorporates the results of the VNR consultations with various stakeholders, including national, local, and target groups. By presenting these consultation results separately, transparency is ensured, and the voices of different groups are emphasized. The key questions and priorities for the interviews are informed by the consultation outcomes, offering a comprehensive view of stakeholder perspectives.

**Spotlight on good practices:** Throughout the report, relevant good practices are showcased. These practices refer to successful approaches, strategies, or initiatives that have proven effective in achieving positive outcomes or addressing challenges. With 20 good practices presented across the chapters, the report highlights both successful endeavours and lessons learned from new initiatives, policies, and programs implemented since the first VNR.

**Priorities for accelerating SDG implementation:** Each main chapter includes a dedicated Priorities section, which draws from multiple sources, including interviews, consultations, desk reviews, and the
progress assessment. These priorities encompass overarching issues that need to be addressed to accelerate SDG implementation and prevent regressions.

Conclusions and next steps: The final chapter brings together the overall findings of the report, identifies key priorities for accelerating the SDGs, and outlines post-VNR activities. This section provides a comprehensive summary and sets the stage for future actions.

Statistical annex: The report includes a Statistical Annex that presents the target values, sources, and indicators for the SDGs. As a living document, this annex will undergo regular updates until the next VNR period, ensuring the availability of the most up-to-date information.

We invite you to delve into this report, exploring the analysis, insights, and recommendations that will contribute to Timor-Leste's sustainable development journey.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>VNR-2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Total population and households (total)</td>
<td>total ppl 1,340,434 // households 250,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Census 2022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ppl 847,682 // HHs 181,409 (72.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Census 2022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ppl 492,752 // HHs 68,861 (27.5% of total private HHs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Census 2022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Average household size</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Census 2022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female headed households (both rural and urban)</td>
<td>44,535 (17.8% of total households)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Census 2022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Age structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Population with disabilities (total)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Census 2022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Multi-dimensional poverty rate</td>
<td>55% of population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54% of children (Estimates based on 2014 TLSLS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Prevalence of food insecurity</td>
<td>22% (IPC phase 3 or above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Total literacy rate (total)</td>
<td>70% (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>67% (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>73% (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth 15-24 years</td>
<td>85% (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Literacy rate among people with disabilities (total)</td>
<td>23.9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Attendance of primary education (total)</td>
<td>288,504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>143,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>145,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>% of women holding parliamentary seats</td>
<td>40% (2022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>% of women holding managerial positions</td>
<td>13.3% (2021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>% of households that have access to safely managed sanitation</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>75.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>95.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>% of households that have improved drinking water</td>
<td>87.0% (Census 2022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>82.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>97.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Youth not in employment, education or training (15-24 years)</td>
<td>30.5% (LFS 2021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>% Population age 5-25 by any disability Currently attending school</td>
<td>19.0% (Census 2022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>% of workforce in agriculture sector</td>
<td>26.9% (LFS 2021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>% of households with access to electricity</td>
<td>96.1% (2020 data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>94.4% (2020 data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>100% (2020 data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>% of population with access to internet</td>
<td>74.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>68.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>92.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Population covered by social protection</td>
<td>30.6% (2020 data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Children under 5 years of age have their birth certificate</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>COVID-19 cases (cumulative):</td>
<td>22,889 (WHO 2023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>COVID-19 deaths (cumulative)</td>
<td>131 (WHO 2023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Total GDP</td>
<td>3.62 billion (current US$)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Major events in Timor-Leste: January 2019- June 2023

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2019 | **January** - Acquisition of ConocoPhillips' and Shell's stakes in the Greater Sunrise oil and gas consortium  
|      | **April** – Inauguration of the Fibre Optic Terrestrial Project to bolster digital infrastructure  
|      | **July** – Presentation of the First Voluntary National Review Timor-Leste in New York  
|      | **December** – Parliamentary non-approval of budget triggers duodecimal regime for 2020 (which allows monthly appropriations of up to one-twelfth of the 2019 state budget) |
| 2020 | **January** - Full incorporation of Public Administration entities into the Programme Budgeting model  
|      | **January** – Launch of the 'Spotlight Initiative' aimed at curbing violence against women and girls  
|      | **March** - Severe flooding in Dili, impacting approximately 10,000 individuals  
|      | **March** – Confirmation of first Covid-19 case leading to the declaration of a State of Emergency  
|      | **April** - Formation of a new Government through a reconfiguration of party alliances  
|      | **December** – Parliament's approval and President’s promulgation of the national budget |
| 2021 | **April** – Cyclone Seroja wreaks havoc, impacting approximately ~180,000 people, destroying ~32,000 homes, and leading to 44 fatalities.  
|      | **April** – National Calamity declared in the wake of severe natural disasters.  
|      | **April** – Launch of the nationwide Covid-19 immunization programme, facilitated through COVAX.  
|      | **November** – State of Emergency imposed due to Covid-19 is officially lifted. |
|      | **February** – Ratification of the ‘Framework Law on General State Budget and Public Finance Management' is achieved.  
|      | **May** – Presidential election, designed to be resilient to COVID-19 conditions, takes place successfully.  
|      | **September** – A comprehensive Population and Housing Census gets underway.  
|      | **October** – The Integrated National Financing Framework is unveiled. |
| 2023 | **January** - The mid-term evaluation of the Strategic Development Plan is released.  
|      | **March** - Participation in the conference regarding the Least Developed Countries graduation in Dubai.  
|      | **May** - The transformation of the General Directorate of Statistics into the National Institute of Statistics is completed, coinciding with the launch of the 2023 Census report.  
|      | **May** - An agreement is reached, in principle, to welcome Timor-Leste as the 11th member of ASEAN.  
|      | **May** - The country successfully conducts its sixth Parliamentary elections. |
Part I. Introduction and Methodology

1. Approach and scope of the report

Minister Fidelis Magalhães presented the VNR-1 in at the HLPF in New York in July 2019 and has been key in developing the scope and approach for the VNR-2. Therefore, the VNR-2 team asked him about why Timor-Leste has volunteered to conduct the VNR the second time, why the VNR-2 title focuses on People Centred Sustainable Development and the expected results.

**Fidelis Magalhães:** As Timor-Leste aspires to become an upper-middle income country by 2030, our priority is our people, with the principle of ‘leave no one behind’. Investing in people is vital for the growth and development of Timor-Leste, but it’s only possible when the country has a strong economic foundation that is inclusive and diversified. This is the main scope and storyline in this second VNR. The VNR methodology has become a culture within our government and will hopefully continue into future governments.

*Fidelis Magalhães is the Minister of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers at Government of Timor-Leste. Having worked in civil society and human rights, he played an active role in peace and reconciliation efforts. He held various positions in the Government including the Minister of Legal Reforms and Parliamentary Affairs between 2018 and 2020.*

1.1. Scope of the report: People Centred Sustainable Development

**Could you tell us about the scope of the report and the background behind it?**

This report, called VNR-2, focuses on People Centred Sustainable Development. It all started back in 2002 when the youth of Timor-Leste wrote postcards expressing their aspirations for the nation in 2020. Four of these postcards were retrieved in 2022, and it’s clear that the youth envisioned Timor-Leste as a peaceful, democratic, and free nation.

**Box 1. Postcards written 20 years ago**

Bemvinda da Costa, female, 16 years old from Viqueque municipality (the southern municipality of Timor-Leste) wrote:

“I want in 2020 Timor-Leste will be different, erase KKN [corruption, collusion and nepotism] in Timor-Leste. I want in 2020, Timor-Leste will have improvements because many people are dying for this country, everything will not be complete if KKN persists. That is why if you become a Leader...”
don’t do the KKN, I want Timor-Leste to become a rich nation. As a Timorese, in 2020, I want my country should be better like other countries.

Latonia M.L.Araujo, male, 17 years old, from Dili:

I think in 2020, Timor-Leste will be better than now because we will get our freedom and democracy to construct our country with love and peace. As students, we are asking to our leaders to not be selfish but think of us as your people so that we can work together to construct our Timor-Leste to be better.

Ivo Jesuino G. Araujo, male, 18 years old from Dili wrote a list of his aspirations for the country:

- Understand each other to not kill each other. Stop violence and domestic violence.
- Should have modern factory technology.
- We will not have terrorists that burn houses, kill people like what Osama Bin Laden is doing in the USA.
- We will have tall buildings in the Dili City and many hotels.
- All the population will enjoy tall buildings, new houses, cars, motorbikes, tractors, containers. Lastly helicopters will take us to Liquica and Atauro municipalities.

Finally, Jose M Marcal, male, 17 years old from Dili expressed:

Timor-Leste would be better if all the leaders work together. I ask to erase corruption, collusion and nepotism and domestic violence, create job opportunities for young people and construct new schools for students so that we can focus on our study, because we are the future to build this country to be like other countries. I think in 2020, our lives will be improved like in other countries. We will not have “Uma Talin” [traditional house], we will not burn wood to cook. But we will be using gas, and all people will live in white [modern] house, have their own cars, motorbikes and some other things because we are rich with petroleum, marble and gas.

That’s fascinating. Can you give us a summary of the key points from the postcards?

The youth saw that once peace is achieved and violence is reduced, the national leaders should focus on promoting good governance by fighting corruption and working collectively and collaboratively to put ‘people at the center.’ They saw corruption, collusion, and nepotism as the main obstacles to development and urged national leaders to collaborate with each other to erase them. Furthermore, they saw the strategic use of Timor-Leste’s natural endowments such as petroleum as a means to invest in people and the economy. Developing modern industries, making use of technology, investing in education, and creating jobs are key factors to improve living conditions and reduce violence and domestic violence. As such, they believed, Timor-Leste will become a striving nation like other nations (Figure 1).
Figure 1 Postcards written by youth in 2002 to future leaders in 2022

That’s a very insightful perspective from the youth. How does this relate to the VNR-1 and VNR-2 reports?

The Timor-Leste’s VNR-1, published in 2019, used SDG 16 on Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions as the overarching theme and lens for the report. It highlighted that since the period of violence and instability in 2006, the country has not experienced protracted violence and is at peace. It concluded that the progress the nation has made in building a democracy is considerable. A considerable part of the VNR-1 was dedicated to the priorities of peace and nation-building. That is in line with all the four postcards which referred to the priority of peace and democracy reflecting the pressing need at the time of writing.

As explained earlier, during our VNR-2, we chose a unique approach to gauge the youth’s perspective on our progress towards the SDGs. This was accomplished by analysing postcards created by them, which offered a ground-up perspective on key development issues to respond to their expectations regarding SDG implementation in Timor-Leste. Through our analysis, we found that SDG 16 and SDG 17, focusing on peace, justice, strong institutions, and partnerships for the goals, were viewed by the youth as crucial underpinnings for development in Timor-Leste. They highlighted the significance of good governance, institutional development, and robust partnerships in this context.

Furthermore, they pointed out that SDG 4, 5, 8, 9, and 10, encompassing quality education, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation, and infrastructure, and reduced inequalities, respectively, act as key catalysts, accelerating our progress towards development. Conversely, they perceived SDG 1, 2, 6, 7, 10, and 11, which deal with poverty, hunger, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, reduced inequalities respectively, as significant outcomes of our developmental efforts.
What is the priority for Timor-Leste in achieving sustainable development?

The Strategic Development Plan clearly outlines our goal: "by 2030, Timor-Leste aims transition Timor-Leste from a low income to upper middle income country, with a healthy, well educated and safe population by 2030". Therefore, central to our strategies are the aspirations voiced by our young people, such as those written in the postcards which include access to quality education, secure job opportunities, improved living conditions, and the strategic use of technology. However, to genuinely develop our human capital, we need to go beyond these necessities. Inclusive social protection, universal healthcare, food security, and clean water and energy are all equally crucial. We are thereby adopting an analytical framework that underscores the importance of putting people first and abides by the 'leave no one behind' principle to ensure sustainable development in Timor-Leste. By ensuring that everyone has access to the essentials like health services, education, and food security, we aim to enhance the overall well-being of our people.

Central to Timor-Leste’s development is the investment in our most precious resource – our people. We see a symbiotic relationship between a robust, diversified economy and well-nurtured human capital. One strengthens the other in a beneficial cycle of growth and advancement. By focusing on developing the labour market and equipping a significant proportion of our youth with valuable skills, we stand to reap the benefits of a demographic dividend. Creating secure and meaningful employment opportunities for all, regardless of gender or locality, or other backgrounds is vital.

**Figure 2 Framework for analysis**

Furthermore, the recent Covid-19 pandemic and climate disasters require Timor-Leste to accelerate a more equitable and inclusive digital transformation across all sectors. This will help the government
increase efficiency and coordination. Ultimately, the progress in building effective and capable democratic and public institutions is the underpinning factor to realize these transformations.

I want to highlight that although VNR-2 focuses on people, it does not mean that the already achieved gains in democracy were taken for granted. This is especially important given the international context of increasing authoritarianism. The initial storyline and overarching theme were presented to the Council of Ministers in December 2022. The key messages were approved on 8 March 2023 and published on 11 April 2023.

1.2. Objectives and rationale

*Minister Magalhães, could you tell us about the objectives and rationale behind Timor-Leste’s second Voluntary National Review (VNR-2)?*

The VNR-2 aims to assess if the Timor-Leste is making progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and meeting the expectations of young people, as expressed in postcards. Specifically, the objectives are three-fold: to identify the progress made since the first VNR report; to examine the causes and drivers of these changes; and to identify future interventions necessary to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs.

The VNR-2 is timely and necessary for several reasons. First, the term of office of the current government will come to an end this year. On the one hand, the findings from the VNR-2 will inform the Eight Constitutional Government’s reporting on their mandate. On the other hand, this comprehensive and rigorous assessment could be a powerful planning tool for the next government, allowing it to improve the architecture of its programme and ensure necessary alignment and coordination of government activities. As such, the VNR-2 is useful across political cycles in Timor-Leste.

Second, the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and global insecurity over the last three years have had long-term impacts. Therefore, the VNR-2 report will help the government and non-state parties to adjust strategies and priorities on implementation of the SDGs in light of all these changes. This, in turn, will inform which public investments should be prioritized in the coming years. Third, Timor-Leste is expected to join the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) soon, while also progressing towards graduation from Least Developed Country status. The report’s findings will inform the government’s preparations for these important accessions and graduations.
What are the other benefits to conducting the VNR-2?

Yes, there are several. I take pride in our progress since the first VNR in 2019. The VNR methodology has become a culture within our government and will hopefully continue into future governments. Our technical team has managed to effectively balance major objectives with government action plans, thus providing specific data and reducing bias.

In our development efforts, we identify three areas requiring enhancement. First is the **setting of intervention sequences and priorities**. Priorities come to life when we have baseline data to inform us, which is why we utilise resources such as programme budgets and reports like the VNR for this purpose. Given that resources are limited, prioritization is crucial - we cannot tackle every challenge simultaneously. One of the challenges for Timor-Leste has been insufficient prioritization, leading to ineffective resource management and obstructing developmental progress.

Our approach focuses on **identifying the root causes of development setbacks**, tackling those first to yield positive outcomes, and ease the handling of other areas. In this context, we have selected ‘People’ as our primary focus. It sounds straightforward, but implementing people-centric policies demands detailed planning and careful execution.

**Coordination** is another area we are keen to improve. We see this issue recurring in many developing nations, including ours. Therefore, we believe in the need for better leadership at the government level and among development partners to prevent goal divergence during project execution. As the VNR looks at issues in a more holistic way, it highlights where the coordination needs to be improved.

Lastly, we value the role of **evidence-based policy making**. We have seen its benefits, particularly with the VNR, which allowed us to gain insights, inform policy decisions and, based on the feedback, advocate for the adoption of the International Convention for Persons with Disabilities. This time for the second VNR, it will help identify appropriate Covid-19 recovery measures. As we all know, the pandemic has had significant impacts on the global community, and Timor-Leste is no exception. Many think that Covid-19 is over but we must not forget its impacts are still present and there are many lessons. Therefore, it is critical that we identify the most effective recovery measures to minimize the pandemic’s impact on our economy and society.
2. Preparation Process

**Brigida Soares:** We designed the current VNR-2 process based on lessons learned from the first VNR. As a result, the VNR-2 is inclusive, honest, and evidence-based.

Brigida Soares is the Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Coordinator at the National Agency for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (ANAPMA) at the Prime Minister’s Office. She also served as a Technical Coordinator during the VNR-1 in 2019.

2.1. Management and coordination of the preparation process

You have provided a technical lead for both VNR-1 and VNR-2. Can you explain the VNR-2 development process and its main components?

Sure, the VNR-2 development process had three main interconnected parts: stakeholder engagement, data collection and analysis and drafting and review. These parts were crucial for ensuring that the process for developing the VNR was inclusive, evidence-based, and reflected the vision and character of Timor-Leste. The process was preceded by the formulation of the VNR Coordination Commission and will be followed by a series of post-VNR activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 2 Target stakeholders’ online survey: suggestions on the dissemination of the VNR-2 report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Government stakeholders:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Involve key persons such as Politicians,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government, and private Sector, so everyone is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commitment to reach the SDGs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need to publish more widely and ensure access.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Share the results with communities and municipal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>authorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Report needs to be simplified into a brochure and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disseminated through platforms such as WhatsApp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conduct training on the SDGs among civil servants.</td>
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</table>

After the VNR is presented, we will carry out several activities to follow up on the recommendations made. Firstly, we will organize consultations with stakeholders to report on the outcomes of the High-Level Political Forum and involve them in the implementation of the VNR recommendations. Additionally, we will hold a meeting with the United Nations and other development partners to create
a roadmap for providing support during the implementation phase. These activities are timely because they will be held only few months after the establishment of the ninth Constitutional Government, and the VNR-2 recommendations can be used to inform the new government’s programme.

**Box 3: Forum of NGOs’ position on stakeholder engagement and post-VNR activities**

Valentino Pinto, Executive Director of FONGTIL: We appreciate the VNR's second phase and participated actively in its consultations. I commend the Primary Minister's Office in promoting a Law on the Civil Society Support to continue work on Social Auditing of government programmes. While progress is being made, it is crucial to maintain a culture of following development processes for effective priority management and better citizen life. We believe there’s a need for expanded dialogue and coordination to better integrate our recommendations and findings into the relevant ministries' priorities. We emphasize that the VNR's recommendations should be more than just concepts. They need to be documented, launched, celebrated, and distributed to all ministries. It would be beneficial if ANAPMA could establish a continuous follow-up mechanism, ensuring these recommendations are reflected in each Ministry’s work priorities. By doing so, we can progressively address the challenges we face, with the hope that the government ten years from now will prioritize and resolve these issues for the betterment of our citizens. Implementing VNR recommendations requires concrete action and policy support.

**In 2019, there was an SDG working group leading the VNR process. How about this time, who was responsible for managing the VNR-2?**

The development of the VNR-2 was managed through the ‘Technical Coordination Commission for the Preparation of the Second Voluntary National Review Report on Progress in the Implementation of the SDGs’ (hereinafter the Commission). The commission consisted of 15 members from the Government, civil society, academia, and private sector. It was co-led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MNEC), General Directorate of Statistics and the National Agency for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (ANAPMA). ANAPMA also acted as a Secretariat to the VNR Commission. The VNR Commission reported to the Council of Ministers directly. The Commission was responsible for guiding the preparation of the VNR, reviewing the methodology and proposed theme of the VNR-2, reporting on the progress of the VNR preparation to the Council of Ministers, and ensuring the preparation process is inclusive, evidence-based, and rigorous. Because the VNR Commission consists of stakeholders from different sectors, it was very useful to reflect different perspectives at early stages of different activities.
2.2. Stakeholder engagement and communications

*How was the stakeholder engagement planned? Was there a dedicated stakeholder engagement plan?*

The VNR-2 had a dedicated stakeholder engagement plan developed in consultation with the VNR Commission, UN RCO, and the Timor-Leste’s Forum of NGOs (FONGTIL). In developing the stakeholder engagement plan, the VNR team based on lessons learned from VNR-1 and we used the results from a targeted stakeholder survey on preferred methods, frequency, and types of engagement. The VNR-2 tried to expand its engagement at sub-national levels, technical levels and political levels.
Could you tell us more about the targeted stakeholder survey?

The target stakeholder survey was a tool used to get input on the VNR-2 in terms of ideas for stakeholder engagement at different stages (including consultations, data collection, and report development); and to get stakeholders’ preferences on key thematic issues, focus SDGs, and topics. The survey received respondents’ feedback on the implementation of key policies and national priorities. The survey was developed in English and Tetum and administered through an online survey. We sent out the survey to more than 200 stakeholders and received response from 45 of them.

Figure 5 Target stakeholders’ online survey, Stakeholder engagement preferences in the VNR-2

Can you tell us about the consultations carried out for the VNR-2 report?

Between December 2022 and April 2023, a total of 807 individuals, consisting of 332 women and 475 men, were directly involved in the VNR-2 consultations. The aim of these consultations was to ensure the inclusion of under-represented groups in the VNR-2 process, hear the views of target groups on the progress of the SDGs, assess the impact of various laws, policies and practices on communities, and gather participants’ experiences during COVID-19 and natural disasters that occurred since 2019. The consultations provided opportunities for representatives from various target groups to shape the key issues, messages of the VNR-2 report, and priorities for the country to accelerate the progress of the SDGs.

Each consultation lasted a full day. One specific approach used in the consultations was that we split the participants into thematic groups. The national consultation for example had nine groups while the target groups consultations were divided into four groups. It was a great opportunity to also inform about the SDGs, the national SDP, VNR-2 process and the results. The consultations are a great way to increase ownership of the VNR by various stakeholders.
Maun Ken, a 26-year-old LGBTI representative who participated in the consultation shared his impressions as follows:

“I am proud that I participated in the VNR-2 consultation. It was my first time, and it was something new. My friend Azu invited me and I liked to be engaged in this event to increase my experience on how to speak up in a forum. In the event, I heard the LGBTI community's voice and their recommendations were very essential. Through these consultations, we can reinforce our government to eliminate any discrimination”.

The consultations were divided into different categories, such as target group consultations, multistakeholder consultations, technical consultations, and individual meetings/key-informant interviews. The target group consultations involved representatives from youth, women, people with disabilities, and LGBTIQ communities. The multistakeholder consultations involved national and sub-national consultations and brought together representatives from government institutions, civil society organizations, private sector, academia, and development partners. The technical consultations involved stakeholders responsible for planning, monitoring, and data production.

Table 1 VNR-2 Stakeholder engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target group consultations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Education</td>
<td>Students – universities; Youth NGOs, youth volunteers, young entrepreneurs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Employment opportunities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Digital transformation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Governance, civic education and inclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Women’s participation in labour market</td>
<td>Representatives of social institutions, women’s livelihood groups, organizations advocating women’s rights and gender equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Access to market and livelihoods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fight against gender-based violence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reproductive health services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Women’s participation in decision-making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>People with disabilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Participation in labour market and livelihoods</td>
<td>People with physical disabilities, hearing and vision impairment. Government focal points for inclusion and equality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Access to essential services – health, education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Physical infrastructure – transportation, WASH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Social protection programmes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Participation in decision-making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LGBTIQ</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Access to quality education</td>
<td>LGBTIQ persons, representatives from organizations for LGBTIQ rights and government focal points for inclusion and equality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Access to health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Access to justice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Job opportunities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Political participation and inclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multistakeholder consultations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National consultation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Health and nutrition</td>
<td>Prime Minister, Council of Ministers, National Parliament representatives, UN Resident Coordinator, Director Generals of Planning and M&amp;E development partners, civil society organisations, Chamber of commerce and private sector representatives, academia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Social protection and basic services Economic diversification and resilience (agriculture, tourism, industry and environment)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Job creation and private sector development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Institutions and good governance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Decentralization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics</td>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Peace, security and justice sector</td>
<td>Municipal government and municipal civil society representatives, local leaders – suco and aldeia chiefs, community livelihood groups (fisheries, tourism, agriculture), community members - women, youth, people with disabilities and other community figures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. SDGs means of implementation</td>
<td>Sub-national consultations 1. Poverty reduction (SDG 1) and social protection 2. Access to basic services (priorities identified) 3. Inclusive economic diversification (SDG8, SDG11, SDG14, SDG 15) 4. Governance and decentralization (SDG 16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical consultation 1. SDGs progress assessment methodology</td>
<td>Government and non-government stakeholders responsible for planning, monitoring, and data production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. SDGs target setting and a review of proposed target values</td>
<td>3. Review of data availability and sources per each SDG indicator 4. Relevant/alternative national indicators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Review of data availability and sources per each SDG indicator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Relevant/alternative national indicators.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the review, we also conducted individual in-depth interviews with sectorial and technical experts to understand the context and factors affecting setbacks, more; with community representatives who had taken initiatives to contribute to development in their own ways and with political leaders. Information gathered through interviews complement the SDG progress assessment data and information obtained from consultations.

**What other communication methods were used during the development of the VNR-2?**

Although the number of participants was low, our online stakeholders’ survey revealed a lack of awareness about the VNR among those directly relevant to the SDG implementation in Timor-Leste from all sectors (Figure 6). Given the high rotation rate within the public sector - half of the participants have only held their current positions for 1-2 years - this could potentially explain the low awareness of the first VNR. Even so, this underscores the importance for the VNR team to enhance their efforts in communicating the process and results of the second VNR. This communication should extend beyond key stakeholders, reaching out to the broader community as well.
Therefore, a monthly communication plan was developed, including a media engagement plan and a social media plan. A dedicated VNR Facebook Page was created, and timely news and updates were shared in English and Tetum via the page with a wide range of audience. The page reached a total of 26,270 accounts between October 2022 and June 2023. In addition, a live TV talk show was done, press releases about the VNR-2 through newspapers, radio, and TV, and a podcast interview were conducted. As the VNR-2 coincided with Parliamentary Election period in Timor-Leste, wider communication and consultations were crucial to ensure policy continuity and the next Parliament and Government use the VNR-2 findings.

### 2.3. Key informant interviews

The decision to present this report through narratives from interviews with various experts was driven by the VNR Commission’s aim to capture the complexities of the development challenges faced, considering recent events such as the Covid-19 pandemic, floods, political situations, and the global context. Key informant interviews were chosen as the preferred approach because they allowed the VNR team to gather information from a diverse range of individuals, including sector leaders and professionals with first-hand knowledge of the development issues and policy environment.

The key informant interviews served several purposes:

- Gathering information on pressing issues or problems in the country from well-connected and informed community experts.
- Providing additional insights to explain statistical data and delve deeper into consultation results.
- Creating a comfortable environment that encouraged frank and open in-depth discussions, leading to more candid and detailed answers.
The interviews were conducted face-to-face, utilizing interview tools that had been prepared in advance. These tools were developed based on consultation results and desk review findings. The results of the interviews are presented in this report with some editing for clarity and coherence.

In the selection of key informants, efforts were made to include a wide range of perspectives and points of view. This involved selecting individuals from different key stakeholder groups, including government, semi-government, academic institutions, and civil society organizations. Additionally, there was a conscious effort to ensure gender balance among the interviewees.

In the report, interviews were conducted with key individuals representing various sectors. Here is a list of interviewees for each chapter:

- **Chapter 1. Approach and scope of the VNR-2**: Fidelis Magalhães: Minister of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers at the Government of Timor-Leste

- **Chapter 2. Preparation Process** and **Chapter 3. SDGs Policy and Enabling Environment**: Brigida Soares: Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Coordinator at the National Agency for Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (ANAPMA) at the Prime Minister’s Office

- **Chapter 4. Poverty reduction and social protection**: Carmeneza Moineiro: Adviser to the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion

- **Chapter 5. Food security and nutrition**: Filipe Da Costa: Executive Director of the Unit of Mission to Combat Stunting

- **Chapter 6. Health and wellbeing**: Nevio Sarmento: Timorese microbiology scientist and a Ph.D. candidate at Charles Darwin University


- **Chapter 8. Inclusive and resilient economy**: Helder Lopes: Economic and Financial Advisor to the President of Timor-Leste

- **Chapter 9. Institutions that deliver for the people**: Rui Augusto Gomes: Minister of Finance for the 8th Constitutional Government
  - Maria Oliveira: Executive Secretary (General Director) for the Civil Service Commission
  - Marta da Silva: Researcher at Lao Hamutuk CSO

- **Chapter 10. Partnerships for the SDGs**: Licínio Branco: Director General for Multilateral and Regional Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
**In conclusion, how would you compare the VNR-1 and VNR-2 preparation processes?**

The scope and coverage of VNR-1 and VNR-2 are slightly different. VNR-1 had SDG 16 as the overarching theme with a focus on reconciliation and inclusion. The focus SDGs were 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 17. The statistical annex was included, but it was limited with no targets and previous years’ data. VNR-1 did not conduct any local reviews and had consultations with 400 participants through one national consultation, and two target group consultations. On the other hand, VNR-2 has one **overarching theme** of people centred sustainable development with three **sub-themes**: investing in people, inclusive economy and as an underpinning factor, institutional development. A statistical annex is included in the report, and it contains target values per each SDG indicator, and previous years’ data where possible. As such, it is more comprehensive. Second, in terms of **stakeholder engagement**, VNR-2 was a bit broader. As we are conducting the review for the second time, we had learned a lot from the first VNR and applied them this time. Perhaps in the next VNR, we should try to conduct the VNR at local levels as well.

**Table 2 Scope and coverage of VNR-2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>VNR-1: 2019</th>
<th>VNR-2: 2023</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thematic area</strong></td>
<td>SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong institutions. Reconciliation and inclusion.</td>
<td>People Centred Sustainable Development: Leaving No One Behind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SDGs</strong></td>
<td>SDG 16 as the overarching theme. Focus SDGs were: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 17.</td>
<td>One overarching theme with sub-themes. SDGs covered are: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 16 and 17.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statistical annex</strong></td>
<td>Included, But does not include targets values and previous years’ data.</td>
<td>Included. Target values and previous years’ data were included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local reviews</strong></td>
<td>Not conducted</td>
<td>Not conducted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Municipalities</strong></td>
<td>2 municipalities - Dili, Baucau</td>
<td>4 municipalities – Dili, Baucau, RAOEA, and Liquica.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of stakeholders</strong></td>
<td>400 participants</td>
<td>807 participants (40% female and 60% male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of consultations</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication means</strong></td>
<td>Email and meetings</td>
<td>Facebook page, Email newsletters (4 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Meetings, a TV talk show</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. SDGs Policy and Enabling Environment

The SDGs institutional mechanisms were described in VNR-1 report. Therefore, this section focuses on key changes introduced since the VNR-1 in policy and enabling environment of the SDGs.

3.1. Changes in the SDGs policy and enabling environment

**Brigida Soares:** The pandemic highlighted the need to strengthen our national monitoring and evaluation capacity. Sectoral Medium-Term Plans, aligned with the SDGs and SDP, are being piloted in health, education, agriculture, and public works. This integration presents a good practice for aligning medium-term planning with the SDGs, fostering cross-sector coordination, efficient resource utilization, and enhanced service delivery, thereby improving policy coherence and development effectiveness.

Brigida Soares is the Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Coordinator at the National Agency for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (ANAPMA) at the Prime Minister’s Office. She also served as a Technical Coordinator during the VNR-1 in 2019.

**What were the main recommendations provided in Timor-Leste’s first VNR in 2019 to improve the SDGs’ ownership, integration and institutional mechanisms?**

In our first VNR report back in 2019, we discussed several initiatives that were underway to bolster results-focused planning and budgeting processes in Timor-Leste. These included public financial management reforms and the establishment of an inter-ministerial council, which was chaired by the Prime Minister and was tasked with overseeing this reform. We also highlighted efforts to review the outcome indicators of government programmes to ensure they aligned with the SDG indicators. We had also begun the nationalization of the SDG indicators and monitoring and evaluation of SDG results from 2020 onwards.

As part of the VNR-1 report, we outlined several actions that were planned to be taken. First, we intended to increase public understanding of the SDGs and actively encourage citizen participation in their implementation. Second, the integration of the SDGs into government budgeting, policies, and programmes of line ministries was identified as a key priority for the Government of Timor-Leste. Third, we acknowledged that, despite progress in aligning budgeting and planning systems to the SDGs, there was significant work to be done to enhance our government’s capacity for data collection, analysis, and monitoring. Fourth, we were considering the idea of piloting an integrated mechanism for national reporting that streamline our reporting processes and ensure we meet international expectations.
Were the planned activities from the 2019 VNR-1 report successfully implemented? Could you please provide us with updates on the SDG policy environment in Timor-Leste since the first VNR in 2019?

Absolutely. Since 2019, our key focus was integrating the SDGs into government budgeting, policies, and programmes. Timor-Leste has prioritized the implementation of the Agenda 2030 in three phases that are aligned with our SDP. We are currently in phase 2, with phase 1 almost completed. Timor-Leste’s State Budget through its programmatic structure is fully aligned with the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

We’ve also aligned sectoral Medium-Term Plans with the SDGs and SDP, through the development of our Medium-Term Planning Framework. The framework has been approved by the Prime Minister and we are currently piloting Medium-term plans in four key sub-sectors: health, education, agriculture, and public works. Moreover, we are nationalizing SDG indicators where applicable and incorporating them into the Mid-Term Plans.

In terms of implementing the SDGs at the sub-national level, the Mid-Term Planning process is facilitating SDG implementation at the sub-national level. The Municipal Public Financial Management law, currently under discussion by the National Parliament, will require municipalities to align their development plans with the SDP, and consequently, the SDGs.

Recently, our Ministry of Finance approved a new five-year public financial management reform strategy. This strategy focuses on improving planning, ensuring fiscal sustainability, introducing a mid-term evaluation framework, increasing domestic revenue collection, and introducing value-added tax. The launch of the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) in October 2022 is another key advancement. This was based on a comprehensive Development Financing Assessment conducted in 2019 and provides a roadmap for financing the SDGs in Timor-Leste. Already, concrete steps have been taken as part of the INFF. For example, in June 2022 when the Ministry of Finance and the MNEC completed the Timor-Leste remittance mobilization strategy. The goal here is to incubate and scale up strategic approaches to leverage remittances for the socio-economic development of Timor-Leste, particularly focusing on diaspora remittances and investments. Other key priorities include mobilizing domestic revenues through new tax initiatives, exploring alternative financing sources like concessional and commercial loans and treasury bills, and prioritizing impactful expenditure over quantity through a transition from traditional line-item budgeting to improved annual and medium-term programme budgeting.

**Good Practice 1: Sectoral plans linked to SDP and SDGs**

The Government of Timor-Leste, through ANAPMA, has initiated the Medium-term Plan to streamline governmental programmes with strategic planning documents like the Strategic Development Plan and the SDGs. The Plan applies to all government entities, including those outside direct government control, like the National Parliament, courts, and the President’s office. The initiative started with a pilot phase in
four sub-sectors - Agriculture, Public Works, Education, and Health, beginning on 17 April with a goal to draft the first document by 30 June 2023.

- **Participants**: All line ministries under the government's organic structure, Municipalities, and state independent institutions participated in the implementation. This involved setting outcomes, outputs, and activities of the government programme, linking them with SDP and SDG objectives, and preparing a sequential 1+4 year plan.

- **Beneficiaries**: The initiative benefits the Prime Minister's Cabinet and intends to fill planning gaps, set clear planning directions, enable better monitoring of government programme implementation, and provide more efficient and effective service delivery to the community.

- **Results**: The Medium-term Plan provides a clear target for each government programme, enhancing service delivery, ensuring budget allocation, and offering measurable indicators from SDGs and relevant government documents. The initiative ensures the consistent implementation of the SDP and SDGs, thus fulfilling the state's commitment.

- **Key Successes**: Improved coordination among line ministries, increased awareness of budget, plan, and system unification, and reduced overlap in programme implementation. The initiative also enhances transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, promoting better management, improved service delivery, and consistent achievement of SDP and SDGs goals.

- **Potential for replication**: The success of the pilot phase can be replicated to other sub-sectors, and potentially to other organizations or countries. Key factors enabling the initiative's success include leadership, participation, financing, local support, previous experience, and organizational development. Potential hurdles to the initiative's success might include political intervention and institutional capacity for implementation.

This reform represents a promising practice for strategic alignment of medium-term planning with the SDGs, promoting the efficient use of resources and effective service delivery, whilst fostering coordination across various sectors. It illustrates how SDGs can be incorporated into national planning frameworks, benefitting policy coherence and development effectiveness.

**Could you speak about the progress made in the follow-up and review of the SDGs since the VNR-1, particularly in terms of reviewing programmes’ outcome indicators, nationalization of SDG indicators, and establishing a nationally led monitoring and evaluation of SDGs?**

We have made progress in these areas. ANAPMA, one of our key governmental institutions, is developing a national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) policy framework. This will include a national database specifically for SDG indicators. If the proposed SDG Commission is established, it would significantly aid this work, with ANAPMA reporting results and the SDG Commission overseeing and publishing pertinent data.

ANAPMA and INETL have been working collaboratively to strengthen data collection systems. The introduction of the Mid-Term Planning and M&E framework will support the timely collection of data. As a part of the M&E framework, we are developing a **five-year capacity-building plan**, which includes building institutional systems and enhancing individual capacities. The *Dalan Ba*
**Futuru** Timor-Leste information system tracks how much is allocated to each SDG every year and ANAPMA is the institution in charge of monitoring Timor-Leste’s achievements in terms of the SDGs. **Data disaggregation** will be integrated into the M&E framework development and included in the rollout and pilot of the Mid-Term Planning.

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**Good Practice 2: Paving the Road to the Future’ with Technological Efficiency in Public Administration in Timor-Leste**

*Dalan ba Futuru,* translating to “Road to the Future,” stands as a commendable practice in public administration. It embodies the essence of efficient, transparent, and accountable management, essential for any robust governance system. The design of DBFTL as a planning, monitoring, and evaluation tool leverages technology to streamline the annual planning process.

Its capacity to sketch out the chain of cause and effect from one outcome to the next allows for an improved understanding of the progress made towards strategic goals. This enhances the ability to predict and manage potential challenges, thereby significantly reducing risks associated with public projects. One of the distinctive aspects of *Dalan Ba Futuru* is its utilization of open-source software. This decision not only brings cost-effectiveness due to free licensing but also fosters a sense of ownership, given that the platform was developed by Timorese and is government owned. Furthermore, the widespread accessibility of the platform, extending to the village level, promotes inclusivity and ensures that no part of the community is left out in planning and evaluating public projects.

*Dalan Ba Futuru’s* incorporation in the Government Data Centre TIC- Timor assures security, which is vital in the digital age. Its linkage with the ANAPMA, who administers the application, ensures that it remains aligned with public administration goals and standards. The initiative to digitalize planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes through *Dalan ba Futuru,* along with its integration with FMIS-Free balance, marks a significant step towards modernization and enhanced efficiency in public finance management.

Overall, *Dalan Ba Futuru’s* role in facilitating budget elaboration, promoting efficient planning, monitoring annual plan implementation, and supporting evaluations makes it a best-practice model. By offering real-time information for decision-making, it proves instrumental in crafting a well-informed and proactive administration, thereby paving the "Path to the Future."

The Government started introducing important **social and economic markers** in the Financial Management Information System and *Dalan Ba Futuru* Timor-Leste systems specifically focusing on children, disability, food security and nutrition, gender and value chains. These markers allow the Government to monitor and allocate resources more effectively to the most vulnerable groups in our society and is a concrete action in line with the Leave No One Behind principle.

The global Covid-19 pandemic had a major delaying effect on the implementation of our key public financial management reform programme. Naturally, the focus and priorities during Covid-19 was to
keep the country and all citizens safe. **It is particularly hard during such times to implement major reform work such as medium-term planning** and strengthening our M&E capacity and systems. We were able to use this time to prepare our policies and frameworks, and the need and **demand for data during the pandemic is a useful lesson for all of us in why we must strengthen our M&E capacity, policies and processes.**

*In the VNR-1, one of the key follow-up actions mentioned was raising awareness of the SDGs. Can you provide an update on whether this has been accomplished?*

In terms of raising awareness about the SDGs, the United Nations in Timor-Leste has been actively involved. Over a span of two years, the UN Communications Group organized four significant sensitization and awareness sessions dedicated to the SDGs and Agenda 2030. These sessions aimed to engage participants from diverse backgrounds and organizations, resulting in a substantial number of attendees. The first session, held in collaboration with the Timor Post newspaper, attracted 25 journalists and senior staff members. The second session took place at RTTL and saw the participation of 20 staff members. The third session, hosted at the UN House in Timor-Leste, brought together over 30 journalists representing various media outlets. Lastly, the session held at the Xanana Gusmao Reading Room gathered an impressive cohort of 60 students.

Overall, these sessions reached out to more than 135 individuals, including journalists, media representatives, and students. Through engaging presentations, interactive discussions, and informative resources, the UN Communications Group effectively disseminated knowledge about the SDGs and Agenda 2030, fostering a deeper understanding and commitment to sustainable development among the participants.

Additionally, an event was organized at the Portuguese School of Dili on April 24th. Around 50 students from year 5 and 12 participated in this session, which focused on explaining the SDGs and exploring ways in which students can contribute to their realization in their daily lives. A short video was also presented to further enhance their understanding.

**Moving forward, what should be done to improve the SDG Policy Environment?**

The development of the **SDG commission** to keep the focus on the SDG goals, the implementation of medium-term planning, setting national medium-term priorities with measurable indicators aligned to the SDG’s, together with strengthening of monitoring and evaluation systems and capacity will help improve the SDG policy coherence and environment. This includes, ensuring the availability of reliable, timely data for decision makers and citizens.
3.2. Data and Statistical Systems and the SDG Progress Assessment

Elias Ferreira: The significance of statistical capacity and quality evidence-base is continuously growing and should meet the changing data needs of the Government, civil society, and development organizations, especially given the recent Covid-19 pandemic and our efforts to accelerate our progress towards meeting the SDGs.

Elias Ferreira is the President of the National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Finance Timor-Leste since April 2023. He has joined the National Directorate of Statistics since 2002 and was appointed as the Director General of Statistics, Ministry of Finance in 2016. His vision is to develop an integrated social and economic statistics system in line with international standards and to promote evidence-based policy-making in Timor-Leste.

Could you please explain what methodology and indicators were used in the VNR-2 report to assess the progress of Timor-Leste’s SDGs implementation? How were the target values for each SDG target determined in the assessment process?

The report uses the UN ESCAP’s SDG Progress Assessment Methodology in analysing and communicating statistics in the VNR (ESCAP, 2022). The assessment provides opportunities to observe key trends rather than a snapshot alone, helping to answer the questions ‘How much progress has been made since 2015’ and ‘How far is the country from achieving the SDG targets by 2030?’ To answer these questions, the SDG indicators framework and national and international statistics available for the indicators are used.

The results of the assessment are produced at sub-indicator level and aggregated at indicator, target and goal levels (ESCAP, 2023a). For this VNR, a total 123 indicators and 226 sub-indicators were used. To measure progress, it was important to set target values per each SDG indicator. Three types of methods were used to set targets – to use the universal target value (eliminating poverty); estimate target based on the country’s past rate of progress; and to use regional performance as benchmark.

Once we have the target values and the data for the indicators, we can estimate how likely Timor-Leste is to achieve the SDGs given the current pace. There are four types of results from the assessment.

- **On track** – it indicates that the country is making progress towards achieving the target and is expected to meet it based on the current rate of progress or with minor additional effort.

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1 For more information on the background and methodology of the SDG Progress Assessment, Progress Assessment Methodology | SDG Data Gateway (unescap.org) and https://www.unescap.org/kp/2023/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2023.
• **Accelerate** – means there is a need to increase the current rate of progress in order to achieve the target within the given timeframe.

• **Regressing** - signifies regression or a lack of progress in reaching the target. It suggests that efforts need to be intensified or redirected to reverse the negative trend.

• **No data available** - indicates that there is no data or insufficient data available to assess the progress towards the target.

**How was the data collection and progress assessment process conducted for the SDG Progress Assessment in Timor-Leste’s VNR-2, and what key elements were considered in the assessment?**

A technical workshop was held involving 65 planning and monitoring officers from various government entities to validate the SDG Progress Assessment in Timor-Leste’s VNR-2. The VNR Secretariat used the SDG Progress Assessment Tool and conducted follow-up meetings and trainings with line ministries and non-government stakeholders to collect up-to-date data for each indicator. Data focal points were identified within each line ministry. The ANAPMA and INETL team carried out a review of the SDG indicators and dataset. The SDG indicators dataset includes:

- **Data points**: It includes the data collected for each indicator since 2010, providing a historical perspective on progress. It is required for each indicator to have more than three data points that demonstrate consistency and are properly calculated using the same method.

- **Target values**: These values are determined by referencing the Strategic Development Plan (SDP), sectoral policies, programmes, strategic plans, and annual plans, setting specific targets to strive for.

- **Accountable organization**: Relevant sectors, line ministries, and agencies are assigned responsibility for tracking and reporting on the indicators.

- **Data source identification**: This involves documenting the name and type of surveys and administrative data forms used, as well as the frequency of data collection, ensuring transparency and reliability in data sources.

During the technical consultation, participants provided valuable insights regarding the existing gaps in data collection, analysis, and data systems in Timor-Leste, with a specific focus on the SDGs. They also discussed potential strategies and actions to address these gaps and improve the overall data ecosystem in the country.

**VNR Consultations 1: Technical consultation on SDG targets, indicators and data availability**

On 12 December 2022, the VNR Commission in partnership with UN ESCAP organized a technical workshop among 80 (33% female and 67% male) government officials responsible for planning, monitoring and evaluation. The consultation aimed to review the target values in the Timor-Leste SDG dataset, review of data availability per each SDG indicator and get feedback on the SDG Progress Assessment methodology and tool and potential improvements.
Group discussions, the Technical Consultation on SDG data availability, Timor-Leste

The participants were split into four groups: Human Capital (SDG 1-5); Economic Development (SDGs 7-11); Environment and climate change (SDGs 6, 12-15); and Institutional Reform (SDG 16-17). In addition to getting specific feedback on SDG target values and indicators, several needs among the responsible government officials were identified in relation to SDG follow-up, data collection and analysis.

- Language barriers often hamper data collection efforts. Most indicators are primarily in English, and while translations into Tetum exist, the nuanced details of measurement can sometimes be lost.
- The absence of a central data centre complicates the situation. Without it, the burden of urgent data collection falls on individual agencies, making the process less efficient.
- Slow internet speeds further impede the process, restricting efficient data collection and exchange across all entities in Timor-Leste.
- A limited understanding of the SDGs, resulting from sparse information, contributes to these challenges.
- Budgetary restrictions and limited understanding of SDG indicators within the Line Ministry present additional hurdles in meeting set targets.
- It’s crucial to contextualize global indicators to effectively tackle country-specific issues such as poverty and hunger. This is especially important for indicators that aren’t already contextualized, as it significantly influences planning and budgeting.
- Introducing specific indicators to assess programme quality would also be beneficial in driving improvements.

The consultation with four focus groups generated several key recommendations:

- Use national indicators that accurately reflect the unique context of Timor-Leste.
- ANAPMA should work with line ministries to align existing programmes with the Strategic Development Plan, SDGs, and government programmes.
- Efforts should be made to facilitate the capacities required for the contextualization of SDG indicators.
- Translation and consistent language usage in SDG indicators should be maintained.
- All municipalities should conduct regular M&E to gauge the implementation of SDG indicators.
- Establish data centres for each entity to improve data accuracy and utilization.
- Regular training on global and national indicators and data production and use, should be provided.
- The integration of SDG indicators into the annual work plans of line ministries should be encouraged.
According to the VNR-1 report, one of the key strategies to accelerate the progress of the SDGs is to enhance data collection and analysis. Can you provide an update on the actions taken in line with these recommendations?

Yes, the VNR-1 report emphasized the importance of producing timely, relevant, and high-quality data by conducting more frequent surveys with wider geographic coverage. Additionally, it recommended better coordination for regularly accessing and combining administrative data from line ministries and service providers. The report called for increased investments in statistics and data and for ensuring that all relevant data is disaggregated. In short, the national statistical system, which is the underlying factor to produce quality data and evidence for decision-making, needed to be improved.

Since 2019, significant progress has been made in strengthening Timor-Leste’s national statistical system. Key issues related to the system’s enabling framework have been addressed. One of the most significant developments was the Council of Ministers’ approval and the President of Republic Promulgation of the Decree-Law no. 4/2023 on 15 February 2023, which transformed the General Directorate of Statistics into the National Institute of Statistics of Timor-Leste. This transformation is the foundation for increased management capacity, technical and administrative autonomy, and financial resources for the national statistical authority. Despite this transformation, the National Institute of Statistics remains a part of the indirect administration of the State, under the Ministry of Finance.

We developed the National Statistical Development Strategy (2023-2033) which is a 10-year plan for the national statistical system and it was launched in June 2023. The goal of this strategy is to plan how and why official statistics should be produced and managed, including budget estimates for statistical production and development. We worked with the World Bank to develop this strategy and followed the Paris21 guidelines, using a wide range of consultations.

The National Statistical Development Strategy responds to the changing data needs of the Government, development organizations, civil society, and others. Given the recent Covid-19 pandemic and our efforts to accelerate the SDGs, official statistics have become more critical than ever. During national emergencies such as natural disasters, statistics are crucial. To ensure the timely and comprehensive coverage of statistics, the strategy will be implemented at the municipal and district levels alongside the ongoing decentralization process.

Over the past few years, there has been an increase in the availability of funding allocated from the general budget. This reflects a consensus on the importance of producing high-quality and timely data and the need to invest in institutional capacities. Specifically, there has been an increase in the budget allocated for the statistics authority, further emphasizing the commitment to improving data quality and management.
Figure 7 State budget allocated to the General Directorate of Statistics, 2019-2023 (US$)

Note: the increase in budget allocation in 2022 and 2023 is also related to the Population and Housing Census
Source: http://www.budgettransparency.gov.tl/publicTransparency

In 2022, the Population and Housing Census was conducted successfully, two years after its initial postponement. This census generated essential data to support the planning and implementation of development programmes, update statistical information on demographic, economic, and social characteristics of the population, and track progress towards achieving the SDGs in the country. For the first time, we digitized the census, using computer-assisted personal interviews through electronic devices. The technical assistance provided by UNFPA was crucial in digitizing the Census and training our staff.

We have also completed several key surveys, including the national Agricultural Census (2019), Food and Nutrition Survey 2020, and Labour Force Survey 2021. Currently, we are in the preparation phase of the Living Standards Survey 2023. All of these surveys disaggregate data by gender, age, income, migratory status, educational level, disability, and geographic location, among others, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the data.

Since the first VNR, we have successfully introduced modern technology in our data collection methods. By using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and handheld devices, we can increase the quality of the data we collect. We also conducted our first computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) with the support of UNDP and the World Bank. The phone-based surveys and assessments as a remote data collection method is very useful, particularly during times when we cannot conduct face-to-face interviews, like during the Covid-19 pandemic. It allows us to conduct high-frequency surveys at a lower cost while still gathering reliable and accurate data.

How did the General Directorate of Statistics maintain operations and employ innovative methods during the Covid-19 and flood crises in Timor-Leste?

During the Covid-19 State of Emergency and the Floods in April, the National Institute of Statistics remained active in providing essential data. The nationwide Covid-19 Socio-Economic Impact Assessment conducted by the General Directorate of Statistics in 2021 in partnership with UN...
and UNDP helped to provide a more comprehensive picture of how the population and businesses were coping with the situation. In conducting these surveys, we learned how to maintain maximum safety, adhering to Do No Harm principles at all stages of the surveys to protect respondents. After Tropical Cyclone Seroja, we conducted the Household and Building Damage Assessment in partnership with the National University of Timor-Leste’s civil engineering department. We used a digital toolkit developed by UNDP’s Crisis Bureau. This was a new experience for us as we utilized remote sensing data or satellite images to identify which households were damaged. Our UNTL colleagues conducted the building damage assessment, while we assessed the impacts on households’ livelihoods.

**While SDG Indicator 17.19.1 shows progress in 'Resources for Statistical Capacities', SDG Indicator 17.18.2 concerning 'National Statistical Legislation Compliance' appears stagnant. Could you elaborate on why this is?**

Indeed, Timor-Leste has a Law on Statistics in place since 2003 (Decree-Law No. 17/2003) following our independence. However, it’s evident that the law needs to be updated to align with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. Our Statistical Law needs enhancements in areas such as the National Statistical System, the National Statistical Council, Advisory Committees, a National Statistical Office, and the role of the Chief Statistician. Rather than merely being covered by secondary legislation or government directives, these need to be directly addressed in the law. This improvement is one of the main objectives outlined in our National Statistical Development Strategy, and we aim to accomplish it within the next three to four years.

**What has been the overall change in SDG data availability since the first VNR?**

We have made progress since our last review in 2019, with the number of indicators with sufficient data increasing from 89 to 123 (Figure 8). Notably, there has been improvement in data availability for SDGs 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, and 17. However, while we have made progress, we still lag behind many countries in the Asia-Pacific region, and we need more data to track our progress in implementation of the SDGs.
Figure 8 SDGs data availability in Timor-Leste, 2022 and 2019

Note: Sufficient = At least 2 data points are available; Insufficient = 1 data point; No data = no data points. Source: (ESCAP, 2023b)

Figure 9 Percentage of Sufficient Data by Goal in Timor-Leste (2019, 2022)

Note: The availability of data comparison is based on global data (UNSD) to ensure consistency in comparison. Source: (ESCAP, 2023c)

What have been the challenges encountered in the last four years in strengthening SDG data and data collection systems overall in the country? And can you share your thoughts on moving forward, what should we focus on?

We still don’t have a set of agreed national indicators to measure progress towards achieving the SDGs despite that more than half of the national SDP indicators are aligned with that of the SDGs indicators (110 out of 229 SDG indicators were aligned with the national plan). There is no single online platform that brings all the SDG data together. Nonetheless, in 2023, a new platform will be developed
as part of the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics. The ANAPMA team and the National Institute of Statistics are working together to create this platform.

The coordination of data for the SDGs still has some problems, especially in obtaining administrative data. ANAPMA is responsible for monitoring and evaluating government programmes and therefore is regularly in communication with line ministries while the National Institute of Statistics is focused more on national surveys. However, the coordination and production of data between reporting periods such as the VNR is not sufficient. We need to find ways to improve the collection and use of administrative data. There has been some progress in the health management information system, education information system, and the national social security portal. In terms of data disaggregation, we made improvements in analysing data by income class or wealth index. The latest surveys Food and Nutrition Survey (2020), the Labour Force Survey (2021) and SEIA surveys all analysed the results based on wealth index. However, the area that needs most improvement is in the disability data.

*Figure 10 Filling SDG data gaps by type of source and disaggregation of SDG indicators*

![Data disaggregation chart](image)

**Note:** The availability of data comparison is based on global data (UNSD) to ensure consistency in comparison.  
**Source:** (ESCAP, 2023c)

The current challenge is to link administrative data to national indicators. While there are now focal points in all ministries and government agencies since VNR-1, many of them lack the capacity to understand how to link data to indicators and to collect and analyse data. The National Institute of Statistics is unable to provide statistical training to all focal points every year. Two options are available for moving forward: to assign professional statisticians to key ministries or to train line ministry staff in data collection and analysis. However, turnover among trained staff is a major challenge due to the
instability of civil servants. It should be noted the National Institute of Statistics, in collaboration with UNFPA, has been conducting comprehensive data literacy training programmes for a broad range of stakeholders. These programmes have been designed to cater to the requirements of municipalities and RAEOA, as well as national directors at line ministries, policymakers, civil society members, and media personnel. The training sessions commenced in 2022 and will continue until the end of 2023.

As the National Statistics Development Strategy lays out a clear roadmap and the National Institute of Statistics restructured, the continued support and collaboration from the UN system and other development partners in Timor-Leste remain essential. In the next few years, our priorities include enhancing the Law on Statistics to meet international standards and adhere to the fundamental principles of official statistics. We also plan to ensure that all staff in the national statistical system, particularly those within line ministries, are equipped with the necessary statistical skills. Further, it is crucial to undertake policy initiatives concerning the Open Data initiative within the data governance framework. Investing in the creation and deployment of a data exchange platform for efficient storage, access, and dissemination of data is another critical need. Finally, we aim to increase the ICT capacities within the National Institute of Statistics by updating our software, licenses, and data protection measures. It's important to keep track of how well statistics are being shared with the public and to make sure that a wide range of statistics are being published. There will be some challenges along the way, but there will also be successes.

3.3. Priorities

By prioritizing the policy actions listed below, Timor-Leste can create a conducive environment for effective SDG implementation, data monitoring, and reporting, ultimately accelerating progress towards sustainable development.

1. **Establishing an SDG Commission:** Create a dedicated organizational structure, such as the SDG Commission, to enhance policy coherence, coordination, and knowledge-sharing. This commission would oversee the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and ensure consistent policy-making for sustainable development.

2. **Developing a Timorese SDG Indicators Framework:** Adopt a nationally relevant and context-specific SDG indicators framework aligned with the revised Strategic Development Plan (SDP). The SDG Commission can be responsible for this exercise, facilitating the monitoring and reporting of SDG progress based on Timorese indicators.

3. **Integrating SDGs into agency policies and budgets through the Mid-Term Planning:** Every government agency should incorporate the SDGs into their policies, strategies, and budgets, ensuring that sustainable development considerations are mainstreamed across all sectors. The effectiveness and efficiency of this approach should be reviewed and, if necessary, amended by the SDG Commission by the end of 2023.

4. **Establishing a national SDG Indicators Framework:** Develop a national SDG indicators framework with its own methodology, aligned with the updated SDP framework. This framework
should enable the continuous updating of datasets, ensuring that relevant data are available for monitoring SDG progress. The SDG Commission could play a pivotal role in overseeing this process.

5. **Continue strengthening statistics development:** Approve the National Strategy for Statistics Development and revise the National Law on Statistics, providing sufficient resources to the INETL and line ministries for effective data collection and monitoring functions. Standardization of data collection methods according to SDG indicator metadata/methodology should be prioritized, and coordination efforts can be facilitated by the SDG Commission.

6. **Closing data gaps and disaggregation:** Address data gaps, particularly for SDGs 5, 1, 2, 4, 6, and 8, by 2030. Enhance data disaggregation efforts to provide more detailed insights and ensure that the M&E framework integrates disaggregated data. This should be included in the rollout and pilot of the Mid-Term Planning.

7. **Strengthening SDG data collection and analysis:** Provide significant training and cooperation between INETL, ANAPMA, and the future body responsible for SDG data collection and analysis in the country. Clear guidelines should be developed by UN ESCAP for SDG data requirements, including the number of minimum data points, validation processes, and standardization to enable consistent use of the SDG Progress Assessment. Consistency in reporting and understanding of SDG progress at all levels should be fostered.

8. **Capacity-building and institutional systems:** Develop a comprehensive five-year capacity-building plan that focuses on building institutional systems and enhancing individual capacities. This plan should include extensive training on data collection, analysis, monitoring, and evaluation. Consider establishing a sub-academy for data collection and analysis, jointly managed by the future SDG Commission and INETL.
Part II. Investing in people

In 2002, high school students wrote their aspirations for their country 20 years later:

*I want Timor-Leste become a rich nation. As a Timorese in 2020 I want my country should be like other Countries (Bemvinda da Costa, female, 16 years old, Viqueque)*

*All the population will enjoy tall buildings, new houses, cars, motorbikes, and tractors (Ivo Jesuino G. Araujo, male, 18 years old, Dili).*

*... I ask to erase domestic violence. I ask to ... construct new schools for students so that we can focus on our study, because we are the future to build this country to be like other countries. I think in 2020, our lives will be improved like in other countries. We will not have “Uma Talin” [traditional house], we will not burn wood to cook but we will be using gas, and all people will live in white [modern] house (Jose M Marcal, male, 17 years old, Dili).*

As these young people envisaged 20 years ago, is Timor-Leste today on track of becoming a middle-income country and delivering a people-centred approach? How effective has Timor-Leste been in achieving inclusive health, education, social protection, and food security for all? What has worked well and what were the setbacks? Using the answers to these questions, this chapter aims to identify what should be prioritized to have the most impact on people’s lives by 2030?

Overview of progress of the SDGs

2020 and 2021 were particularly challenging years for Timor-Leste in terms of progressing social policy. Despite this, the Government kept essential services operational and was responsive to Covid-19 spikes and protected people by implementing a mix of containment measures. As a result, death rates and serious cases of Covid-19 remained low.

The socio-economic impact of multiple shocks in Timor-Leste has been detrimental for gains in development, especially for rural households, people with disabilities and the poor slowing progress on SDG 2, SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 6 and SDG 7. Although the nutrition situation has continued to improve, prevalence of stunting, underweight and wasting remains high compared to the Asia-Pacific region. While the health system in Timor-Leste is under-resourced and faces several challenges including shortage of health workers, inadequate infrastructure and lack of essential medicines. While social protection programmes aimed at vulnerable parents and children are adopted, they are not yet
adequate to meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups. The net enrolment rates at secondary levels have been increasing yet preschool education enrolment is low, and the quality of education and use of digital resources remain a major challenge.

Figure 11 SDG progress assessment snapshot – SDGs 1, 2,3,4,5,6 and 7

Therefore, investing in people means healthy, nourished and educated children, society, and workforce. It means strengthening equitable access to quality health and education services and transforming climate-resilient food systems and agriculture services. The poorest households struggled to cope with difficulties due to the twin shocks of Covid-19 and the Cyclone. Expanding social protection to target the vulnerable and poor individuals and households will empower them. As such the SDP goals under the social capital priority area will also be achieved.

4. Poverty Reduction and Social Protection

4.1. SDG 1 Progress Assessment

SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere aims at eradicating extreme poverty, reducing poverty by at least half, implementing social protection systems, ensuring equal rights to resources, building resilience to environmental, economic and social disasters, implement poverty eradication policies and mobilizing resources for the policies As of 2023, out of the seven targets, Timor-Leste, five targets need to be accelerated while there was insufficient or lack of data to measure progress of two targets.
**Figure 12 SDG 1: Ending Poverty, SDG Progress assessment at target level**

| 1.1 | International poverty |
| 1.3 | Social protection |
| 1.4 | Access to basic services |
| 1.5 | Resilience to disasters |
| 1.a | Resources for poverty programmes |
| 1.2 | Poverty reduction |
| 1.b | Poverty eradication policies |

**Source:** (ESCAP, 2023b)

- **Target 1.1 aims to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030.** As of 2021, 22.6% of people aged 15 years or above in Timor-Leste still live on less than US$1.90 per day. In 2019, the rate was slightly lower at 17.4% in total (male: 18.4 %; female: 16.1%).

- **Target 1.2 aims to reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.** According to the latest national poverty indicator, 41.8% were living below the national poverty line, 42.3% for male and 41.2% of female (Living Standards Survey 2014). According to the national multidimensional poverty index, 55% of population were living in multidimensional poverty and 54% of children were living in multidimensional poverty (GDS, MOF and UNICEF, 2021).

- **Target 1.3 focuses on implementing social protection systems and measures for all,** with the goal of achieving substantial coverage of the poor and vulnerable by 2030.
  - The proportion of population covered by at least one social protection benefit was 30.6% (ILO, 2022).
  - The population effectively covered by disability cash benefits was 21.6% in 2020-22 ILO Report, a slight increase since 2019 (19.3%).
  - In 2020, 38.2% of children are covered by cash benefits, which is an increase from the latest data available (30.7% in 2016).
  - 100% of elderly receive an elderly pension (contributory and non-contributory) in 2020-2022.
  - 8.9% of workers are actively contributing to pension regimes.

- **Target 1.4 focuses on providing universal access to basic water and sanitation.** In 2020, 85% of the population had access to basic drinking water services, but there was a significant

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2 For detailed information on indicators and data sources, please refer to the Statistical Annex of the report.

3 The poverty indicator referred to here is the “Employed population below international poverty line. The age groups available are 15+ (total), 15-24 (youth), and 25+ (adult).

4 The National Institute of Statistics and the World Bank are planning the Living Standards Survey 2023. The Survey will provide an opportunity to update the national data and trends in living standards across the country.
difference between rural and urban areas, with only 80% of the rural population having access compared to 96% of the urban population.

- **Target 1.5 addresses disaster resilience.** Although the SDG Progress Assessment does not have data available for the Tropical Cyclone Seroja validated by UNDRR, a GoTL, World Bank and UN report estimated the total damage and loss of approximately US$307.7 million, with 90% of this amount for damage and 10% for losses (GoTL, World Bank and UN, 2021).

- **Target 1.a aims to mobilize resources for poverty reduction,** and as of 2020, Official Development Assistance (ODA) grants for poverty reduction as a percent of Gross National Income increased to 2.28% from 1.4% in 2019.

Poverty eradication and social protection were important pillars of Phase 1 of the **Strategic Development Plan.** The Social Capital Development Area, under Social Inclusion mentioned the following targets: Creation of a universal contributory social security system that guarantees all Timorese workers a pension; A social safety net package for vulnerable families will have been developed; and A Law on Orphan Care and Adoption will be operational, along with other measures to support vulnerable children.

Overall, the synergies between SDG 1 and other SDGs are strong. The VNR-2 underscores a more pronounced relationship direction, as depicted in the following figure.

*Figure 13 Synergies of the SDG 1 with other SDGs*

Note: SDG 1 ties to all SDGs, but for report relevance and based on consultations, interviews, and case studies, only certain SDGs are featured. One-way arrows suggest stronger influence on the SDG; two-way arrows denote mutual influence. Source: Adapted by the author
4.2. Progress and challenges

This section seeks to answer the question whether Timor-Leste is implementing policies and programmes that reduce poverty and protect workers and all citizens. The chapter presents the interview conducted with Carmeneza Monteiro and findings from a series of national, local and target group consultations and desk review.

**Carmeneza Monteiro:** “It is important to deliver for the people and we cannot take for granted the peace and stability we have now. Peace and stability is possible when the basic needs of the people are met. Therefore, the Timor-Leste is continuously improving the social protection ecosystem. The launching of the Bolsa de Mae-New Generation programme as a universal cash transfer to all children, pregnant woman and children with disabilities is a big step and good practice to accelerate the SDGs.”

Carmeneza Monteiro is a public policy professional currently leading the social protection programme with DFAT’s Partnership for Human Development and Social Protection Adviser to the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion. She is also a Partial Commissioner for the Civil Service Commission of Timor-Leste.

**What comes to your mind when reading the postcards written by students 20 years ago?**

I see that all of these postcards talked about peace and freedom as well as some development issues such as **eliminating violence and domestic violence**, providing better living conditions for the people, jobs for youth and eliminating corruption, collusion and nepotism.

As of now, I would say Timor-Leste is following the principles of democracy and peace. But **democracy is fragile and can flip into conflict** if democracy does not deliver to people, if corruption, collusion and nepotism persists, no jobs available for young people and services are inaccessible. Looking from the experiences from other new democracies – peace and stability is possible when the basic needs of the people are met. So, for me, these postcards are reminding us yet again about the importance of delivering for the people and we cannot take for granted the peace and stability we have now.

Overall, the State has been trying its best to create an enabling environment for peace and democracy, the oil economy has contributed to lifting people up from poverty but there are still many challenges in terms of employment, economic diversification and social policies.

**Can you describe the poverty and social protection situation in Timor-Leste before the pandemic?**

Before the pandemic, Timor-Leste still had a lot of vulnerabilities. The **poverty level** was one of the highest in Asia-Pacific. Although we don’t have recent data, in 2014 (the latest available data), around 41.8% of the population were living below the poverty line. But this rate was even higher for **children**
aged 0-14 years at 49% (GDS and UNICEF, 2018). The incidence of child labour was 16.1% according to an estimate by ILO in 2019.

The national poverty line is the most useful threshold for monitoring national poverty and for national policy making. Since 2014, there has been no Living Standards Survey (TLSLS) conducted in Timor-Leste. The TLSLS 2023 is underway, and results are expected to be released in 2024 thus updating the national poverty rates and relevant indices.

There were large differences among the populations living in rural and urban areas in terms of access to essential services. The multidimensional poverty index clearly shows the number of
populations deprived in living standards, water and sanitation, health and education were much higher in rural areas.

**Good Practice 3: Timor-Leste’s National Multidimensional Poverty Index**

In 2021, Timor-Leste introduced a national measure of multidimensional poverty, a landmark initiative to provide data for the SDG indicator 1.2.2. This measure encompasses eight dimensions, enabling a more holistic view of poverty in the nation: Water and Sanitation (WASH); Living Standards; Information (specifically targeting adolescents and youth); Nutrition (focusing on children under 6); Health; Education (addressing people aged 6 years and older); Employment (centred on adolescents and youth); Child Protection (aimed at children under 6). The index consists of eighteen individual-level indicators, carefully selected to examine intra-household inequalities, form the foundation of these dimensions.

This innovative multidimensional poverty index offers numerous benefits, including:

- Enhancing understanding of poverty within the national context, thus complementing monetary measures
- Facilitating ongoing tracking, recording, and evaluation of progress in reducing multidimensional poverty
- Using data to refine policy strategies, target the most deeply impoverished individuals, and foster collaborative methods for implementing SDGs
- Encouraging wider national participation in and commitment to eradicating poverty in all forms.

As of now, the data derived from the 2014 Timor-Leste Survey of Living Standards (TLSLS) using the multidimensional poverty index provides crucial evidence for policy formulation. Once the next wave of TLSLS becomes available in 2024, the index will be updated, offering fresh, valuable insights for planning appropriate policy interventions and budget allocations.

The development of the multidimensional poverty index was a consultative, inclusive process. The selection of indicators and thresholds was guided by international standards, national priorities, and data availability. The national statistical office, GDS, expressed a preference for indicators and targets aligned with the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index and the SDG targets. The GDS also emphasized the necessity for a population-wide measure rather than a household-based one, necessitating the definition of unique indicators and dimensions. Collaborative involvement by GDS, UNICEF, the World Bank, UNDP, and UN Women was instrumental in the successful realization of this initiative. The national ownership of this measure was highlighted as crucial for sustainability. The initial multidimensional poverty index showed a poverty headcount of 55%, with a higher prevalence in rural areas (70%) compared to urban regions (29%). It was found that young children, older individuals (60 years and above), and women are more likely to be multidimensionally poor. These insights serve as a robust baseline for measuring progress in reducing multidimensional poverty, offering a measure finely tailored to Timor-Leste's unique context.
The government has a comprehensive social protection strategy and programmes relevant for all stages and cycles of life and aimed at different target groups. The primary health care is free for the entire population, for school age children, education system is universal and free with nine years of basic and mandatory education; for older people the pension schemes; for those working and contributing to social protection, a variety of schemes exist. Despite the positive evolution in the social protection effective coverage, it still leaves behind 69.6% of people.

In terms of adequacy of social protection programmes, there has been important progress aligned with international recommendations. One such example is that Timor-Leste updated the social pension for elderly and people with disabilities from US$ 30 to US$ 50 in 2022, and it will continue be updating based on inflation. This is the first cash benefit that uses indexation. Nonetheless, adequacy of the social programmes still need to be improved. Particularly, coverage for people with disabilities, migrant population, informal workers and survivors of violence, women, and young people need to be increased.

In Timor-Leste, women in general and pregnant women in particular tend to be the most vulnerable in their families –they are still taking responsibilities of household care and domestic work for the family in unsafe environments, and they eat less. As a result, children will not be healthy, stunting is high among children.

The Food and Nutrition Survey 2020 quantitative analysis identified risk of stunting was higher among households whose caregivers had a low education, poor and lack of access to improved sanitation. It was strongly associated with diarrhoea and fever in terms of morbidity (Ministry of Health, 2020).
Stunting has long life impact on children and on society. Children should be healthy first to be able to study and become productive in the labour market and in the society in general. The Government has a social protection conditional cash transfer programme **Bolsa de Mae** which targets families with children in vulnerable conditions. The benefit level is too small (US$5 per child per month for up to three children) to make a significant impact. This means that the annual benefits range from US$ 60-180 per household. According to a Policy Note on assessing the benefit structure developed in 2015\(^5\), the **Bolsa de Mae** has a great potential to create impact on poverty reduction and assist in developing the potential for children in those vulnerable households if it is redesigned to improve poverty targeting, increase coverage and adjust the benefits levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VNR Consultations 2: Challenges and setbacks in social protection system in Timor-Leste</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>National Consultation:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Women:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>People with disabilities</strong> under 17 years old do not have access to the Bolsa da Mae subsidy, and the MSSI lacks data on people with disabilities from 14 municipalities. There is insufficient institutional support from MSSI to organizations catering to people with disabilities, and the national rehabilitation centre lacks equipment for visually impaired individuals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local communities in <strong>Oecusse</strong>: Prior to 2019, there was no access to clean water, electricity, schools, roads, or potable water. Currently, access to university, Bolsa da Mae, merits, and scholarships is still lacking. <strong>Baucau</strong>: Services and facilities do not cater separately to the general public and persons with disabilities. Most people’s income is less than $125, and the <strong>Uma Kbiit Laek</strong> (Social Housing for vulnerable households) policy has not covered many poor people. Nepotism in the implementation of social aid, for example in <strong>Uma Kbiit Laek</strong> social housing policy, is an ongoing issue.</td>
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Then the Government and DFAT’s Partnership for Human Development Programme had ongoing discussion if we can reform the **Bolsa de Mae** programme. MSSI started advocating for this reform: provide universal cash transfer for mothers and children, increase the monetary value of the transfer.

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\(^5\) See for further details

and simplify the processes. As a result, the concepts for the **Bolsa de Mae - New Generation** programme started being formulated.

**Box 4. Coverage and financing of social protection programmes in Timor-Leste**

The disability benefit only covers those with permanent inability to work. In 2019, this corresponds with 8,727 individuals. This implies that, as of 2019, **only around 21 percent of potentially eligible Timorese are covered** (Government of Timor-Leste, 2021a).

**Figure 16 Social Protection programmes’ trends**

The veteran's pension accounts the largest proportion of the total social protection spending. In 2019, Timor-Leste’s total social protection expenditure was 7% of non-oil GDP and excluding veteran's pension, 3% of non-oil GDP. Budget increases of MSSI between 2010 and 2017 were mainly driven by expenditure on veterans, which accounted for 62% on average of the total budget during that period (Government of Timor-Leste, 2021a). According to the Gender and Sustainable Development, women, LGBTIQ, young mothers, and women and girls with disabilities are not equally benefiting from social protection programmes (GDS, UN Women and UNFPA, 2018).

**The postcards written by the youth called for reducing domestic violence in Timor-Leste. Can you shed some light on the current situation and the prevalence of gender-based violence in the country?**

**Gender-based violence** continues to be a persistent problem for women. Timorese women are underrepresented in politics and decision-making especially at the local level. Violence limits women’s ability to control their bodies and health, make decisions, and limit economic and educational outcomes. It also increases the risk of unhealthy relationships and perpetuates inequitable social norms. A survey by the Asia Foundation showed the worrying trend of intergenerational cycles of violence as women who witnessed their mothers being physically beaten as children were 1.7 times more likely to experience intimate partner violence than those who had not witnessed such beatings during childhood (The Asia Foundation, 2016).
Box 5: The situation of gender-based violence in Timor-Leste


- According to the Gender Gap report of the World Economic Forum Timor-Leste ranks 124 out of 149 countries in relation to gender pay gap and access to economic empowerment taking the bottom spot in East Asia and the Pacific region. However, the recent Gender Inequality Index for Timor-Leste shows a decline from 0.560 in 2002 to 0.378 which means a low inequality between women and men.
- Timor-Leste ranked third highest (9.75) in the Spotlight Country Selection Proxy Composite Indicator and weighting, after Papua New Guinea and Palau. This gender imbalance contributes to the high levels of violence against women and girls, which remains one of Timor-Leste’s most widespread human rights violations.
- According to the 2016 Demographic and Health Survey, 59% of Timorese women (15-49 years) had experienced physical and/or sexual assault by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Women endure discrimination in their homes, society, health, education, employment, and access to justice, and their labour force participation (24.9%) is lower than that of men (52.5%). The survey revealed a wide range of prevalence across municipalities, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions. Help-seeking following violence remains low (76%) (GDS, MoH and ICF, 2018).

The Government’s commitment to gender equality and ending violence against women and girls has been hindered by the lack of a holistic approach, limited coordination between different groups of actors, and low levels of consistent and sustained investment and support for institutional change. Government funding for gender equality has been less than 2% of the total state budget for 2016-2017, with the 2018 political bottleneck slowing critical funds to service providers and women’s organizations. For the fiscal year of 2023, US$ 259 million has been allocated for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion programme, whereas in 2022, it was US$233 million. This is the third largest programme by the total amount in the budget and represents 8.2% of the total General State Budget (Government of Timor-Leste, 2023).

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6 Timor-Leste has signed core human rights treaties including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Convention against Torture and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
What efforts have been made to address gender-based violence and promote gender equality in the country so far?

The GoTL has been proactive in addressing GBV. For instance, the Law Against Domestic Violence was enacted in 2010 and National Action Plans for Gender-based Violence have been implemented. The current National Action Plan 2022-2032 aims to bolster gender equality, empower women, and enhance support to survivors. It's a multifaceted approach involving the government, development partners, and CSOs working together to strengthen response services and devise preventive strategies.

The country has established a gender equality architecture, supported by an Inter-Ministerial Gender Working Group and sector-specific Gender Working Groups. This has been followed by incremental investments to strengthen civil servants' capacities to plan and deliver effective and gender-responsive services. Service infrastructure and institutional capacities are still evolving considering the country’s short 21 years of independence, but institutional frameworks and coordination mechanisms are well-positioned to complement capacity development efforts to promote respectful relationships and mobilize communities toward eliminating violence against women and girls.

In Timor-Leste, the women’s movement has been a driving force in the country’s growth, including attempts to abolish domestic abuse. Women’s organizations have been leading advocates for increasing violence against women visibility, and emerging organizations and diversity are reinforcing these efforts by broadening the dialogue and issues raised, such as women’s economic empowerment, new masculinities, LGBTIQ rights, and the agency and protection of people with disabilities. The Spotlight Initiative is a major programme supporting the national organizations and movements and aiming to reduce GBV in the country in a comprehensive way.

Although we’ve seen significant progress, the fight against GBV is ongoing. We need to continue strengthening prevention efforts, improving response services, and promoting effective coordination and monitoring. The ultimate goal is to create a safer society where GBV is no longer tolerated.

Good Practice 4: Transforming norms and enhancing institutional response through the Spotlight Initiative and Together for Equality Programmes

The two Joint Programmes (Spotlight Initiative and Together for Equality) implemented by six UN agencies have achieved significant progress in their mission to prevent and respond to GBV, making substantial contributions to the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment. These comprehensive initiatives have successfully transformed social norms, increased awareness, and provided essential support services to prevent and address violence against women and girls.

A key area of impact lies in the promotion of positive change in social norms, attitudes, and behaviours to prevent GBV. Notably, initiatives like Connect with Respect, developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS), CSOs, and UN Women, have effectively fostered
gender-equitable social norms among youth. Through active engagement with teachers, students, parents, and community members, this programme has successfully transformed attitudes and behaviours while addressing the critical issue of GBV prevention, including important aspects such as consent and healthy relationships. In addition, the EU-funded Spotlight Initiative developed edutainment films for television to help raise awareness about positive gender norms and respectful relationships, drive community engagement, and spark discussions that would lead to community-led or nationally acceptable methods of preventing violence against women and girls. To see if the films were changing people’s attitudes, a chatbot was created using the widely used WhatsApp platform.

Moreover, the Joint Programmes have made significant strides in enhancing the capacity of institutions to respond to GBV effectively. Collaborating with local civil society organizations, Faith based organisations and UN agencies, these programmes have strengthened access to essential services for GBV survivors. By developing training programmes, guidelines, and standard operating procedures, institutions such as justice sector actors, health service providers, and public authorities have improved their coordination, response mechanisms, and overall support for survivors of GBV.

Collaborative efforts between the government, development partners, and CSOs have been instrumental in strengthening response services and prevention strategies. Various areas have been addressed, including:

- **Healthcare services**: Development of training programs for healthcare providers to effectively respond to GBV cases, including intimate partner violence by development and utilization of a contextualized in-service training package.
- **Legal and justice services**: Implementation of gender-based violence subjects in judicial training institutes and the development of guidelines to prevent and combat sexual harassment in public service. Furthermore, technical inputs have been provided by UN agencies on the Criminal Procedural Code; the Law on Justice Organization; Child Protection Bill; ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; the Domestic Workers Bill; the Law Against Violence and Harassment in the world of work. Furthermore, for victims two Justice Clinics have been constructed.
- **Psychosocial support**: Development of counselling programs and the establishment of counselling spaces to provide support to survivors.
- **Shelter and safe spaces**: Establishment of emergency accommodations and safe spaces in health facilities to ensure survivors have secure and confidential environments to receive support.
- The UN has also supported the design of specialized survivor-centered services for adolescent girls, which helps provide data to strengthen age-appropriate service provision. This work is expected to provide data on service use by women and girls, further expanding the provision of such services nationally.
- **Coordination and referral systems**: Strengthening multi-sectoral GBV response teams and the establishment of a referral network of services for victims.

The Joint Programme's efforts have yielded tangible and impactful results in preventing and responding to GBV and reached out to over 328,850 beneficiaries. Through the transformation of social norms and the enhancement of institutional capacities, these programs have played a crucial role in creating a safer and more equitable society where violence against women and girls is actively addressed and prevented.
What happened when the Covid-19 State of Emergency was declared, in terms of its impact on poverty situation and the delivery of essential services?

During the State of Emergency, the Government municipal departments had great difficulties in financing activities related to Covid-19 due to the duodecimal budget and the delay in the distribution/execution process of the Covid-19 measures. Programmes such as the “Bolsa da Mãe” or the “Merenda Escolar” (School Feeding Programme) were not available during the three months of State of Emergency in 2021 (United Nations and the Government of Timor-Leste, 2021).

Because of the State of Emergency and major activities were stopped, small businesses could not sustain anymore, most people lost their income and especially those in the informal economy. Some households had no food to eat during that time. Then, people started advocating for subsidies for the people. Initially MSSI was proposing US$ 200 monthly transfer for households. The payment mechanism was very difficult - not everyone has a bank account, banks do not have sufficient branches especially in rural areas, the existing mobile payment systems (T-Pay and Mosan) were not suitable to be deployed to provide social assistance at scale. It meant that the cash needs to be distributed in person and the Government needed to wait for the Ministry of Health guidelines. So, the distribution of the subsidies was a complex health versus livelihood trade-off.

**Box 6. The state of financial inclusion in Timor-Leste**

In 2022, UNCDF, UNDP, and TEBUTT conducted a digital financial literacy survey in Timor-Leste. The survey included 1,631 Timorese aged 15-74 across the country. It explored the respondents’ experiences with traditional and digital financial services to-date and assessed basic competencies in digitization and finance. Key findings included:

1. A bare majority of Timorese (52%) do not have a bank account, electronic payment card, or digital financial service they can use to store money or make payments.

2. One in ten adults (10%) have a payment card of any sort.

3. Just 4% of Timorese adults use banking apps or online money management tools to monitor their spending and saving (7% among Internet users).

4. Half of Timorese adults (50% agree) believe digital financial services are risky for ordinary people.

5. Timorese are near universal in their use of cash to pay for commonly accessed household items and services (defined as groceries, paid meals out, or utility bill payments).

6. Notable differences in mean digitalisation scores between cohort groups are as follows, and levels of digitalisation... Significantly lower among rural men (4.31 mean) and women (4.11) than their urban counterparts (7.05 among urban men and 6.65 among urban women).

7. There is acknowledgement that digital financial services are the ‘way of the future’; and are both beneficial and essential to many Timorese, particularly small business owners and Timorese receiving government payments.
a. A majority (57%) agree digital financial services like mobile payments, online banking, and digital wallets will soon replace cash in Timor-Leste.

b. Seven-in-ten (69%) acknowledge digital financial services make it easier to receive benefits payments from government, despite relatively few Timorese receiving government payments at this time.

Source: (UNCDF, UNDP and TEBBUTT, 2022)

Eventually, MoF and MSSI had to go jointly to all (452) villages across the country to facilitate payment – the whole Government machinery had to go. Almost 300,000 households who fulfilled the condition that at least one member does not receive a monthly income greater than US$500 (through salary, subsidies, or institutional support) received **US$ 200 Uma Kain subsidy** between May and July in 2020, just two months after the State of Emergency.

There are a number of vulnerable groups of women that found difficulties or did not receive the cash transfer due to discrimination, stereotyping, lack of knowledge by the relevant authorities about the rules of the cash transfer and the design of the cash transfer itself. These groups include vendors, single mothers, widowed mothers/widows, people with disability, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gender community persons, victims of past crimes of the past and domestic workers (Rede Feto et.al, 2021).

Another great difficulty in implementing this short-term emergency measure was the issue of **registration**. This is a key hindering factor for social protection programmes even today. Xefe de suco (village chief) had to determine which households are eligible to receive the payments depending on whether the members are married or not married.

The percentage of children aged 0-4 years old with **birth registered** was 60.4% (60.3% for male; 60.5% for female). While the percentage of children aged 0-4 years old with **birth certificate** was 29.2% (29.1% for male and 29.2% for female) (General Directorate of Statistics, MoF, 2015).

Given the definition of a household is unclear, the important document village chiefs used to determine whether the household is eligible or not was a **family card**. Those who did not have such cards risk being excluded and there could even be fraud in issuing these cards as we know during cash payments and **Cesta Básica** programmes, the number of households significantly increased reaching around 330,000 households.

As such, these programmes showed the importance of civil registration. Newcomers need to come and register and obtain the **family card**. People don’t know the importance of registering and reporting when leaving and moving. Both the Government and the people need to make efforts to improve the

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7 Ficha Família
8 In 2022 Population and Housing Census, a total of 250,034 households were enumerated (Government of Timor-Leste, 2022a; Government of Timor-Leste, 2022b)
registration system in the country. The process should be simplified so that everyone can access public services.

Overall, during the State of Emergency, social protection and social services have been essential in supporting the most vulnerable population. Social services and protection programmes remained in full operation to allow support to the population. But the majority of social solidarity institutions providing shelters for women had not received additional financial support during the State of Emergency. Funding shortages have posed significant challenges for social solidarity institutions, hampering their ability to support communities, reach remote areas, and provide adequate compensation to their employees. This has particularly affected institutions that provide shelter and safe spaces for women.

The qualitative interviews undertaken with the municipality representatives of the MSSI and the local essential service providers reported a general increase of cases of Violence against Women and Children during the pandemic (United Nations and the Government of Timor-Leste, 2021).

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**Good Practice 5: Cash transfers during Covid-19 showcases the Government’s capacity to respond swiftly to the country’s needs**

In August 2020, the GoTL approved a package of four short-term economic recovery measures under the first phase of the Economic Recovery Plan. A significant component of which this plan was the *Uma Kain Cash Transfer Programme*. The Programme distributed US$200 cash subsidy to 313,442 households during the Covid-19 State of Emergency achieving a coverage rate exceeding 96% despite various challenges. Cash was distributed to households meeting the condition that at least one member does not receive a monthly monetary value greater than US$500. An Implementation report by the Government of Timor-Leste (2021d) documented the lessons learned, successes and good practices of this unprecedent Programme.

- **Banking system**: The lessons from the Programme highlight the key role of an accessible banking system in successful social protection programme implementation. Such a system can make the delivery of support more effective, efficient, and safer, particularly in periods of public health crises.

- **The Importance of cross-agency collaboration**: The programme highlighted the need for effective inter-ministerial collaboration, with delays encountered due to lack of regular coordination between the Ministry of Administration (MAE) and MSSI.

- **Necessity for comprehensive beneficiary data**: The MAE could only provide data for the ‘heads of households in the households lists, which made verifying income eligibility with the National Institute of Social Security (INSS) challenging. If no income could be verified because of insufficient data, the household was automatically deemed eligible. A such, the Programme highlighted the need for clearer definitions for beneficiary eligibility and stronger civil registration systems.

- **Need to include vulnerable groups**: The eligibility criteria excluded certain population groups, including those not part of households such as children in orphanages, women and girls in
shelters, incarcerated citizens, and emigrants not registered in their villages. Additionally, members of vulnerable groups who could not obtain a Family Card due to not fitting the traditional definition of a family were also excluded. This underlines the need for inclusive programme designs that consider a wide range of household structures and circumstances, especially in times of crisis.

Despite limited access to banking systems, the initiative mobilized large-scale logistic operations to deliver the subsidy by hand, which started just over a month after the programme was legislated. **Good practices include:**

- **Significance of the complaints process:** This process was instrumental in fostering transparency, accountability, and inclusivity. Serving as a key feedback channel, it spotlighted systemic inequalities, especially for marginalized groups. The feedback informed programme enhancements, underlining the necessity for clearer eligibility criteria, improved civil registration, and broader banking services. As a result of the complaints procedure, 14,634 valid complaints were addressed with a monetary support totalling US$2,926,800.

- **Extensive inter-ministerial, local-national, and international collaboration.** This collaboration was integral to the successful execution of the programme, spanning across government levels from the MSSI, MAE at the national level, to municipalities, Administrative Posts, and local authorities at the local level. Furthermore, the successful partnership with development partners, such as ILO and various UN agencies, DFAT, and the World Bank, provided crucial support facilitating a cohesive, expansive, and efficient implementation.

- **Real-time data collection** using tools like the Kobo Toolbox for managing and analysing data allowed for more efficient data collection and tracking, further enhancing the process of data reconciliation.

- **Transparency:** A robust data reconciliation process provided transparency and validated the appropriate usage of funds. Multiple independent data sources, including payment lists, withdrawal and deposit slips, data collection dashboards, daily and final reports, and bank account balances before and after payments, ensured the programme’s reliability.

- **Value of public awareness campaigns:** The MSSI’s public awareness campaign, encouraging those earning more than US$ 500 to refrain from claiming the support, had a noticeable effect. This demonstrated the power of public communication in encouraging social responsibility and adherence to the programme’s eligibility requirements.

**Box 7. Fighting to be recognized as a household**

According to *Rede Feto*, a national network advocating for gender equality, women less likely to receive it were vendors, single mothers, widows, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ persons, survivors of violence, and domestic workers. The primary obstacles identified were related to insufficient information about household registration process, the distance and cost involved in registering the household and misapplication of the rules for distributing the benefit (*Rede Feto et.al, 2020*).
Estefânio Salsinha or maun Ken, a mobilizer of LGBTI community in Ermera municipality, currently a university student in Dili shared his experience applying for the Uma Kain Subsidy:

As our government launched the Cesta Básica and a US$200 subsidy for each household, the problem I faced was I was not entitled to receive the subsidies from the government. I currently live in Ermera municipality, but my parents’ originate from Aileu municipality. Although my name was on the subsidy list, the authorities insisted we are not a household because my parents live in a different municipality and therefore should not receive the subsidies. Maybe the local authorities thought I had double identification but in reality, my name is only registered in one village. Also, they tend to think a household should consist of a husband and wife, children and grandparents. But when you don’t have this kind of family, you are not considered a household.

I insisted and made several complaints. Only then I was able to receive the Cesta Básica, and the US$200 Christmas Bonus in 2022. I could not receive the Uma Kain subsidy in 2020. There are young people who are excluded from this subsidy because they are not a conventional household.

What measures have been taken to support those affected by natural disasters, especially during the Easter Floods, Cyclone Seroja?

The GoTL with support from international organizations and donors, has provided emergency relief and assistance to those affected by natural disasters. MSSI was mainly responsible for ensuring women and children have shelter and provide food for displaced people, providing in-kind support. Most of the Government response such as repairing damaged infrastructure and buildings was provided by the Civil Protection agency.

Box 8. Cyclone Seroja impact on households’ income and social protection response

In the midst of the pandemic in 2021, Timor-Leste was hit by Cyclone Seroja which caused flash floods and landslides across the country. There was a total of 31,337 households, or approximately 178,621 people (including 13,099 households living below the national poverty line) were affected and 44 reported fatalities (GoTL, World Bank and UN, 2021).

The floods caused severe damage to infrastructure such as roads, bridges, water supply infrastructure, schools, and health facilities. According to the Household Building Damage Assessment among affected households, 90% of the households surveyed reported decline in household income because of the Floods. Damage to equipment, damage to finished products, shortage/lack of raw materials and productivity decline were the most cited reasons for affecting income. 80% of the surveyed buildings had suffered some structural damage, 12.7% buildings are fully collapsed and 8.8% are severely damaged (UNDP, GDS and UNTL, 2021).
The flooding caused a displacement of over 12,300 people. IOM, through Enhancing Rapid Disaster Response for Flooding in Timor-Leste, supported the national response, by implementing camp coordination mechanisms and providing shelter interventions to flood-affected communities. In the Together for Equality Project: Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence funded by KOICA, UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, and IOM supported efforts to ensure safe and ethical Gender-Based Violence (GBV) prevention and mitigation and response in disasters context. The Together for Equality Project aimed to increase resilience and women and girls’ participation in disaster risk reduction and decision-making structures (IOM, 2022).

**Can you describe how does the Bolsa de Mae – Jeresaun Foun programme work and what are the emerging results? What are the main challenges and opportunities for this programme?**

Poverty is multidimensional and then linked to deprivation of income, nutrition, health, education, and other living conditions aspects in a context of multiple vulnerabilities, including the climate change and natural disasters in Timor-Leste. It means people lack the basic needs to develop themselves and become productive, access to the same socio-economic opportunities throughout their lives. Therefore, the **National Strategy for Social Protection 2021-2030** states that “by 2030, Timor-Leste aims to achieve the end of poverty, promote peace, ensure access to healthcare, education and other essential services, ensure adequate care for children, the elderly and the disabled, and protect the population from social and economic risks, thereby ensuring a decent living standard for all Timorese citizens”. Both the **Bolsa de Mae** and the **Bolsa de Mae-Jeresaun Foun (new generation)** programmes directly contribute to this vision.

The national consultations highlighted that alongside non-contributory social protection programmes such as elderly pension, cash transfers for vulnerable groups, it’s crucial to focus on the contributory aspect as well. This entails registering and making social security contributions essential for all workers, regardless of age. Doing so ensures they are eligible for their rightful benefits throughout their lives and guarantees a pension at the end of their careers.

The **Bolsa de Mae-Jeresaun Foun programme**, despite primarily being a cash transfer initiative, uses a multi-sectoral strategy. It liaises effectively with the health sector to enhance the accessibility to health services and make appropriate referrals. The programme facilitates this through a heightened awareness campaign of the available health services, promoting health-seeking behaviour, and emphasizing the importance of healthcare for pregnant women, mothers, and children. When the MSSI initially proposed this programme to the Council of Ministers, the aim was to extend its benefits nationwide. Subsequently, in October 2021, a Decree Law was passed that outlined the programme's concept, implementation phases, and funding structure.
Good Practice 6: Bolsa de Mae – Jeresaun Foun (new generation) programme shows great potential for an integrated approach in fighting poverty reduction and malnutrition

Considering the universal coverage of the Bolsa de Mae Jeresaun Foun programme, this is a significant milestone for Timor-Leste. This universal approach amplifies the potential for impactful poverty reduction across the country, marking a key achievement in the nation’s social protection strategy.

This programme, an extension of the original Bolsa da Mae scheme established in 2008, has been designed to enhance social protection for pregnant women and children, particularly targeting their health, nutrition, and education outcomes. Bolsa da Mae - Jeresaun Foun provides monetary support for the beneficiaries, with pregnant women receiving US$ 15 per month, caregivers getting US$ 20 per month per child, and an additional US$ 10 per month granted for children with disabilities. Beneficiaries are registered at health clinics, which encourages them to seek maternal and child healthcare services. The programme also aims to expand women’s access to financial services, contributing to their economic empowerment.

The good practices emerging from the programme implementation offer invaluable lessons.

- The success of the programme is linked to inter-ministerial collaboration, as the collective contribution from multiple ministries has been instrumental in achieving the common goal of improved citizen services. This underscores the importance of coordination and alignment among different government bodies in large-scale social initiatives.

- Raising awareness and advocacy among political leaders and decision-makers was another key factor contributing to the successful implementation. This process was facilitated by providing compelling data, evidence, and arguments about malnutrition, stunting, and poverty, which helped secure the necessary political support and led to the passing of a Decree Law.

- The programme was also led by a nationally driven team, which played a significant role in fostering ownership and participation in policy design and implementation. This approach increased the officers’ sense of responsibility and desire to execute the programme effectively. The programme also utilized an incremental scaling approach, gradually expanding its coverage from the three municipalities with the highest rates of stunting and poverty to the entire nation.

- Leveraging technology, specifically the T-Pay mobile payment system, was another strategic move that enabled efficient and safe transfers of benefits. This measure effectively addressed the issue of a limited banking system and increased access to the programme for a larger population.

- International partnerships, including the Australia-Timor-Leste Partnership for Human Development and Partnerships for Social Protection, have provided technical assistance, including an electronic registration system by Catalpa International, and financial aid via Australia’s Pacific Covid -19 Response Package.
Similar to the *Uma Kain* cash transfer, challenges with documentation and payment mechanisms were faced. It's critical to address logistical issues, such as the lack of birth certificates and payment difficulties. To overcome these hurdles, the programme is working closely with the Ministry of Justice to expedite the certification process and is using semi-banking institutions to facilitate payments.

Overall, the Programme responds to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children’s call to provide and scale up an integrated packages of cash, care, protection, nutrition and case management services to reach the most vulnerable children and their caregivers (OSRSG/VAC, 2022).

Before the programme started, it was estimated based on the census that there were 27,000 households in the three municipalities. In December 2022, around 80% of these households were reached. Now around 19,000 households are registered under the programme. Now in 2023, there are four more municipalities included, in 2024 there will be 11 municipalities and by 2025 the whole country will be covered with Dili being the last one.

One of the major challenges in pilot the programme, like the challenge encountered in other programmes, is the payment mechanism. As the State bank and other banking institutions were not ready to operate at village levels across the country, the programme had to cooperate with semi-banking institutions like T-Pay. The awareness and access to financial institutions are low. After exploring many ways, the MSSI started engaging with ‘T-Pay mobile payment system’. The T-Pay mobile recruits and trains agents send text messages to the communities to come and collect the money when the transfer has been made by MSSI. The payment should be monthly but currently it is made every two months.

Another challenge was out of 17,000 children in our programme, 10,000 did not have birth certificates. There is a clear need to issue **birth certificates for children as soon as they are born**. There is no reason why there are no birth certificates available, apart from logistical issues such as running out of forms and machine failures. To solve this issue, MSSI is working closely with the Ministry of Justice about accelerating the certification process. In Oecusse for example, there are rotational services to issue birth certificates.

We start seeing many direct and indirect benefits of the programme:

- The fact that registration is done at a health facility encourages people to visit health facilities and to **seek maternal and child health care** and other health seeking behaviour.
- Ministry of Health has created **mothers’ support groups** among women who received money. The groups focus on how to prepare nutritious food and the importance of going to health facilities.
- The programme is expanding **women’s access to financial services**.
- By providing cash support aimed at children under six, it helps **supporting school preparedness**. When children eat well and are healthy, they have an appetite to learn and can learn better.
- The delivery mechanism has **created jobs** for people in rural areas. There are 220 workers at 220 health facilities and 85 agents to help with cash distribution. It means these people have regular monthly incomes.
- The potential major impact of this programme will be reduction in child poverty as it smoothens consumption in a very short-term.

**VNR Consultations 3: Groups’ views on success and achievements in social protection**

The achievements highlighted in the area of social protection and poverty reduction reflect concerted efforts at different levels of society.

**National Consultation:** Achievements include provisions for elderly pensions, changes in household, a Social Housing Policy for vulnerable individuals, and partnerships with 29 social solidarity institutions. However, the question posed regarding whether shelters meet certain standards indicates possible concerns around the quality of some social protection infrastructure.

**Women:** Significant achievements are noted in combating gender-based violence (GBV), with a specific national action plan for GBV, laws against domestic violence and for child protection, and shelter houses in municipalities. The existence of robust women’s organizations and sensitive judicial authorities is indicative of the presence of a supportive ecosystem. Notably, there are also efforts in health with the establishment of health posts and referral hospitals, which indirectly contribute to poverty reduction by reducing healthcare costs and increasing accessibility.

**People with disabilities:** Social protection programmes specifically targeting people with disabilities, subsidies, and the establishment of a national rehabilitation centre denote progress. However, it would be helpful to know the reach and effectiveness of these measures.

**Local communities in Oecusse:** Changes since 2019 suggest significant infrastructure improvements (access to schools, clean water, electricity), which indirectly aid in poverty reduction by improving living conditions and access to basic needs. The reduction of school distance and improvement of water and electricity access is a significant achievement in raising living standards. **In Baucau:** Subsidies (Bolsa da Mãe), academic scholarships, School Feeding Programmes, and social housing for vulnerable people indicate that concerted measures are in place to reduce poverty and improve social protection.

*It appears that the programme is already showing a lot of potential. What were the main factors for the successful implementation so far?*

First, raising awareness among political leaders and decision-makers about stunting was crucial. MSSI and Ministry of Health had to provide data, evidence and the theory of change, the technical experts to have meetings with decision-makers on different ways of reducing malnutrition, stunting and poverty. As a result, we got the support of the Council of Ministers, and the Decree Law was passed.
Now there should be a **long-term commitment** to continue implementing the programme. The Ministry of Health and MSSSI were the key drivers in successfully raising awareness among the political leaders.

Second, we learned that it’s not just one ministry who can make significant changes. **Multiple ministries have to be coordinated and aligned.** If each ministry does their part to really focus on the ultimate goal – to provide better services to citizens, then the programme will be successful. For example, roads to facilitate access to health services, finance to facilitate payments and funding, civil registration and documentation should be provided by the Ministry of Justice and the local governments or village chiefs have a critical role of providing information to the Ministry of State Administration. **This kind of programme was eye opening for the need for whole of government.** The implementing government has to recognize that it is not just us alone, we need the support from other ministries and their engagement.

Third, the fact that the team was nationally led was crucial. Reaching consensus on programme design and delivery mechanisms takes time but it enables the government officers to provide inputs to the policy design and allows their participation. It increased the MSSSI officers’ ownership and desire to implement the programme well in the future.

**What are the priorities for improving social protection services and for the country?**

**The first recommendation is to invest in people, particularly children.** Timor-Leste has sufficient resources. It’s more about how we strategically invest these resources. If children and young people are the priority, we have to invest in them. Children are not voters. As a result, there is the least amount of investment in education, social protection and health. To have a bright future we need to invest in children. Healthcare is mostly free in Timor-Leste but the services need improving. Education is also free but the current investments are not sufficient in improving the quality and investing in teachers. The economic returns of improving investments in social services should be recognized by decision-makers.

**Second, we must immediately start integrating the population that are currently not sufficiently covered by social protection systems.** There are still many groups not covered by social protection including people with disabilities, and migrant population. Expanding social protection investments for **children** – through nutrition, improving availability to preschool education and providing child allowance is important. A much higher proportion of **women work in the informal sector** with limited access to social security (45.7% of women versus 33.0% of men according to the Labour Force Survey 2021). Furthermore, **young people and workers in the labour market**, particularly in informal employment are unprotected as well as youth who are not in education, employment or training which make up 31.2% of total youth.
Box 9. The state of migrant population and social protection in Timor-Leste

The GoTL acknowledges the importance of establishing robust policies to safeguard both Timorese migrants abroad and the migrant population within Timor-Leste. However, social protection mechanisms are still not available for migrants - Timorese overseas (IOM, 2022). According to the Law on Immigration and Asylum (No. 11/2017), asylum seekers should have immediate access to social protection and benefits. However, this law has not been fully implemented yet (IOM, 2019). Additionally, there is currently no policy or legal framework in place to safeguard the right to health of migrants, by extending social protection and improving social security for all migrants and their families (IOM, 2021).

Currently, many Timorese emigrants lack insurance or any other form of social protection in the event of serious illness, injury, or death. In the past, the GoTL faced challenges in arranging emergency transportation for emigrants who needed to return home due to medical issues. Some seasonal migrant workers have reported being denied access to medical care when they were ill, or having their wages deducted when they were absent from work due to illness, leaving them unable to afford living expenses in the host country. This lack of support also extends to families of emigrants who passed away abroad and require assistance with funeral arrangements (IOM, 2021).

**Capacities of director generals and directorates of social sectors in advocating for their cause and increased investments should be strengthened.** There is also a need to empower technical level officers. They feel they are not listened to and lack confidence in advocating for ideas and proposals. Preparing the officers in using data, providing evidence, preparing for potential questions to be asked at ministerial meetings, and ability to defend the budget proposals for the ministers.

**The public financial management system needs to be simplified and decentralized.** The Government needs to focus on simplifying the payment processes internally, use digital systems and improve timeliness of budget execution. Also, the government ministries and agencies lack capacities on how to spend the budget. Although they have annual plans, knowledge about how to link specific activities with budgets and programme goals needs to be increased among the mid-level management. The procurement system needs to be simplified and transfer more responsibilities to government agencies. In addition, decentralizing some of the authorities in financing and creating economic activities in rural areas to support rural development are important.

**Improving the overall registration system and the financial inclusion in the country is needed.** Providing birth certificates for children, everyone to have a national ID card, allocating social security number for individuals and producing social security cards. Overall, the banking system also needs to be significantly improved to ensure everyone can access financial services.
4.3. Priorities

Drawing upon a comprehensive desk review, extensive consultations, results from the SDG progress assessment, and the Strategic Development Plan, the VNR-2 have identified the following priorities for strengthening social protection in Timor-Leste. These priorities represent critical areas of focus that require immediate attention to promote sustainable development, poverty reduction, and enhance the welfare of vulnerable groups in the country.

1. **The GoTL should revise the fiscal policy to increase social protection expenditure** from the current 3% of GDP to meet the ILO’s recommended 5% for a basic social protection floor (ILO, 2022). This may involve reallocation strategies that prioritize programs demonstrating high effectiveness in poverty reduction and human development (World Bank, 2022).

2. **Government policy should drive youth-focused investment**, including initiatives for job creation and active engagement in the national social security system as a revenue source. In addition, policies encouraging overall youth development should be enacted to ensure a sustainable social protection system.

3. **Existing poverty reduction social protection programmes such as Bolsa de Mae and Bolsa de Mae- Jeresaun Foun (for pregnant women, children, mothers and children with disabilities), SAI**, and **Uma Kbiit-Laek (housing for the most vulnerable)** should be protected and enhanced through policy commitment. These programmes are making significant changes in line with the GoTL’s Leave No One Behind principle and recognize the policies as essential investments that transfer state income to the country’s most vulnerable citizens.

4. Policymaking should focus on **expanding coverage to include people with disabilities** and those currently outside the social protection framework, including Timorese **emigrants**, women and youth in informal employment, to meet the SDG Target 1.3.

5. **Service delivery within social protection should be improved** by implementing policies that focus on streamlining beneficiary identification, registration processes, payment systems, and monitoring mechanisms.

6. **Improvement in civil registration systems, coupled with the development of a social registry** is needed. This improvement, linked to the forthcoming National Unique Identification number, will enable effective management of demographic, dwelling, and socioeconomic data. A unique identifier can eliminate multiple issues, from multiple identity systems to duplicate registries, facilitating quick integration of various programmes and databases. Birth registration and documentation for children should be increased by simplifying the registration process in accessible locations using better technology to handle the process.

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9 Universal old-age and disability pensions
7. The government should enact policies that support the development of digital financial services and a robust banking infrastructure. These policies should ensure the adoption of mobile banking and electronic transfers, even in remote areas. Additionally, financial literacy programmes should be introduced to aid users in navigating these digital platforms.

8. Focused investment in gender-based violence and child protection programmes is recommended. Development and funding of comprehensive support services like shelters and counselling for survivors of GBV should be prioritized, with special provisions for marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities and LGBTIQ individuals.

5. Food Security and Nutrition

5.1. SDG 2 Progress Assessment

SDG 2, which focuses on ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture, faces significant challenges in Timor-Leste. Unfortunately, progress towards this goal has come to a halt. As of 2023, out of the eight targets set for SDG 2, Timor-Leste is only on track to achieve one target. Two targets require accelerated efforts to make meaningful advancements, while two targets are regressing. The four important targets related to the agricultural sector (enhancing the incomes of small-scale food producers, promoting sustainable agriculture, ensuring access to genetic diversity in seeds and promoting agricultural export) have insufficient data in Timor-Leste (Figure 17).

Figure 17 SDG 2: Zero Hunger, SDG Progress assessment at target level

- **Target 2.1** aims to end hunger and ensure access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food for all. The prevalence of undernourishment, or the proportion of households meeting 100% of their energy intake, was 26.2% in 2020, up from 25.0% in 2019. In 2022, Acute Food Insecurity Phase Classification (MAF, GDS, FAO and WFP, 2023) identified that during the lean season (November 2022 to April 2023), nearly 300,000 people representing 22% of the total population faced high levels of acute food insecurity or Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) Phase 3 or above. Of those, 286,000 people or 21% of the total population were classified in
IPC Phase 3 (Crisis), and 13,000 (1%) in IPC Phase 4 (Emergency). Out of the fourteen municipalities, eleven were classified in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis), whereas three municipalities were in IPC Phase 2 (Stressed). Ermera has 5% of its population in Phase 4 (Emergency), making up 1% of the total population in Phase 4 (Emergency). Based on the Cost of Diet Analysis conducted in March 2023, it was observed that nutritious food items, when available, were priced high (MAF, GDS and WFP, 2023). Moreover, there were limitations in the availability of food, particularly items rich in iron.

- **Target 2.2 focuses on ending all forms of malnutrition**, which is measured through the prevalence of stunting and wasting. As of 2020, the prevalence of moderate to severe stunting among children under 5 years old in Timor-Leste stood at 46.7%, indicating a slight improvement compared to the figure of 51.7% in 2013. Despite this progress, it remains the highest proportion in the region and ranks third globally, meaning that nearly half of the children in Timor-Leste are stunted. Similarly, the proportion of children experiencing moderate to severe wasting has seen a slight decline, from 11% in 2016 to 8.6% in 2020. However, it still holds the highest position in the region and is categorized as “very high” according to the World Health Organization’s threshold (Ministry of Health, 2020). The prevalence of anaemia among pregnant women aged 15-49 years old increased from 35.8% in 2016 to 38% in 2019. The prevalence of anaemia among children aged 6 to 59 months is even higher at 46% in 2019 (World Bank, 2019b).

- **Targets 2.3 and 2.4, aim to double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers as well as ensure sustainable food production systems.** Preliminary data have been collected in a joint project led by the GDS, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) and FAO. However, these data are not sufficient to determine whether and to what extent Timor-Leste is progressing toward its targets.

- **Target 2.a. aims to increase investment to enhance agricultural productivity.** The Agriculture Orientation Index\textsuperscript{10} was 1.28 in 2016, but it declined to 0.64 in 2019, indicating a reduction in investment in agriculture. Moreover, official flows to the agriculture sector decreased from US$32 million in 2017 to US$22 million in 2020.

- **Target 2.c. seeks to help limit extreme food price volatility**, which is measured with the Food Price Anomalies indicator based on the consumer food price index. The food price volatility index rose from -0.081 in 2019 to 0.222 in 2020. New data for 2021 indicate abnormally high general food prices (more than one standard deviation compared with the historical mean), evidently due to the ongoing effects of the war in Ukraine and the lingering supply-chain disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

\textsuperscript{10} The Agriculture Orientation Index (AOI) for Government Expenditures is defined as the Agriculture Share of Government Expenditures, divided by the Agriculture Share of GDP, where Agriculture refers to the agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting sector. The measure in a currency-free index, calculated as the ratio of these two shares.
The Strategic Development Plan (2011-2030) acknowledges the vital role of the agricultural sector in reducing poverty, promoting economic growth, and enhancing food and nutrition security. Specific targets related to food security under the Rural Development and Agricultural sector goals were identified. One such target, set for 2020, states that ‘rural communities will have adequate food, either directly from agricultural production or through other employment and commercial activities. Families in rural areas will have the same opportunities as those in urban areas’ (Government of Timor-Leste, 2011).

While the interplay between SDG 2 and other SDGs is reciprocal, the VNR-2 underscores a more pronounced relationship direction, as depicted in the subsequent figure. Based on VNR-2 findings, SDG 2: Zero Hunger exhibits substantial synergies with SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, and 13.

**Figure 18 Synergies of the SDG 2 with other SDGs**

Note: SDG 2 ties to all SDGs, but for the purpose of this report and based on consultations, interviews, and case studies, only select SDGs are featured. One-way arrows suggest stronger influence on the SDG; two-way arrows represent strong mutual influence.

Source: Adapted by the author
5.2. Progress and challenges

The VNR team interviewed Filipe da Costa to gain insights into the progress and challenges related to addressing nutrition issues and the recent policies and programmes aimed at reducing malnutrition in Timor-Leste.

*Filipe da Costa:* “Food availability, affordability, quality, access, and utilization remain a significant challenge, with many households struggling to meet their basic nutritional needs. For these reasons, I would call the current situation a food and nutrition emergency.”

Filipe Da Costa serves as an Advisor to the Prime Minister and the Executive Director of the Unit of Mission to Combat Stunting. He has been nominated as a SUN Movement Focal Point and National Convenor of the UN Food System Summit. His prior roles include the Executive Directorship of Civil Society Support Services and Social Audit. Da Costa plays a crucial role in crafting the Consolidated National Action Plan for Nutrition and Food Security.

**What comes to your mind when looking at these postcards? What have changed since the independence in 2002?**

Since our independence, we have witnessed significant changes that have greatly improved the lives of our people. Although we have not yet reached our ultimate goal, we have made positive changes in various areas. We now have a functioning democracy with open elections, and there has been a notable increase in women’s participation in decision-making processes. During the transitional administration and the early governments, the United Nations helped establish basic systems that aligned with international standards and uphold human rights.

We are fortunate to have received substantial international support and to possess our own resources. By combining these factors and making wise investments, with the support of donors and the implementation of effective mechanisms and foundations, Timor-Leste has the potential to achieve numerous goals. While there is still a long way to go, I am incredibly enthusiastic and optimistic that we can make significant progress in attaining some of the SDGs, setting a positive example for others.

**Can you tell us about the state of food security and nutrition in Timor-Leste?**

Although we are doing well in terms of political development, many of us are still poor, food insecure, and face malnutrition. Timor-Leste is not doing well by any international measures related to food and nutrition security. This situation hinders human development achievements in other areas. The decline in the prevalence of stunting, wasting, and being underweight among young children, the country still has a high rate of malnutrition (SDG 2.1). Almost half (47.1%) of children under the age of 5 suffer from stunting, indicating a low height for their age, while 8.6% experience wasting, indicating a low
weight for their height (Figure 20). This means that approximately 57% of children under five in Timor-Leste are not meeting expected growth standards, which is among the highest rates in the Asia-Pacific region (Ministry of Health, 2020).

According to the Food and Nutrition Survey 2020, the data reveals that only 46.4% of children were initiated into breastfeeding within an hour of birth, and 64% of infants were exclusively breastfed during the first six months of life (Figure 21). The survey also highlights the high prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies among children under the age of five. Another concerning finding is that 90% of mothers do not wash their hands before breastfeeding their children. This may be due to a lack of awareness about the importance of handwashing or limited access to clean water. It is crucial for every household to have access to clean water, and it is essential to educate the population about the significance of handwashing.

The situation regarding women’s nutrition and health is also very concerning. Thirty-eight percent of pregnant women and 12% of women of reproductive age (15-49 years) suffer from anaemia. Additionally, only 65.4% of women are able to achieve a minimum diversified diet, consuming at least five out of ten food groups. This issue of anaemia among women and stunting in children not only reflects inadequate nutrition but also increases their vulnerability to other illnesses such as pneumonia and diarrhoea. This cycle continues as pregnant women, already facing the challenges of pregnancy, are further affected by anaemia (Figure 22).
Why are we talking about anaemia among women and children, it's because if untreated, it can affect a person's overall health and ability to do daily activities. Iron-deficiency anaemia reduces the work capacity of individuals and entire populations, with **serious consequences for the economy and national development**. Timor-Leste is also experiencing a significant rise in **overweight** and obesity rates, which have tripled since 2003 and now stand at nearly 19% as of 2020. This indicates the early signs of Timor-Leste facing the triple burden of malnutrition, encompassing undernutrition, overnutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies.

In my opinion, **malnutrition is a key indicator of inequality in Timor-Leste**. It is interesting that the 2020 Food and Nutrition Survey conducted analyses on differences of food insecurity by household wealth. The results are not shocking but shed light on increasing inequality by region and by wealth. In Dili, households are wealthier compared to those in rural areas. So, the location and the wealth levels are also related. Looking at stunting alone, it is much higher in rural areas and among poorer households.
In 2020, 59.1% of children in the poorest households compared to 29.7% of children in the highest wealth households had stunting.

Source: (Global Nutrition Report, 2022)

As per the recent Integrated Phase Classification conducted by the National Commission for Nutrition, Food Security and Sovereignty (KONSSANTIL) and WFP in 2022, around 22% of the total population were experiencing high levels of hunger in the lean season. But in post-harvest season, there is not much change, only a reduction of 2% of the population moves out of food insecurity (Figure 25 and Figure 26).
Out of the 14 municipalities, eleven are classified in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis), whereas three municipalities are in IPC Phase 2 (Stressed). The main drivers of high acute food insecurity include high food prices, reduced purchasing power, the persistent impacts of the COVID-19, global conflicts, and natural disasters.

Source: (MAF, GDS, FAO and WFP, 2023, p. 1)

**Given the significant vulnerabilities that were already present before the pandemic, could you explain the specific impacts of the Covid-19 State of Emergency?**

During the pandemic, the food insecurity situation was worsened by **lack of food availability and accessibility** as **movement restrictions** hindered the transportation of food between municipalities and resulted in the **closure of markets**, particularly in Dili. While some farmers had their own rice, the overall variety of food they could consume was reduced, leading to a decrease in the intake of vegetables, meat, and fruits. Furthermore, certain food items either did not sell in the market or became too expensive for many individuals to afford.

Schools in Timor-Leste have been closed and have not operating for several months since April 2020. Schools began to reopen in August and were fully open for in-person learning by October 2020. Due to school closures, the **school feeding programme was temporarily disrupted**. The amount of funding for the programme decreased in the 2020 school year reached its lowest point with only US$ 4.0 million available, while the pre-pandemic and pre-budget impasse amount was US$ 17.6 million in 2017. Therefore, the number of students fed, the frequency of school feeding, the size of rations, and the level of food basket variety have decreased.

**Food inflation has been on the rise in Timor-Leste since 2020**, with a significant increase of 8.2% as of September 2022, as per the World Bank Economic report. Regional disparities in food inflation were observed, with a rate of 7.0% in Dili and 10.0% in rural areas. The rise in food inflation can be attributed to higher agricultural input costs such as transport, fertilizer, and animal feed coupled with a global recession. The GoTL and WFP's price monitoring report indicates that the prices of imported rice, which is the most widely consumed staple in the country, have been steadily rising since February 2022. This increase is consistent with international market trends and has been exacerbated by high fuel and transportation costs. Furthermore, the cost of local rice is twice that of imported rice.
Poorer households continue to experience higher food insecurity compared to wealthier households (SDG 1). Surveys conducted by the United Nations and the GoTL, WFP, Oxfam and many others consistently show that severe food insecurity is prevalent among the poorest households, highlighting affordability as a critical issue. Rural households outside of Dili are particularly vulnerable to moderate or severe food insecurity. According to a WFP survey, seven out of ten households adopt livelihood-based coping strategies to address food shortages. Primary concerns among households include increased food prices (67%) and food scarcity (16%) (World Food Programme, 2022).

**Box 10. Impact of Covid-19 and inflation pressures on food security**

*Figure 27 Change in food inflation (%) from previous year, 2018-2022*

![Change in food inflation](image)

Source: (World Food Programme, 2023)

*Figure 28 Proportion of households with moderate or severe food insecurity, by household wealth quintiles, 2021*

![Prevalence of food insecurity, 2021](image)

Source: (United Nations and the Government of Timor-Leste, 2021)

*Figure 29 Proportion of households with moderate or severe food insecurity, by household wealth quintiles, 2022*

![Prevalence of food insecurity, 2022](image)

Source: (GDS, UNDP and World Bank, 2022)

Using the *Food Insecurity Experience Scale*, households that experience moderate food insecurity typically eat low quality diets and might have been forced to reduce the quantity of food they would normally eat. Whereas households that experience severe food insecurity typically have run out of food and at worst
gone a day or more without eating, putting their health at risk. In July 2021, the proportion of households affected by moderate or severe food insecurity in the 30 days prior to the survey was 41.4% (United Nations and the Government of Timor-Leste, 2021). This figure rose to 45.4% by July 2022, although the proportion of severely food-insecure households significantly decreased from 19.3% to 8.7% (World Bank, 2022).

VNR Consultations 4: Nurturing Food Security in Timor-Leste: Achievements, Challenges, and Priority Pathways Ahead

Ensuring food security is a critical aspect of sustainable development in Timor-Leste. The consultations with various groups in the country provide useful insights on the progress made, existing challenges, and priority areas for action to enhance food security for all.

The achievements highlighted during the national multi-stakeholder consultation included: The Ministry of Health developed a National Action Plan for a nutrition programme, and the Government approved a law to increase taxes on soft drinks/beverages and sugar. Additionally, the SUN (Scaling Up Nutrition) and Food System Sustainability programme supports the country’s efforts to ensure food nutrition. Women’s groups and persons with disabilities highlighted public awareness of nutrition information has increased through radio, newspapers, and health centres. Local communities in RAOEA highlighted that the agriculture sector has made significant contributions to improving the lives of the people through various achievements:

- Successful implementation of irrigation projects, including the construction of the Tono dam and the canalization connecting Toon irrigation to fields in the Villages of Cunha and Lalisuk.
- Improved agricultural techniques through training provided by the Regional Secretariat of Agriculture.
- Deployment of extensionist workers in rural areas, providing valuable support to farmers.
- Increased availability of local products, with the RAEOA selling local products in the market.
- Establishment of permanent farms and farms for productivity groups, contributing to sustainable agriculture.

Challenges identified during the national consultation include the absence of the Food Control Law, which is necessary to regulate imported products. While consultation with women’s groups noted the lack of knowledge among pregnant women regarding the importance of nutrition, food hygiene, and preparation of nutritious meals.

Priorities identified during the national consultation include providing socialization and awareness programs for health professionals to enhance their knowledge in nutrition-related areas; improving the quality of local food production to ensure the availability of nutritious and safe food; and to strengthening food laws and regulations to control imports and promote local food production. Organizations for women’s rights and gender equality emphasized the need to conduct socialization and awareness programs to educate women about nutrition, food hygiene, and nutritious meal
preparation. The local community representatives in RAOEA suggested promoting sustainable agricultural practices, including good irrigation systems and knowledge-sharing on agricultural techniques and to establishing permanent farms and productivity groups to enhance agricultural productivity and sustainability.

What were the effects of the 2021 floods on food security? What are the lessons learned from the experience?

In April 2021, floods resulted in a significant number of internally displaced individuals, with the majority located in Dili (8,845) (UN RCO, 2021). Evacuation centres were established, but those affected faced food shortages, disruptions in daily life, and loss of belongings, livestock, crops, and assets. The agricultural sector in Manatuto, Baucau, and Bobonaro, which contribute 40% of Timor-Leste's crop production, was severely impacted. The lower number of internally displaced individuals in these areas still had a significant impact on livelihoods and food security.

Therefore, the main goal of the nutrition sector during the floods was to prevent the worsening of malnutrition and provide life-saving services to those who were most vulnerable, such as children under five years old and pregnant or breastfeeding women. The inter-sectoral and national-local coordination was crucial. The Nutrition Department worked with local Municipality Health Services to send Nutrition Coordinators to every evacuation centre within their community health centre area. These coordinators assessed the number of children and pregnant or breastfeeding women in the centre and provided initial registration and screening to determine their nutritional needs. The sector also prioritized creating safe spaces for mothers to breastfeed, rest, and eat. To ensure that there was enough water available, the nutrition sector collaborated with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and water and sanitation sectors (SDG 6).

Box 11. Cyclone Seroja: Impacts of floods and landslides on communities and the agriculture sector

As of July 2021, tropical Cyclone Seroja affected 4,230 hectares of crop land and caused 9,134 tons of crop losses valued at over US$ 12.5 million. Out of that affected land, nearly 1,570 hectares were maize fields and 2,663 hectares were paddy fields. These areas represent 4.6% and 11.9%, respectively, of the cultivated area for those crops during the main growing season of 2020-21. Furthermore, irrigation schemes and canals were destroyed or damaged in 93 villages in 11 municipalities caused by erosion due to heavy water causing channelization, rills, and gullies along the hillside and within the canals (FAO, 2021). According to the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment report, total damage and loss in agriculture and food security sector was US$ 21,251,625 while recovery needs were estimated at US$ 50,511,753 (GoTL, World Bank and UN, 2021). Of these, costs from livestock deaths were estimated at US$ 15,700,700.
5.3. Drivers of food and nutrition insecurity and policy actions

**Despite making significant improvements in other areas of human development, why is Timor-Leste experiencing slower progress in reducing the prevalence of stunting and anaemia?**

One of the key contributing factors for high rates of malnutrition is the **inadequate quality and quantity of food**. Despite the potential for agriculture to support food security, Timor-Leste remains highly **dependent on food imports**. It makes the country vulnerable to price fluctuations and supply disruptions. This is exacerbated by the fact that the country has a limited capacity for food storage and processing, which means that much of the food produced locally goes to waste. The majority of the population still relies on **subsistence farming**, with limited access to markets, technology, and infrastructure. Timor-Leste is a small island developing state meaning it is **extremely vulnerable to climatic shocks**, including La Niña, El Niño, and tropical cyclones. Extreme rainfalls caused by La Niña will become more intense and frequent while El Niño can cause droughts. As a result, food availability, affordability, quality, access, and utilization remain a significant challenge, with many households struggling to meet their basic nutritional needs. For these reasons, I would call the current situation a **food and nutrition emergency**.

**The cost of nutritious food is high.** According to a WFP’s study in March 2023, the cost of a nutritious diet has increased by 68% since 2019. On average a household of five people would need to spend over US$ 300 per month to purchase the lowest cost nutrient-adequate basket. This corresponds to a range between US$7.2 to US$14.1 each day, across the country. **Adolescent girls face the most challenges in meeting their nutrient needs**, with a cost ranging from US$ 4 to almost US$ 12 per
day. Most people do not eat balanced and nutritious food due to high cost and lack of availability and micronutrient deficiencies. The main drivers of acute food insecurity include **high food prices and unaffordability**, which result in insufficient food consumption, negative coping strategies lie reducing number of meals and limiting portions that lead to malnutrition.

In about seven years, we only reduced the stunting rate by about 3%, from 50.2% in 2013 to 47.1% in 2020. This is very slow. I don’t question whether the past and current interventions are right or not. I think the country is implementing the right interventions given that all malnutrition indicators reduced even marginally, they have not gone up. Therefore, the gap is the **level of investment and coverage we have now is not sufficient** to tackle this widespread problem. For Timor-Leste to achieve the SDG 2, more resources are needed, we need to double or triple the funding, work in synergies, and reach everyone through programmes. It is like giving weak medicine to a patient in need of intensive care and stronger treatment.

The **level of education plays a significant role in nutrition outcomes**. When family members have lower levels of education, they often adhere to traditional beliefs that restrict the food intake of pregnant women during pregnancy. This can result in inadequate nutrition for both the mother and the developing fetus, exacerbating the problem of malnutrition. Another key driver is the **absence of community health and nutrition programmes in Timor-Leste**. These programs, typically facilitated by social mobilizers or community health volunteers, play a crucial role in raising awareness within the community about preventing and treating malnutrition. Without such programs, there is limited knowledge and understanding of proper nutrition practices, hindering progress in addressing malnutrition effectively. These challenges are further complicated by **the lack of scaled-up targeted interventions focused on the critical first 1000 days**, which includes maternal and child health and nutrition, promotion of optimal breastfeeding, and appropriate complementary feeding practices.

The 2020 Timor-Leste Food and Nutrition Survey identified several immediate causes of malnutrition that require urgent attention. Rates of early initiation of breastfeeding have significantly declined, depriving infants of essential nutrients and protective factors. Diving deeper into the potential causes, stunting rates even peaked in children from 6-23 months, indicating a lack of adequate quality and quantity of complementary feeding, reiterating a stronger food system-based approach to addressing malnutrition (Ministry of Health, 2020).

Lastly, **inadequate access to improved water and sanitation systems contributes to malnutrition**. There is lack of handwashing practices before feeding and breastfeeding which also contribute to the transmission of diseases and further compromise nutrition outcomes. Addressing poor water supply and sanitation services, particularly in both urban and rural settings, lead to an increased incidence of diarrhoea and stunting (SDG 6).
Since the first VNR in 2019, what have been the principal policy measures implemented to mitigate these driving factors?

Firstly, in an effort to counter the unprecedented impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and flooding on food and nutrition security in the country, the government has established a dedicated **Stunting Unit directly under the Prime Minister’s Office**, as per Government Decree n. 91/2022. This unit’s primary mandate is to mobilize resources towards tackling the issue of stunting. Mirroring the approach taken to combat Covid-19 through the establishment of Covid-19 Fund, this mission-specific unit will operate for a two-year period, acknowledging the urgency to address the alarmingly high prevalence of stunting in Timor-Leste.

Timor-Leste has developed a **Consolidated National Action Plan for Nutrition and Food Security** (SDG2 CNAP-NFS), approved by the Council of Ministers in November 2020. Through my engagement in civil society, we evaluated food security and nutrition projects and programmes, identifying 306 interventions in Timor-Leste. Given resource and time constraints, we had to prioritize, which led us to narrow down to 18 high-priority interventions through extensive consultations with both national and international stakeholders. Thus, **CNAP harmonizes various standalone policies** such as the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (2017) and the Zero Hunger Action Plan (2025), which are presently managed by different agencies. Under CNAP, a limited number of high-priority interventions are selected from these existing plans, and we advocate for increased investments, enhanced implementation, and robust tracking. Consequently, CNAP is a consolidation that builds upon these pre-existing plans.

With our consolidated action plan now in place, we’ve initiated advocacy for the high-priority interventions it outlines. Timor-Leste officially joined the **Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN)** movement in September 2020, signalling an intensified focus on nutrition. This focus was further underscored by the adoption of the National Health Sector Nutrition Strategic Plan for 2022-2026. Moreover, Timor-Leste has charted a national food systems pathway, committing to enhance agricultural productivity as a pivotal intervention under CNAP. Beyond nutrition-specific strategies, we are integrating nutrition-sensitive approaches grounded in food system, which we believe will lead to sustainable progress over time. Now we are able to identify programmes that are nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive, thanks to the nutritional marker or tagging introduced in the budgeting system.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Good Practice 7: Timor-Leste’s Stunting Unit and Nutritional Budget Tagging elevate policy coherence in the fight against malnutrition and food insecurity</th>
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<td>Timor-Leste’s strategic approach to addressing malnutrition and food security encompasses both the establishment of a dedicated <strong>Stunting Unit</strong> and the application of <strong>nutritional budget tagging</strong>. These innovative initiatives represent best practices in nutrition mainstreaming, illustrating the government’s commitment to cross-sectoral, coordinated efforts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The <strong>Stunting Unit</strong>, created via Government Decree n. 91/2022, is a mission-oriented body focused on tackling high stunting rates in the country. Its role includes ensuring funds are directed towards nutrition-</td>
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specific interventions, especially targeting the crucial **first 1000 days of a child’s life**. The Stunting Unit also serves as the Secretariat of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement in Timor-Leste, a global initiative aimed at eliminating malnutrition by 2030. Timor-Leste joined the SUN Movement in September 2020, demonstrating its global commitment to this cause. The Stunting Unit coordinates efforts among government and various partners to tackle malnutrition in Timor-Leste. With the support of UN Agencies (FAO, UNICEF, WHO, WFP), the European Union, Government of Australia, Government of Japan, and many other donors, development partners, and academic institutions, this multi-stakeholder platform exemplifies policy coherence in action.

Meanwhile, The Government institutionalized **Nutritional Budget Tagging** in its planning and budgeting system, marking a significant commitment towards comprehensive malnutrition response. Proposed in 2022 and first applied in the 2023 State Budget, this system identifies, classifies, and tracks public expenditures on nutrition. It thus provides insights into the allocation of resources for interventions aimed at eliminating malnutrition among the population.

Two types of nutritional budget tagging are incorporated:

- **Nutrition-Specific interventions**: These directly address immediate causes of malnutrition, such as providing vitamin A supplements or promoting dietary diversification among pregnant mothers.

- **Nutrition-Sensitive interventions**: These target the underlying causes of malnutrition, improving aspects like agriculture and food security, social protection, early childhood development, education, sanitation, and water hygiene.

In 2023, a pilot phase applied this budget marker to eight government entities including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, among others. The entities were required to plan and budget for nutrition-related interventions, distinguishing between nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive activities. As a result, a total of **US$ 80,511,165** was allocated for nutrition and food security in the 2023 General State Budget (of which US$ 13,177,174 for nutrition-specific interventions) (Government of Timor-Leste, 2023).

This innovative practice provides a much-needed solution to the challenge reported in the VNR-1 - that of quantifying funding allocated to addressing malnutrition and food insecurity. By operationalizing nutrition budget tagging, the government of Timor-Leste demonstrates an exemplary commitment to enhancing the visibility and accountability of nutrition-related expenditures, paving the way for more targeted and effective interventions.

Together, these initiatives embody a cohesive approach, facilitating the alignment of strategies, policy coherence, and accountability in the fight against malnutrition. The collaborative actions of the Stunting Unit and the use of nutritional budget tagging offer a valuable model for other nations seeking to optimize their nutrition and food security interventions.

The government aimed to secure funding for nutrition and roll out the costed SDG2 CNAP-NFS at the national, subnational, and community levels. To achieve this, a resource mobilization strategy was developed, and a budget tracking exercise was conducted to identify funding gaps. Domestic
expenditures on nutrition were also tracked to ensure adequate investment in this area. Consequently, I’m happy to see that from 2022, the Government allocated US$50 million for five years in investing in food and nutrition programmes, meaning US$10 million each year. The GoTL has increased the investment for improving nutrition and food security in 2022 to US$117 million compared with US$44 million in 2019 (SUN Countries: Timor-Leste, 2023). However, this is still quite a small amount, Timor-Leste should invest US$50 million per year to improve nutrition (a World Bank report).

The Government has continued implementing the National Agriculture Strategic Plan to help farmers grow more food. Recognizing the challenges and damages caused by the pandemic and the natural disasters and floods, the Government introduced new kinds of seeds that increase yields, distributed machines and fishing equipment, vaccinated animals to keep them healthy, made groups for farmers to work together, and fixed up land for growing coffee and other important cash crops. Because of all these things, farmers have been able to grow twice as much rice in the last five years (Government of Timor-Leste, 2021c).

Another significant programme is Cesta Básica. It was implemented in 2021 and 2022. Given that the agricultural sector is critical to ensuring food security in Timor-Leste, particularly nearly one quarter of the working-age population in Timor-Leste (23.5%) are subsistence foodstuff producers engaged in subsistence farming, fishing and processing and storing food (SEFOPE, General Directorate of Statistics and ILO, 2022). By purchasing from local farmers and distributing to communities, the Cesta Básica has helped boost local agricultural production, resulting in increase in agricultural production first time in a decade.

It is worth noting that the recent Food Security Bulletin published by MAF reveals that rice production, owing in large part to this initiative, has increased to 85,000 metric tonnes, almost meeting the national requirement of 110,000 metric tonnes. This is a remarkable improvement from the 35,000 - 54,000 metric tonnes, yield in the years before 2020. Alongside this initiative, the private sector and the government’s National Logistics have facilitated importing the remaining required rice and procuring a stock of rice for emergency responses (MAF, FAO and WFP, 2023). As a result, the Cesta Básica has become central to our strategy, significantly enhancing food availability. Persisting in the priority to purchase locally produced goods is crucial to inspire more youth to join the farming and agriculture sector.

Good Practice 8: Cesta Básica programme provides valuable lessons

One of the key measures of the Covid-19 Economic Recovery Plan was the Cesta Básica programme. Under the Cesta Básica programme, a basic basket or shopping voucher worth US$50 is distributed to all citizens in Timor-Leste. This basket contains essential food and personal hygiene items. The programme serves several purposes: addressing households’ basic needs and combating hunger, assisting Timorese families affected by income reduction due to Covid-19, and stimulating the local economy by boosting farmers’ income and supporting local traders. To promote agricultural production, at least 75% of the items included in the basket must be locally sourced.
The Cesta Básica distribution took place in two phases. The first phase occurred during 2020-2021 with a budget of US$ 71.5 million, followed by the second phase in 2022 with a budget of US$ 80 million. The objective was to reach all citizens in Timor-Leste.

**Lessons from the programme include the following.** In continuing the programme, the capacity of the Government to plan, monitor and enforce contractual obligations on distributors should be improved. Limited administrative capacity pushed the Government to delegate food distribution to private firms with lack of monitoring and quality assurance from the government side. The initial distribution timeline was extended from two months to eight months. Further, more focus is required on improving means of collecting and collating local food production data to monitor the changes in the local food production patterns and respond with programmes and policies accordingly, to boost local production.

*Figure 31 Population satisfied with the Cesta Básica programme*

According to the SEIA-2 survey conducted in 2021 among 4292 households, the majority of those who received Cesta Básica were satisfied with the programme, with less than 1% of respondents being very dissatisfied. In Dili, where households received vouchers, 88.3% were satisfied, while outside Dili, where households received baskets, 74.7% were satisfied. Although most households welcomed the Cesta Básica, they indicated a preference for other forms of assistance, with cash being the most preferred modality.

There has been a notable surge in both awareness and activities surrounding food and nutrition in recent years. For example, the number of mother support groups has expanded thanks to the *Bolsa de Mae-Jerasaun Foun* programme covering pregnant women, mothers, and children under five years old (SDG 3). Cash transfers provided can improve the capacity of the households to buy nutritious food (SDG 1).

In July 2022, the Government also increased the benefit level of *Merenda Escolar – School Feeding* programme from 25 cents to 42 cents per pupil per day which to improve the effort of providing nutritious meals to children. This is a crucial programme as it ensures that children receive at least one
nutritious meal each day, safeguarding them against malnutrition and long-term health issues. Furthermore, this programme plays a vital role in enhancing access to education by enabling children to concentrate better in school, thereby boosting enrollment and attendance rates. It also promotes higher retention rates among students and enhances their cognitive abilities, thereby contributing to their overall educational development (SDG 4).

The Programme also contributes to children’s education by allowing children to focus and helps increase enrolment and attendance, promotes retention rates and improves cognitive abilities. In addition to providing nutritious meals, the programme creates jobs, according to the latest reports there were approximately 1600 jobs such as cooks, drivers, and monitoring staff (MEYS, 2023). The majority of cooks are women, and they are paid in cash. As you know, in Timor-Leste, fewer women have access to paid jobs so this programme benefits local women as well (SDG 5).

**Good Practice 9: Merenda Escolar’s pioneering role in enhancing health, education, and Local economy in Timor-Leste**

The *Merenda Escolar* School Feeding Programme was introduced in 2006 and has undergone significant development since then. Funded by the General State Budget, its objectives include the provision to all children who attend preschool and basic education of a daily meal that contains healthy, balanced, and essential food components. Additionally, the programme aims to reduce poverty and the rate of malnutrition among school-age children, decrease the dropout rate, promote healthy eating habits among educational communities, contribute to the economic development of local farmers, and encourage community participation in development.

The *Merenda Escolar* targets students between 5 to 14 years old, and in 2018, approximately 329,403 pupils benefited from the programme. However, the programme’s coverage of preschool-age children remains limited, covering only 11 percent due to low preschool enrolment, primarily resulting from a lack of infrastructure in the country (World Bank, 2022).

The budget allocated for the Programme has fluctuated in the past, reaching its lowest in 2020 associated with Covid-19 pandemic and school closures then significantly increased in 2023.

*Figure 32 School Feeding Programme Annual Budget, 2015-2022*
Timor-Leste has signed the global School Meals Coalition and made several commitments to further enhance the programme’s impact by 2030. These include increasing coverage of the national school feeding programme from 150,000 to 300,000 children within five years, establishing a budget line to finance school feeding from domestic resources, developing or revisiting a national policy on nutritious school feeding, establishing a national directorate on school feeding in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, and promoting Home-Grown School Feeding, linking schools and local agricultural production (Government of Timor-Leste, 2021c).

The Programme delivers comprehensive solutions aimed at preventing malnutrition and long-term diseases in children by ensuring they receive at least one nutritious meal daily. By boosting local agricultural production, it enhances livelihoods and fosters job creation, while concurrently supporting improved educational outcomes and learning experiences. The Programme also promotes access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene practices at schools.

Now, it is crucial to increase investment to improve the implementation of these programmes on the ground. Moreover, institutional capacities should be continually enhanced to ensure that the Merenda Escolar programme can effectively address malnutrition in children.

Another benefit of the Merenda Escolar programme is that as the Government Decree requires the use of locally produced food. Schools are provided with funds to purchase food products, and small-scale farmers play a crucial role in supplying a variety of items, ranging from vegetables, fruit, eggs, and meat to fish, grains, tubers, and legumes. The programme’s scope extends beyond just food; it is also connected to promoting access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene practices at schools. The programme encourages children to cultivate the habit of washing their hands before eating, which contributes to their overall hygiene and well-being.

However, there are still several improvements that need to be made to the programme. Firstly, the allocated funding for the programme needs to be increased and sustained. Historically, the budget allocated for the Programme has fluctuated significantly, reaching its bottom in the pandemic year of 2020. Additionally, the quality of meals should be improved by incorporating a wider variety of ingredients. It is also essential to expand the programme’s coverage, as currently, only half of the children are benefiting from it. Moreover, when schools are closed during weekends and breaks, some children might not receive a nutritious meal. This is a critical concern that must be addressed in order to ensure that children are not going hungry during these periods.

The GoTL’s fiscal system and bureaucratic mechanisms often delay the School Feeding Programme’s financing in the first quarter of each year. A state budget review proposed two options to address this. The first option suggests advancing 50% of the tranche to ensure meal access early in the year. The second, more secure long-term option involves establishing a Special Fund. Despite the potential bureaucratic issues and extra costs to maintain the fund’s secretariat, an investment of approximately US$ 210,000-US$ 300,000 could secure US$30 to US$40 million per year.
During the VNR-1 national consultation, the National Health Sector Nutrition Strategic Plan 2022- 2026 that was adopted by the Ministry of Health was mentioned as a positive change. Furthermore, Timor-Leste ratified a **Law to increase the excise taxes on sugar and sugar-sweetened beverages** already in effect from 2023 (SDG 3 and SDG 16). These are examples that demonstrate the **high-level of commitment in Timor-Leste** towards addressing all forms of malnutrition and food insecurity.

**What do you think should be the priorities in alleviating food insecurity and malnutrition in Timor-Leste?**

We should recognize that stunting and anaemia are a national emergency. Therefore, we have to **increase investment** from the GoTL and also from the international community. There could be a match-funding scheme, for example when the GoTL allocates US$10 million a year to reduce food insecurity, donors can match with similar amount. We need to significantly scale up existing programmes based on evaluations and study results and invest in capacities. The leadership of the KONSSANTIL would be significant in fund raising and budgeting, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

There could be a **Global Fund or Trust for Nutrition**. We have a Global Fund for combatting malaria and HIV, a similar kind of fund would help developing countries to start tackling the fundamentals of development that are food insecurity and malnutrition. When people are food insecure and malnourished, it affects all other aspects of their lives – health, education and income among others.

We witnessed major shocks in the last four years. This shows that we need to be **better prepared for future pandemics and natural disasters** and have regulations. The Ministry of Health’s Nutrition Cluster Contingency Plan and mechanisms are in place. We need to maintain the preparation at all times, not just wait until the next shock, start testing of the operations and have well-trained task forces on the ground.

Now that we have established the Unit of Mission to Combat Stunting, its operations should continue and should be sustainable. As the Unit exemplifies the SUN strategy 3.0 approach, where the country takes the lead in setting priorities and rallying support around these objectives, embracing a multisectoral strategy, the Unit can be a central point for mobilizing resources. This coordination helps align efforts towards achieving set goals.
5.4. Priorities

Based on desk review, expansive consultations, findings from the SDG Progress Assessment, and the overarching Strategic Development Plan, the VNR-2 has identified the following priorities for increasing food and nutrition security in Timor-Leste.

1. **Declare food and nutrition situation as a national crisis:** The Government needs to treat food and nutrition insecurity as a public health crisis. A humanitarian assistance to protect the lives and livelihoods of the 22% population classified in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) or above, an immediate launch of humanitarian support is required, also considering the three municipalities with a 5% population in Emergency food insecurity (IPC Phase 4). Any delays in the humanitarian response will lead to the deterioration of the food security.

2. **Food and nutrition security fund management and high-impact investment:** A special fund should be established to allocate funding and prevent budget delays. The Stunting Unit, continuing beyond the Covid-19 crisis, should act as the Secretariat for the fund to streamline high-impact interventions. To circumvent fiscal and bureaucratic delays affecting the School Feeding Programme, two options are proposed: advance 50% of funding to ensure early-year meal access or establish a Special Fund. Despite associated costs, the latter's proactive approach could secure US$30- US$40 million annually, enhancing fund transparency and accountability, while preventing misuse.

3. **Optimize government funding for nutrition:** With increasing funds allocated for nutrition in recent years, the focus should now be on ensuring efficient use and regular tracking of expenditure against programme coverage. Adequate financing for different programme components is vital for comprehensive system strengthening. Consider institutionalizing Community Health Workers with performance-based incentives to enhance last-mile health and nutrition service delivery.

4. **Implement targeted nutrition interventions:** Prioritize interventions emphasizing the critical first 1000 days of life, including maternal-child health and nutrition, breastfeeding promotion, and appropriate feeding practices. Priorities include treating children under-five for wasting in all health facilities and boosting exclusive breastfeeding rates. Support vulnerable groups with additional social protection, particularly households with severely malnourished children.

5. **Continue effective multi-sectoral programmes:** The government should continue ongoing programs such as the Consolidated National Action Plan for Nutrition and Food Security, the Merenda Escolar, Bolsa de Mae – Jeresaun Foun, National Agricultural Sector Plan, and the Zero Hunger Programme.
   a. **Poverty reduction and health access programmes:** Extend Bolsa de Mae – Jeresaun Foun cash transfer and health-related programmes.
   b. **Address water supply and sanitation:** Improve water and sanitation services to reduce diarrhoea and stunting (SDG 6).
   c. **Agriculture and fisheries programmes:** Bolster agriculture and fisheries through investments and initiatives such as the Escola Merendar School Feeding Programme.
These efforts can stimulate markets, engage youth and women, and increase incomes. Intensify home-grown school feeding initiatives (MEYS in coordination with MAF). BNCTL can provide support through micro-credits, loans, and public-private partnerships.

d. **Support livelihoods and economic opportunities:** Expand food and market value chains, storage facilities, and cold chains.

e. **Raise awareness:** Conduct education and awareness campaigns about food, nutrition, breastfeeding, and handwashing practices.

6. **Future proofing and resilience building:** The Government should integrate disaster risk management in agriculture and food production, adopt climate-smart agriculture practices and reduce dependence on food imports.

7. **Ensure equity:** The Government should focus on social aspects of food systems, including fair access to food and food distribution.

8. **Establish Food Control Law:** The Government needs to pass the necessary law to control imported products and ensure food safety.

9. **Improve data availability:** The Government should enhance data collection for SDG targets related to the agricultural sector (SDG 2.3; 2.4; 2.5 and 2.b).
6. Health and Wellbeing

6.1. SDG 3 and SDG 6 Progress Assessment

SDG 3: Good health and Well-being aims at ‘ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being at all ages is essential to sustainable development’. The goal consists of 13 targets. Timor-Leste is on track to achieve three targets, needs to accelerate progress across eight targets and shown reverse trend in two targets.

Figure 33 SDG 3: Good health and Well-being, Progress at target level

| 3.7 | Sexual & reproductive health |
| 3.8 | R&D for health |
| 3.9 | Management of health risks |
| 3.1 | Maternal mortality |
| 3.2 | Child mortality |
| 3.3 | Communicable diseases |
| 3.6 | Road traffic accidents |
| 3.8 | Universal health coverage |
| 3.9 | Health impact of pollution |
| 3.a | Tobacco control |
| 3.c | Health financing & workforce |
| 3.4 | NCD & mental health |
| 3.5 | Substance abuse |

Source: (ESCAP, 2023b)

Progress towards achieving several of the health targets outlined in the SDG 3 has been slow in recent years.

- **Target 3.1 to reduce maternal mortality rate** has shown slow progress. The target is measured by two sub-indicators. The first indicator on deaths per 100,000 births, the rate in Timor-Leste decreased from 160 in 2015 to 142 in 2017. The set target for Timor-Leste is to reduce the maternal mortality rate to 70 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030. The second indicator on the percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel, which is crucial for reducing maternal and neonatal mortality, showed an improvement from 63% in 2015 to 68% in 2022, with a drop to 48% in 2021 possibly due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The target for this indicator is to reach 100% by 2030, indicating that there's still a substantial gap to fill.

- **Target 3.2. on reducing infant and under-five child mortality rate** (deaths per 1,000 live births) has made progress in reducing child mortality over this period. The data shows a positive trend, with the rate decreasing from 50.8 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2015 to 44.2 in 2019 and further reducing to 39.6 in 2021.

11 For more details at indicator level, see Statistical Annex of the report.
Likewise, progress towards meeting targets 3.3 and 3.4, which aim to combat both communicable and non-communicable diseases, has been slow.

- HIV and tuberculosis cases have not significantly decreased. The number of new HIV infections was 10 per 100,000 population in 2020 compared to 9 in 2015. The number of deaths due to tuberculosis was 1100 in 2019 (the latest available data) while the number was 1200 in 2015. The rates of cardiovascular disease have risen.

- Malaria Deaths: The data shows that there have been no reported malaria deaths from 2015 to 2022, indicating effective disease control and prevention efforts. Achieving zero malaria deaths aligns with the SDG 2030 target and demonstrates Timor-Leste’s progress in managing this disease.

- Indicator 3.4.1 concerning mortality due to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, or chronic respiratory diseases, is a critical health concern. The mortality rate attributed to these diseases seems to have slightly increased from 18.6% in 2015 to 19.9% in 2019.

- The harmful consumption of alcohol (target 3.5) is another area where progress has faltered. The amount of alcohol consumed per person aged 15 and over has remained relatively high, with regression noted in recent years. There has been no significant change between the data for 2015 was 0.53 litres per annum for the overall population aged 15 and above and for 2019, 0.53. Men consume more alcohol than women (0.84 litres versus 0.21 litres per annum).

- Efforts to reduce road traffic deaths (target 3.6) have been hampered by slow progress. The target is measured by number of traffic deaths per 100,000 population. Men appear to be particularly susceptible to road accidents. For men, the road traffic death rate per 100,000 population has shown a slight decrease from 18.28 in 2015 to 16.86 in 2019. While for women, the rate has decreased from 7.85 in 2015 to 6.83 in 2019. The overall road traffic death rate per 100,000 population has been slightly decreasing from 13.12 in 2015 to 11.90 in 2019. However, the data for the years 2020, 2021, and 2022 is also missing.

- Achieving essential health service coverage (target 3.8) has also proven challenging, with the ‘universal health coverage index’ only increasing from 53 in 2018 to 55 in 2020 (the target for 2030 is 100).

- Meanwhile, tobacco use (Target 3.a) remains a significant issue, overall tobacco uses in the population aged 15 and above fell from 42.5% in 2015 to 28.4% in 2016 but rose to nearly 39.2% in 2020.

- Tobacco use in females dropped from 12.7% in 2015 to 10.8% in 2020. Despite fluctuations, the prevalence is already below the 2030 target of 24.7%.

- Male tobacco use remains high, starting at 72.3% in 2015, dropping to 69% in 2020, which remains significantly higher than the 2030 target.
However, there is some cause for optimism. Targets 3.7 and 3.b, which focus on universal access to sexual and reproductive care, family planning, education, and vaccines, as well as target 3.d on early warning systems for global health risks, are on track to be achieved by 2030.

- **Target 3.7** aims to reduce adolescent births, with targets set at 15.5 births per 1000 women aged 15-19, and zero for the age group 10-14.
  
  o In the 15-19 age group, births per 1000 women have consistently fallen from 78.3 in 2001, to 50 in 2010, and 42 in 2016. If this downward trajectory continues, the target of 15.5 by 2030 is within reach.

  o Similarly, the 10-14 age group saw a modest decrease, from 0.5 in 2012 to 0.4 in both 2014 and 2015. While the decrease here is smaller, the current trend suggests that the target of nearly zero adolescent births in this age group by 2030 is plausible. However, it should be noted that more recent data could potentially provide a more nuanced perspective. While family planning methods in Timor-Leste are freely available in public health facilities, they are mainly offered to married women with children, leaving adolescent girls facing significant barriers to access.\(^{12}\) (Cummins & Fonseca, 2017). The lack of data for the indicator might also be linked with the existing stigma and under-reporting.

- **Target 3.b.** – aims to support the research and development of vaccines and medicines for the communicable and non-communicable diseases that primarily affect developing countries.
  
  o For indicator 3.b.1 the diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine (DTP3) rate increased from 76% of the population in 2015 to 90% in 2019, but slightly dropped to 86% in 2020. Despite the dip, the general trend suggests progress towards the SDG target of 100% coverage by 2030. The measles vaccination rate seems to hover around 80% in 2019 and 78% in 2020. The reason for these slight declines in 2020 could be due to disruptions in immunization services as a result of the pandemic.

  o For indicator 3.b.2, both gross and net disbursements of ODA to medical research and basic health sectors are provided, with a target value of US$ 29.2 million 2019 by 2030. Both gross and net disbursements have shown an upward trend from 2015 to 2020, with a significant jump in 2020 reaching approximately US$ 38.8 million 2019. This increase may be a response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, indicating that more resources have been allocated to the health sector to address urgent needs and gaps.

- **Target 3.d.** Indicator 3.d.1, measures health capacity and emergency preparedness using the SPAR tool index. This index, averaging 13 components, aims for a score of 100 by 2030. In Timor-Leste, the SPAR score was 44 in 2018, dropped to 37 in 2019, rose slightly to 42 in 2020, and made a

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\(^{12}\) These barriers include a lack of awareness and healthcare services, scarce rural health facilities, cultural constraints, inadequate education about contraception, gender norms, and stigma surrounding unmarried individuals seeking medical help. The lack of male involvement in contraceptive choices and limited youth-friendly health services further compound these challenges.
significant leap to 60 in 2022, indicating substantial progress. Fluctuations may be linked to the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact, which highlighted the need for robust health systems.

- **Target 3.c** is measured by health worker density, in four categories: dentistry personnel, nursing and midwifery personnel, pharmaceutical personnel, and physicians. Overall, the data shows progress in the health worker density across various categories, but there’s still considerable work needed to reach the 2030 SDG targets. Strategies may include improving training and education opportunities, enhancing retention and motivation strategies, and providing better working conditions for health workers.

  - **Dentistry Personnel Density**: The density of dentistry personnel has drastically declined from 0.08 per 10,000 population in 2019 to 0.02 in 2020. This trend suggests a significant shortage of dental health professionals, far off the 2030 target of 0.32. Enhancing the capacity of dental health services should be prioritized to address this gap.

  - **Nursing and Midwifery Personnel Density**: This indicator has shown a slight increase from 14.82 per 10,000 population in 2015 to 17.56 in 2019, and marginally decreased to 17.48 in 2020. The progress is positive, but there’s still a significant way to go to achieve the 2030 target of 35.6. Continued efforts are needed to train and recruit more nursing and midwifery staff.

  - **Pharmaceutical Personnel Density**: There’s a dramatic increase in the pharmaceutical personnel density, from 0.08 per 10,000 population in 2015 to 2.13 in 2019 and 2.09 in 2020. This substantial improvement indicates a strengthened pharmaceutical sector. Nonetheless, there’s still some distance from the 2030 target of 6.5, and the momentum must be sustained to meet this target. **Physicians Density**: The physician density has increased from 6.95 per 10,000 population in 2015 to 7.69 in 2019 and slightly decreased to 7.56 in 2020. The rate of increase needs to be accelerated to achieve the 2030 target of 21.3. This indicates a need to attract and retain more physicians in the country.

**SDG 6: Water and Sanitation** aims at ‘ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all’. The goal consists of eight targets. Clean water and sanitation are fundamental to maintaining good health. Without access to clean water, communities are more vulnerable to water-borne diseases, negatively affecting overall health. Proper sanitation facilities help control the spread of diseases, including those that can be fatal for children, such as diarrhoea which also in turn cause stunting in children. Timor-Leste is on track to achieve one target, needs to accelerate progress across three targets and shown reverse trend in two targets.
The following target is on track to be achieved:

- **Target 6.1**: on universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all is measured by the proportion of the population using safely managed drinking water services. From the SDG Progress Assessment, it is evident that there has been a significant improvement. In 2015, 75.25% of the population had access to at least basic water service, and this figure rose to 85.5% in 2020.

For the following targets, progress is observed but it needs to be accelerated:

- **Target 6.2** aims to achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation. SDG Indicator 6.2.1, which relates to safely managed sanitation services, there's a clear reduction in the population practicing open defecation. From a total population perspective, the percentage dropped from 22.45% in 2015 to 18.22% in 2020. Looking specifically at rural and urban populations, the rural areas saw a decline from 30.84% to 26.52%, while urban regions reached an impressive zero percent in 2020, down from 2.39% in 2015. These trends highlight improved sanitation practices over time, particularly in urban areas. However, the data on the proportion of the population with basic handwashing facilities on premises suggests stagnation. Between 2015 and 2020, there was no change in the percentages for the total, rural, and urban populations (28%, 22%, and 43% respectively). This implies an area of concern and potential focus for future interventions, particularly in enhancing hygiene practices, as there appears to be a lack of progress over the five-year period.

- **Target 6.4** aims to substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity. According to Indicator 6.4.2, in 2015, Timor-Leste recorded a water use efficiency of US$ 1.17/metre cube while it was US$ 0.93/metre cube. For SDG Indicator 6.4.2, which evaluates water stress, the data shows that in 2015, 28.27% of total renewable water per annum was withdrawn while in 2010, it was the same. Unfortunately, there's no data for subsequent years to track the progress or regression.

- **Target 6.b**: Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management. The first indicator tracks whether there are procedures in law or
policy that allow for participation by service users and communities in planning programmes for rural drinking water supply. In the specified time frame, the score remained at the maximum of 10, indicating that the procedures are clearly defined in the country's law or policy.

- The second indicator assesses the extent to which users and communities are participating in planning programmes for rural drinking water supply. The score here remained at 2, signifying a moderate level of community participation. The target by 2030 is to reach a score of 3, indicating high participation.

The following targets are showing reverse trends:

- **Target 6.6** aims to protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes. The data indicates a consistent and significant decline in the area of permanent lakes and rivers in the region being tracked. Between 2015 and 2021, the decline has accelerated, moving from -1.57% in 2015 to -42.02% in 2021. The 2030 target for this indicator is 0% change, which implies maintaining the existing area of water-related ecosystems without further decline.

- **Target 6.a**: aims to expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programmes. From 2015 to 2020, the ODA for water supply dropped from approximately US$ 16.91 million in 2015 to US$ 3.90 million in 2020. It’s worth noting that even though progress is slow on SDG 6, the significantly low and diminishing international support is to blame for pulling the results down for the goal. The target for this indicator is to reach $33.82 million by 2030. This underscores the need for renewed commitment and increased financial support from international donors to enhance water supply and sanitation in the region.

The targets 6.3 and 6.5 do not have sufficient data to assess progress.

The Strategic Development Plan lays out that by 2030 Timor-Leste will have a healthier population as a result of comprehensive, high quality health services accessible to all Timorese people. In turn, this will reduce poverty, raise income levels and improve national productivity. SDP targets related to health sector for 2030 include (Government of Timor-Leste, 2011):

- A municipality hospital in all 13 municipalities (now 14 municipalities).
- 100% of health facilities will be fully equipped and staffed for management of chronic diseases.
- 100% of health services will have infrastructure that is safe, environmentally friendly and sustainable.
- A comprehensive high quality health services accessible to all Timorese people.

The VNR-2 finds that SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being has strong synergies with SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 as shown in Figure below.
Figure 35 Synergies of the SDG 3 with other SDGs

Note: SDG 3 ties to all SDGs, but for report relevance and based on consultations, interviews, and case studies, only certain SDGs are featured. One-way arrows suggest stronger influence on the SDG; two-way arrows denote mutual influence. Source: Adapted by the author

6.2. Progress and challenges

The health sector was one of the hardest hit by Covid-19 pandemic. As documented in VNR-1, geographic inequality in health infrastructure, health outcomes and access of vulnerable and poor households to health services remain major challenges. Nonetheless the health sector took immediate measures and used the pandemic as an opportunity to accelerate progress in certain areas including testing, health communication, expansion of health infrastructure and international cooperation. According to the nationwide Covid-19 SEIA-2, nearly 90% of respondents were satisfied with the response of health facilities during the State of Emergency, making it the institution that satisfied the most people (United Nations and the Government of Timor-Leste, 2021).

To understand progress, setbacks and the impact of Covid-19 on the health sector in Timor-Leste, the VNR team conducted an interview with Nevio Sarmento. While presenting his experience working in the health sector, this section also presents findings from the national, local and target group consultations and the SDG Progress Assessment.
Nevio Sarmento: Trust in evidence, science and local capacity.

“When the pandemic hit, we were able to upgrade the national laboratory with a Timorese-led initiative and international partners’ support. This allowed to produce real-time data on the spread of the infectious disease. This reminded us yet again what gets measured gets done”.

Nevio Sarmento is a Timorese microbiology scientist and a Ph.D. candidate at Charles Darwin University. He took one year gap from his PhD when Covid-19 hit to help the Government’s pandemic response and upgrade the national laboratory, with his team. He is currently conducting research on childhood pneumonia and malnutrition in Timor-Leste in the hope to provide baseline data to assist the Ministry of Health to introduce the Pneumococcal Vaccine in the country.

Can you describe what was the situation like in Timor-Leste before the pandemic?

Timor-Leste still has many infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and pneumonia. The cases of Lepra are also high. The capacity of the national laboratory to detect and test diseases was low, especially in rural areas the infrastructure was not set up.

Pneumonia remains high in the country. About 30,000 -40,000 children under five or 15-20% of all the children under five in Timor-Leste, with pneumonia were treated in hospitals. The main reason causing pneumonia among children under five is malnutrition. About 40% of the children who are admitted to hospital with malnutrition will be likely to have pneumonia. It is a causal-effect relationship - if you have malnutrition then your immunity is lower and the bugs that stay in your nose transfer to lungs and start affecting the blood system. So, malnutrition has the biggest impact and we are hoping to find ways to minimize the number of children with pneumonia.

According to a 2017 WHO data, 2100 children under five have died due to preventable causes of which 20% from pneumonia (WHO, 2020). The Food and Nutrition Survey 2020 revealed that stunting was strongly associated with diarrhoea and fever in terms of morbidity. Stunting also showed strong association with education status of mother/caregiver, wealth quintile and lack of access to improved sanitation. Wasting was associated with diarrhoea, fever and wealth quintile (Ministry of Health, 2020).

SDG Indicator 6.2.1, which relates to safely managed sanitation services, there’s a clear reduction in the population practicing open defecation in Timor-Leste. This is a worrying trend since lack of access to safely managed sanitation services are associated with diarrhoea. From a total population perspective, the percentage dropped from 22.45% in 2015 to 18.22% in 2020. Looking specifically at rural and urban populations, the rural areas saw a decline from 30.84% to 26.52%, while urban regions reached an impressive 0% in 2020, down from 2.39%
These trends highlight improved sanitation practices over time, particularly in urban areas.

Without knowing whether the disease is caused by bacteria or virus there are a lot of cases of prescription of antibiotics. Timor-Leste does not regulate the purchase of antibiotics over the counter, normally it should be based on prescriptions from medical doctors. We have some bacteria that have 75% resistance to antibiotics. Given the regular **stockout of essential medicines** including antibiotics, it is important to prescribe them in a targeted and evidence-based way. Therefore, it is important to develop the microbiology laboratory in Timor-Leste to help doctors diagnose their patients with accuracy and prescribe appropriate measures.

Before the pandemic, the **health infrastructure** was not ready in Timor-Leste. Municipalities were not prepared, and we used the existing laboratories that are not for microbiology. Referral hospitals were in a slightly better position and had some ideas what to do based on previous experience testing tuberculosis. Then there are other general infrastructure issues. For example, **power cuts** are still common in both urban and rural areas. The **internet connection and speed** are a big problem in Timor-Leste. Before Covid-19 hit, we did not have an online system for sharing and using information and statistics.

Although according to the SDG Indicator 9.c.1, 96.5% of the population are covered by at least 3G network, only 45% are covered by 4G network (ESCAP, 2023b). In total, 51.0% are internet users accessing mainly via mobile networks and the number of broadband users is significantly lower, at 0.01% of the population (Digital 2022: Timor-Leste, 2022).

Molecular diagnostic capacity in the country was limited. Since 2011, we have been testing only influenza for monitoring changes in seasonal influenza. The **National Laboratory**, which is the only microbiology centre in the country was set up in 2016 with international support with five full-time staff operating only in Dili. There were only two to three scientists that know how to use PCR and a handful of people working in that area. Investment in PCR is expensive and the main funding was coming from the WHO. **Lack of human resources** is a major challenge in the health sector. When Covid-19 hit, there were only five people were working in the Laboratory and none of the technicians working in the laboratory were familiar with PCR tests.

In 2020, the health worker density per 100,000 population for nursing and midwifery was recorded as 17.48, slightly lower than the 17.56 recorded in 2019. Meanwhile, the density for physicians was 7.56 in 2020, a small decrease from 7.69 in 2019 (SDG Indicator 3.c.1.)

In addition to health infrastructure, we should also talk about WASH infrastructure and preparedness. Handwashing facilities for example, is essential for preventing diseases such as diarrhoea, enhancing nutrient absorption, and ensuring the health of children, mothers, and entire communities. However, according to the 2016 Demographic and Health Survey, only 27.7% of all households had fixed handwashing facilities with rural areas, only 22.5% of households had handwashing. We know stunting
in rural areas is also much higher than in urban areas. So, we have a lot to do in improving access to water and sanitation, especially in rural areas.

### VNR Consultations 5: Challenges and setbacks in health services in Timor-Leste

- **Infrastructure challenges - roads, WASH, electricity & accessibility**
- **Stockout of medicines and lack of storage**
- **Lack of or imbalanced human resources & high turnover**
- **Indirect health care expenses**
- **Lack of access to family planning services by diverse groups**

The **National Consultation** identifies the lack of storage facilities for medicine, leading to constant stockouts, as a major challenge. High **staff turnover** and a lack of specialists in health and disability sectors pose a critical problem. There are also legislative gaps, like the absence of a health quarantine law and a Law on Control of Disease Vigilance. Infrastructure challenges, particularly with transportation to municipal levels, create further impediments.

**Women’s groups** bring to light multiple issues, including the lack of basic amenities like clean water and electricity in health facilities, coupled with poor road conditions and transport, leading to **inaccessibility**. Despite existing facilities, there is a problem with securing medicine storage and persistent stockouts or expired medications. Challenges such as difficulty obtaining legal documents for subsidies, a lack of health awareness, drop-out cases during treatment, lack of mental health support, and imbalanced human resources allocation further underline the depth of the problems faced in this sector.

**People with disabilities** face distinct challenges, including inadequate accessibility to health information, lack of early detection centres, and insensitive handling by healthcare staff. Insufficient accessibility of health post buildings and issues around healthcare expenses compound the difficulties faced by people with disabilities.

For the **LGBTIQ community**, discrimination by health officials, the rising number of HIV cases due to a lack of Antiretroviral Therapy sites, and problematic requirements for medical certificates present considerable obstacles. Moreover, the lack of sexual access to family planning services for LGBTIQ individuals highlight a critical gap in inclusive healthcare provision.

**Regionally**, Baucau faces challenges similar to those mentioned by women’s groups, such as distant health clinics, insufficient medicine stocks, and issues with waste management. High malnutrition rates due to poor family economy and inadequate family planning further exacerbate health issues.

**What happened when Covid-19 hit Timor-Leste? How did the health sector and the National Laboratory respond?**
From the first week of the Covid-19 case in the country, there were major problems with testing. We had to send our samples to Australia and wait for one week to get the results because the National Laboratory capacity was not ready. The national budget to fund the national laboratory to test Covid-19 and other general operations came late, only in 2021. We were aware that polymerase chain reaction (PCR) is important to diagnose and fight the pandemic.

So, at the early stage of Covid-19, with many donors joining hands, we managed to expand the molecular lab. The director and staff of the Laboratory were proactive in reaching out to donors requesting targeted support and they were diligent. We are grateful for financial support from international organizations\(^\text{13}\) and their assistance in procurement in times of global supply chains issues. As laboratory equipment is in high-demand yet low-supply in a small-island development state like Timor-Leste, international agencies’ financial support was critical.

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**Good Practice 10: The Covid-19 laboratory response in Timor-Leste; a story of collaboration**

The National Health Laboratory was tasked to lead pillar five - Laboratory Response in Timor-Leste’s Covid-19 pandemic response task force. The collaboration between the National Health Laboratory and international and national partners was important in strengthening the laboratory response to COVID-19 in Timor-Leste. The collaboration allowed the National Health Laboratory to refurbish the laboratory, procure equipment and reagents, and recruit human resources. The collaboration with Menzies School of Health Research and the WHO helped to establish teams to operationalize the laboratory pandemic response, while the collaboration with KOICA provided additional support for infrastructure investments and human resource training. The Fleming Fund Grant (UKAid) investment at the Laboratory by Menzies provided the foundation for more microbiological work, including capacity building, research and surveillance.

The Ministry of Health also collaborated with UNDP, UNICEF, IOM, and foreign embassies and DFAT. UNICEF has been pivotal in procuring medical supplies and vaccines, both locally and internationally. It furnished personal protective equipment for health centres, procured 21 vehicles for vaccine transport, and acquired Pfizer vaccines for adolescents and adults for booster doses in 2022. Furthermore, UNICEF enhanced the cold chain capacity of the country, installing 16 ultra-cold freezers capable of storing 750,000 Pfizer vaccine doses at the Dili national warehouse, expanded to four regional warehouses.

UNDP supported the Ministry of Health in procuring vital Covid-19 supplies and medicines and contributed to enhancing national capacities for better procurement and supply chain management, maintaining transparency and accountability. Working closely with key national stakeholders like the Autonomous Service for Medicines and Health Equipment, the National Laboratory, and the Department of Pharmacy, UNDP strived to enhance the quality and efficiency of medical supplies procurement. From 2021 to early 2023, UNDP furnished a substantial range of medical instruments, medicines, diagnostics, and consumables, significantly contributing to the country’s pandemic response.

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\(^\text{13}\) WHO, UNDP, UNICEF, DFAT, KOICA, WFP, and UK Aid were among the organizations mentioned.

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At first, the Laboratory was not able to produce PCR tests. So, we sent the initial 100 tests to Australia to compare our own laboratory results with theirs and the results matched at 99.9%. This increased confidence to continue PCR tests in the country and since April 2020, we started to have Covid-19 PCR tests nationwide. Covid-19 showed that we have to trust our own data and results. As such, we were able to reduce the burden of sending our results to Darwin, Australia each time. During that time, the Laboratory Information Management System was introduced allowing real-time information and monitoring. We managed to roll out in 2021 to have a PCR machine in each municipality to test Covid-19, tuberculosis and influenza and the staff to operate the machines were trained. We started with 5 and now we have 28 staff across the country including at the municipality level.

As a result, we were doing 2500 tests per day and communicating the results immediately and virtually. While back in 2011 in the country the total number of PCR tests was 100 per month. Luckily the National Laboratory has a generator to allow work 24 hours regardless of power cuts. We never closed the laboratory and the staff worked three shifts of each 8 hours for all 28 until early 2022. This required us to train staff at all levels. It can be said that Covid-19 accelerated the investment and trust in the National Laboratory.

The Laboratory worked directly with the Integrated Crisis Management Center (CGIC) to manage the Covid-19 situation in the country (Box 11). As part of the National Laboratory, we led the laboratory response. Our diagnosis results were critical for the CGIC to make decisions affecting people’s livelihoods as well – whether to have restrictions, what type and how. The Laboratory had a successful operation during the pressure of the first year as the GoTL acted very fast by restricting movements and borders when needed and vaccinating half of the population before Covid-19 hit its peak. The Laboratory was supporting preparation during one year before the community transmission.

**Box 12. Timor-Leste’s Covid-19 overview**

Timor-Leste had the first positive case of Covid-19 on 21 March 2020. A week later, the National Parliament declared a State of Emergency in response to the threat of Covid-19 in the country. Accordingly, the GoTL imposed various measures such as domestic and international travel restrictions, closure of schools and physical distancing. The State of Emergency has been continuously extended, a month at a time until September 2021, with a total lockdown (or a health fence) in the capital city, Dili to curb Covid-19 cases. The nationwide vaccination programme against Covid-19 started on 7 April 2021 with a goal of vaccinating the total population by the end of 2021. May include total 866397 (first dose), 768171 (2nd dose), 284589 (booster) above 12 plus population coverage as on 2nd May 2023 (WHO, 2023a).

Timor-Leste’s restrictions mainly focused on people with symptoms. When community transmission started, the health sector response focused on treating people with moderate and severe cases as it was more efficient. Thanks to effective Covid-19 vaccines, community transmission did not lead to many deaths. Many of the positive cases were asymptomatic. As of 26 April 2023, Timor-Leste had registered 23,428 cumulative cases of Covid-19 and 138 deaths (WHO, 2023a).
For an effective implementation of Covid-19 mitigation and response measures, it was necessary to involve the coordinated intervention of government departments. Therefore, an Inter-ministerial Commission was created on 18 February 2020 chaired by the Prime Minister. It included all ministries and other relevant state secretaries. In March 2020, as the State of Emergency was declared, an effective and coordinated response was needed and the Integrated Crisis Management Center was established on 31 March 2020 (Government Resolution #14) under the Prime Minister. During the State of Emergency, the CGIC worked as a situation room and consisted of eight task forces.

Figure 36 Covid-19 cases, deaths, vaccinations and stringency index, Timor-Leste

![Graph showing Covid-19 cases, deaths, vaccinations and stringency index, Timor-Leste]

Note: The stringency index varies between 0 and 100 that records the strictness of government policies regarding Covid-19 pandemic. (0 - lowest strictness, 100 - highest strictness).

Source: (Hale, et al., 2021), Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker. The rate of vaccinated population is higher than 100% because it includes second dose and booster vaccines.

Another big risk posed by Covid-19 pandemic in addition to directly those related to the virus are the disruptions in essential services, especially health services for those who need. Therefore, keeping health services operational during the restrictions and continue reaching those needed, the role of volunteer organizations and volunteers in reaching remote communities and ensuring health services are not interrupted was important during Covid-19. This is something not only new during Covid-19, in fact Timor-Leste’s National Health Sector Strategic Plan 2011-2030 recognizes the engagement of volunteers into health promotion and behaviour change communication initiatives.
Box 13. Health service utilization during Covid-19

Of the 4292 households surveyed across Timor-Leste in 2021, 20% of children under 10 years old had missed vaccination while 29% of women aged 15-49 years had missed reproductive health services.

Figure 37 Health service utilization during Covid-19

61% Needed medical treatment.

26% Of households reported increased health service utilization.

46% Of those needed treatment had access to health services ‘Sometimes’.

40% Of those who couldn’t access health services were due to COVID-19 (fear of getting COVID, travel ban and fear of getting tested).

29% Of 15-49 years old women missed reproductive health services. 80% missed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

50% Have concerns about COVID-19 vaccination.

20% Of children under 10 years missed vaccination (‘immunizasau’). More children in poorest households missed vaccination.

Source: (United Nations and the Government of Timor-Leste, 2021)

Good Practice 11: Volunteer health professionals bring vital medical care and Covid-19 vaccination to unreach areas of Timor-Leste

The Saude ba Ema Hotu (SABEH, health for all) that provides medical consultation services directly to communities in the most remote areas through a group of volunteer health care professionals comprising of General Doctors, nurses, midwives, public health officers, and non-health persons who assist in the delivery of SABEH programmes for community development. In 2021, SABEH engaged 78 volunteers who provided free medical consultation to 7 remote villages in 4 Municipalities across Timor-Leste, many of which have had no access to regular health services or mobile clinics.

Having reached total number of 14,210 patients volunteers provided basic medical consultations, health promotion and prevention, Covid-19 awareness raising, prevention and vaccination, patient home visit and care, and Ante Natal Care programme. SABEH’s volunteers also supported the rollout of Covid-19 vaccinations, which included the administration of 10,458 doses of the Covid-19 vaccine and advocacy for vaccinations to the communities. In addition, SABEH also works with other non-health entities who are interested and willing to perform volunteer services for other social issues in remote communities.
You mentioned the critical roles of national directors in identifying needs and the international support. What else do you think was important to build a good standard National Laboratory?

Trust your own people was key. We led the Covid-19 response tasks backed up by our international counterparts. But for all Covid-19 testing was led by Timorese people, we have to trust to our capacity that we can do this. From the Ministry of Health, they know that we can do it and they let us do it. For the testing, we produced results within 24 hours, and for the critical people we had the results within 6 hours.

There were challenges with misinformation and disinformation too, especially spread through Facebook and WhatsApp with “overnight experts and overnight microbiologists”. To combat this, it was important to get public trust in the scientific community and in data to buy-in public support. The fact that CIGC was headed by Dr. Rui de Araújo who was an already trusted doctor read out every afternoon the PCR results via the national TV and livestreamed on social media allowed majority of the population to access timely and reliable information about the Covid-19 situation14. Medical doctors were on TV and radio giving interviews, translated materials into Tetum and posted on Facebook and produced videos and shared among youth. Our local health workers were able to directly meet people speaking local languages and dialects.

Now the laboratory is able to detect different types of hepatitis viruses, tuberculosis, malaria, HIV full profile – everything that can be tested in a virus, antibodies, diagnostic microbiology. We are also passively monitoring the strains Covid-19. The National Laboratory is ready for the next pandemic – we are ready to test.

A key success story in the country was the elimination of malaria. Now we can cross-check if any incidence of malaria whether they are indigenous or imported. Why can’t we use the same strategy to treat tuberculosis through well-coordinated measures and tracing active cases. Timor-Leste has reduced child mortality and achieved many targets compared to when we started measuring these indicators in 2005 and 2006.

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14 According to the SEIA-2 results, 64.1% of the respondents had received Covid-19 information from TV, 49.3% from health centres and 36.3% from internet and social media (United Nations and the Government of Timor-Leste, 2021)
emergency care facilities and the successful implementation of the *Bolsa de Mae -Jeresaun Foun* programme were reported as key achievements.

Notable progress has been made in terms of **improving accessibility and inclusivity**, particularly for women, people with disabilities, and the LGBTIQ community. Efforts like establishing residences for healthcare workers, offering targeted reproductive health training, providing subsidies for pregnant mothers, and designing inclusive programs demonstrate an intent to ensure no group is left behind in healthcare access.

**Women’s groups** have observed several important developments in the health sector. There has been an increase in accessible health infrastructure, including referral hospitals, community healthcare centres, health posts, and clinics. Additionally, residences for healthcare workers have been established, potentially enhancing service delivery. Improvements have also been noted in health equipment and materials, contributing to better healthcare quality. Furthermore, initiatives such as information and training on reproductive health, the introduction of a subsidy for pregnant mothers and babies, and the inception of programs addressing disease-specific care, nutrition, maternal and child health, and family health are testament to the comprehensive and integrated approach to health care in the country.

**People with disabilities** have highlighted the following progress. They received targeted health information and vaccination services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the development of a mini medical treatment book has catered specifically to their needs. In an effort to ensure wider access to health information, TV-based broadcasts have included content on services for child treatment. Lastly, the initiation of the National Action Plan on People with Disabilities marks a significant stride towards improving healthcare accessibility and knowledge for this segment of the population.

**In Oecusse** (or RAOEA), healthcare has seen notable developments. Local communities highlighted that clinics have been established in numerous rural areas, providing much-needed access to healthcare services for local residents. These clinics are staffed with health personnel and equipped with necessary facilities, including ambulances, significantly benefiting the people of Oecusse. In **Baucau**, the following were considered as achievements: Government has continuously disseminated family planning information and rehabilitated 13 health centres at the village level. This action has considerably improved access to healthcare services for people in rural areas. The local government's preparedness against Covid-19 and the accessibility of free health services further underscore the advancements in healthcare. Additionally, the introduction of the SISCA programme (the integrated community health services) has been seen as a notable achievement. In **Liquica**, healthcare services have been enhanced, most notably through the establishment of 24-hour services that are freely accessible to the public. Again, the SISCA programme has played a significant role in these improvements.
6.3. Key policy changes since the first VNR

What other policies and reforms are underway in Timor-Leste, and have they shown any results yet?

Timor-Leste made significant progress in terms of the policy environment. Since the first VNR, the Health Financing Strategy 2019–2023 was launched (WHO, 2019). The Strategy aims to guarantee financial protection for the population, enhance health funding to address unmet needs, diminish inequities in resource availability and service utilization across different territories and population groups, and augment system-level allocative and technical efficiency, as highlighted by the WHO in 2019 (cited in ILO, 2021). The Strategy was developed in alignment with the National Health Sector Strategic Plan 2011–2030. This is an important document as it stands, a considerable share of health funding is covered by Timor-Leste’s oil revenues; donor health spending has been declining over the years, except the recent increase during the Covid-19 pandemic. The total expenditure on health remains relatively low, standing at around 7.16% of GDP. Also, as the VNR team reported, all consultations with target groups, with women and people with disabilities, the need to strengthen health sector financing is mentioned as a priority. Following the Strategy, recently in March 2023, the launched a new Health Financing Unit with support of the USAID. The Health Financing Unit will perform health financing data collection and analysis, health accounting, tracking health expenditures and coordinating technical assistance activities with development partners. Ultimately helping to produce valuable evidence for decision making.

Other milestones include that the updated Family Planning Policy has been approved, the Review of the National Health Strategic Plan was conducted and the Law on excise tax on sugar and sugar-sweetened drinks was approved in 2022. The established Family Planning Policy allows all couples access to contraceptive services, thereby aiding in the prevention of unplanned pregnancies. The policies and legislation have positive effects not only for health but also for reducing malnutrition, breaking the cycle of poverty. For example, the national Family Planning Policy ensures access and choice to all couples in preventing unplanned pregnancy using contraceptive services.

Good Practice 12: Pioneering Family Planning Reforms and Tech-Driven Supply Chains Boost Reproductive Health Services

For Timor-Leste to benefit from the demographic dividend, there is a crucial need to provide the necessary conditions to decrease the fertility rate while providing equitable access to health, education, protection for its population, especially the youth. Therefore, and in line with SDG 3 on good health and well-being, the Government of Timor-Leste with the support of UNFPA dedicated its work to ensure that universal needs for family planning are met and that there would be zero preventable maternal deaths. The 2022 Facility Audit, assessing the readiness of health facilities, reported that 96% of the 272 facilities in 14 municipalities provided family planning services, 83% offered maternal health services, and 48% catered to HIV/AIDS services, showcasing notable progress.
Meanwhile, the Government upgraded the supply chain system that supports sexual and reproductive health services. The mSupply, an electronic logistics management information system supported by UNFPA, facilitates procurement, storage, orders and distribution for Timor-Leste Medical and Pharmaceutical Supply Agency (SAMES) and the National Hospital in 5 hospitals, 14 district health offices, community health centres and the National Laboratory in Timor-Leste. The use of such system reduced the delay in commodities supply chain and improved the delivery service at national and sub-national levels. For better sustainability of such system, a third party procurement was signed in 2022 by the Timorese government with the UNFPA that give access to UNFPA’s global supply network to procure lifesaving sexual and reproductive health commodities. The amount invested by the Ministry of health/SAMES was roughly US$ 370,000 and heralds the willingness of the government to scale up family planning policy within the country.

As the result of this combined support to strengthen the Family Planning Policy, the 2022 Facility audit proved a 20% increase in the use of modern contraceptive methods as 54% of all audited facilities had no stock out for at least three modern contraceptive methods, compared to 45% reported in the 2018 Facility audit (UNFPA Timor-Leste, 2023).

Lessons learned from previous Family Planning Policy suggest the importance of inclusivity, education, and accessibility. Key lessons learned include:

- The principle of ‘leaving no one behind’ should guide the policy’s focus on inclusive accessibility. Ensuring services are accessible to all, particularly unmarried adolescents, young people, those in informal relationships, and unmarried women.
- Efforts must also be made to reduce societal stigma, foster youth-friendly services, and involve men in family planning decisions.
- Consistent implementation of the Policy on the ground and M&E are critical to track progress, identify gaps, and adapt strategies to meet evolving needs. These lessons are pivotal for future policy implementation.

I also note that the excises taxes on unhealthy food and tobacco the GoTL introduced will likely result in numerous positive outcomes for public health and tobacco control. It will position Timor-Leste as a success story in the fight against obesity, non-communicable diseases, and tobacco addiction. I’m optimistic that we will see some real progress towards the SDG Targets 3.4 and 3.a in the third VNR. Timor-Leste is one of the few low-income countries in adopting pro-health taxes and implementing significant tax increases on sugar, sugar-sweetened beverages, and tobacco.
Good Practice 13: Timor-Leste’s pro-health taxes drive success in public health and tobacco control

Timor-Leste has introduced a tax rate of US$1 per kilogram on sugar and confectionery products, and a tax rate of US$3 per litre on sugar-sweetened beverages, flavoured waters, and non-alcoholic drinks with added sugars. A further increase in these taxes is being considered by the government. These measures align with global recommendations and have been proven effective in reducing the consumption of harmful products and improving health behaviours.

The increase in sugar-sweetened beverages taxation in Timor-Leste holds great potential to address critical health indicators. The country faces alarming rates of stunting, malnutrition, and overweight/obesity in children and women. By implementing higher taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages, Timor-Leste aims to promote healthy eating habits among its future generations.

“Pro-health taxes play a crucial role in promoting public health by discouraging the consumption of harmful products. WHO Timor-Leste has been a staunch advocate of these taxes that are a powerful tool to encourage healthier choices and create a healthier society. The commitment of the Government of Timor-Leste and the Ministry of Health towards this cause is truly inspiring,” said Dr Arvind Mathur, WHO Representative to Timor-Leste.

Additionally, Timor-Leste faces a high burden of non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. Non-communicable diseases account for a significant percentage of deaths in the country. By raising tobacco taxes, Timor-Leste has taken a critical step towards reducing tobacco consumption and combating non-communicable diseases.

Since January 2022, the excise tax on tobacco in Timor-Leste has witnessed a substantial increase, soaring from US$ 19/kg to US$ 50/kg. Building on this success, Timor-Leste further increased the tax to US$ 100/kg in January 2023.

Although concerns about illicit tobacco trade have arisen due to increased taxes, the Ministry of Health, with technical assistance from WHO Timor-Leste, has been actively working to accede to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control protocol aimed at eliminating the illicit trade of tobacco products.

The country has also adopted a holistic approach to wellness by making tobacco cessation services accessible to the Timorese people and going beyond just tobacco control. The Ministry of Health, supported by the WHO Timor-Leste, has established open-air gymnasiums in various communities to promote an active lifestyle. By encouraging citizens to prioritize their well-being, Timor-Leste aims to foster and promote healthy behaviours.

The remarkable achievements in public health and tobacco control have not gone unnoticed. Minister of Health, Dr. Odete Maria Freitas Belo, was recently honoured with the WHO Director General’s World No Tobacco Day award 2023, recognizing her leadership and dedication to the cause. Timor-Leste’s
exemplary efforts in implementing pro-health taxes and driving tobacco control serve as a beacon of inspiration for other countries. With commitment from the government, collaboration with international organizations, and the dedication of healthcare professionals, Timor-Leste is paving the way for a healthier and more prosperous future.

**In your opinion, what are the priorities for the health sector in Timor-Leste by 2030?**

We should learn **how to reduce fake news** and increase factcheck. Increased health communication is needed to promote health seeking behaviour. Timor-Leste still have hybrid between traditional and conventional (especially in bone healing – where accident rates are higher). Health promotion and increasing trust in doctors, trust in evidence, science and local capacity is crucial not only in times of pandemic but also in other times.

“**Until 2030 we need continued investments in laboratories, in research and development, in service delivery and most importantly, in its own people**”. We have well-trained scientists, but they are not well paid, and we risk losing them. It is important to remunerate them properly, to appoint them to positions where they can have more impact and influence. Financial and management decisions about privatization or Public-private partnerships should be carefully made with sufficient research. We have many graduates from higher education institutions but only a few acquired quality educations for work. We need strategic management. Timor-Leste can increase investment in delivery of services by reducing overhead costs such as unnecessary meetings, travels, and purchase of cars.

Finally, **poverty, malnutrition and tuberculosis must be tackled together as interrelated problems.** Ensuring every household and school has **water**, not to mention clean water, is a prerequisite for healthy children and people. Although our healthcare services are free, the ‘Indirect financial barrier study’ carried out in 2019-2022 by the National University of Timor-Leste, Ministry of Health, UNICEF and WHO showed that the population face great obstacles in accessing them mainly due to indirect financial costs such as transport costs. Focusing on **reducing these indirect costs** would be important.

**6.4. Priorities**

Based on desk review, expansive consultations, findings from the SDG Progress Assessment, and the overarching Strategic Development Plan, the VNR-2 has identified the following priorities for strengthening healthcare services and improving health outcomes in Timor-Leste. Broadly, the principle of "leave no one behind" should underpin the approaches to addressing the priorities outlined below. Healthcare services should be readily available to everyone, irrespective of their economic standing, age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, geographic location, or any other discriminatory factors.

1. **Strengthen implementation of Health Sector Financing Strategy (2019-2023)** and coordinate multi-sectorial support and technical assistance through the Health Financing Unit.
Implement nutrition-focused and performance-based budget allocation system for municipalities.

2. **Develop mechanisms to reduce the costs associated with healthcare** or to introduce incentives (in cash or in kind) for mothers to attend prenatal and postnatal exams, as well as to perform routine exams in children. There is lower utilization of health services compared to other countries in the region. Although healthcare services are free of charge in public facilities, users often bear significant costs – financial or in time – to travel to the services (ILO, 2021).

3. **Improve geographic distribution of capacity.** Improving equity in the geographical distribution of health professionals will make a critical contribution to addressing disparities between municipalities. Resources should be allocated towards healthcare coverage and increase the accessibility and availability of health services, particularly for the country’s rural inhabitants.

4. **Scale-up outreach services in remote areas.** Programmes that allow access to healthcare services in isolated regions or that bring these services closer to people, such as mobile clinics, should be strengthened at scale as they remove barriers to access and will support improved geographic distribution of healthcare capacity.

5. **Human resource development.** To support the two priorities above, further resources should be allocated to increasing critical staff numbers, such as nurses and pre/post-natal care.

6. **Improve and complete basic infrastructure at health facilities** such as water, toilets, electricity, and roads to support health care services.

7. **Improve healthcare seeking behaviour.** Socialize and raise public awareness among the communities about the benefits of regular health checks and being conscious of health related issues.

8. **Implement the Disability National Action Plan (2021-2030).** The Plan has four key recommendations and a workplan in place with seven Outcomes. Furthermore, disseminating the progress of the plan among disabled persons’ organizations and healthcare centres would demonstrate implementation and provide transparency/accountability for the implementation of the Disability National Action Plan.

9. **Prioritize inclusivity and accessibility of reproductive health services and family planning, especially for adolescents and individuals with disabilities.** This involves implementing comprehensive sexual education at an early age, making health services disability-friendly, and ensuring family planning services reach remote areas. Additionally, equipping healthcare providers with the skills to offer age-appropriate and non-judgmental services addressing stigma associated with unmarried individuals seeking healthcare, is essential.
7. Quality Education

7.1. SDG 4 progress assessment

SDG 4: Quality Education aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The goal consists of 10 targets. Timor-Leste needs to accelerate progress across four targets, has shown reverse trends in three targets and has insufficient data for three targets. None of the targets is on track to be achieved by 2030.

**Figure 38 SDG 4: Quality Education, SDG Progress assessment at target level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Primary and secondary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Equal access to education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Adult literacy and numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.a</td>
<td>Education facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Early childhood development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>TVET &amp; tertiary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.b</td>
<td>Scholarships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Skills for employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Sustainable development education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.c</td>
<td>Qualified teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (ESCAP, 2023b)

**Target 4.1** aims to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education, leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. Progress is being made, but it needs acceleration, especially in the area of upper secondary education. At the primary education level, there was an overall increase in the completion rate for children, from 71.3% in 2015 to 77% in 2020. The overall completion rate for lower secondary education rose from 56% in 2015 to 61.9% in 2020. The total completion rate for upper secondary education improved slightly from 49.8% in 2015 to 51.8% in 2020.

**Target 4.2** aims to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education. The target is measured by participation rate in organized learning, one year before the official primary entry age, by sex. The overall adjusted net enrolment rate for children one year before the official primary entry age was 74.12% in 2015, dropped to 43.22% in 2017, and then increased to 50.18% in 2019. The target has regressed overall. Girls had a higher enrolment rate compared to boys (51.7% for girls and 48.7% for boys). Over the span of six years (2015 to 2020), Timor-Leste has seen a positive trend in the gross pre-primary school enrolment, growing from 20.47% to 27.87%. However, the pre-primary education rate is among the lowest globally (World Bank, 2021a).
**Target 4.3** focuses on equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality vocational and tertiary education. This target is measured by the participation rate of youth and adults (15-64 years old) in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months. According to UNESCO data, in 2021, the overall participation rate was 24.5% (23.8% for females and 25.2% for males), which is lower than the 2030 target of 36%. There has been no change since the previous latest data available, which is for 2013, with a 25% overall participation rate for youth and adults. There is an overall reverse trend in achieving this target.

**Target 4.5** aims to eliminate all discrimination at all levels of education and vocational training. The only available disaggregation for Timor-Leste is by gender. Using the Gender Parity Index for the participation rate in formal and non-formal education, there were slightly more females than males (with an index of 1.05) participating in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age. More disaggregated data is needed to meaningfully measure progress towards the target.

**Target 4.6** - Achieve literacy and numeracy for all youth and a significant proportion of adults, irrespective of gender.

- From 2010 to 2020, Timor-Leste experienced a steady growth in literacy rates among all age groups and genders. In 2020, the literacy rate for youth (aged 15-24) reached 85%, while 70% of individuals aged above 15 years were literate. Comparatively, the rates in 2015 were 84.4% and 64.4%. Youth literacy rates for both males and females significantly surpass those of adults (aged 15+).
- Female literacy rates have witnessed remarkable improvements, especially within adult populations. Over the decade, the female adult literacy rate increased by 14 percentage points, highlighting progress in addressing gender disparities in educational access and literacy skills.

**Target 4.a** – Construct and enhance inclusive and secure schools: Based on the most data from 2019, 68.1% of primary and lower secondary schools had access to basic drinking water, and 84.2% had access to electricity.

**Target 4.b** – Increase global scholarship availability for developing countries, particularly least developed countries and small island developing states: Measured through ODA disbursed for scholarships, data indicates a decline in ODA for scholarships since 2015. ODA amounted to US$8.1 million in 2015, whereas it dropped to US$4.6 million in 2020, revealing an overall negative trend.

Progress for the following targets could not be assessed due to insufficient data:

- **Target 4.4** -Enhance the number of youth and adults possessing relevant skills for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship.
- **Target 4.7** – Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills required to promote sustainable development.
- **Target 4.c** – Aim to augment the supply of qualified teachers.
The Strategic Development Plan also states that “by 2030, The people of Timor-Leste are living in a nation where people are educated and knowledgeable, able to live long and productive lives, and have opportunities to access a quality education that will allow them to participate in the economic, social and political development of our nation”. The relevant targets for 2030 include:

- All children will have access to a good quality preschool or classroom located at a reasonably short distance from their homes.
- All children, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of quality basic education.

**Figure 39 Synergies of the SDG 4 with selected SDGs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SDG 4: Quality Education</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good nutrition</strong> is the foundation for good health. Hunger and malnutrition leading to health issues like stunting and weakened immunity reduces school attendance and learning outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access to clean water and sanitation</strong> improves health and thereby school attendance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roads, internet, and electricity</strong> are vital for healthcare accessibility, information dissemination, and efficient operation of health facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tackling poverty reduces vulnerability</strong> and leads to better access to education. Quality education empowers individuals with job skills, increases participation and helps breaking the cycle of poverty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good health enhances learning</strong> by reducing absenteeism and enhancing cognition. Education fosters knowledge of disease prevention and healthy behaviours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality education cultivates a skilled workforce</strong>. In turn, strong economy and labour market provide decent jobs and incomes for the workforce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equal access to education empowers all by ensuring equal rights can remove barriers to education. Quality education fosters gender equality and empowers women’s societal participation.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Universal quality education can reduce inequalities by offering equal growth opportunities. Reducing inequality can enhance education access through fairer resource distribution.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: SDG 4 ties to all SDGs, but for report relevance and based on consultations, interviews, and case studies, only certain SDGs are featured. One-way arrows suggest stronger influence on SDG 4; two-way arrows denote mutual influence. Adapted by the author

To gain insight into Timor-Leste’s progress towards achieving SDG 4, we explored the accomplishments, challenges, and the country’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic. For a comprehensive understanding, we interviewed sector expert Helena Nunes. The findings from the VNR-2 consultations and case studies are also presented in this chapter.
7.2. Progress and challenges in pre, basic and secondary education

**Helena Nunes:** It is encouraging to see that despite the complexities and challenges in achieving the SDG 4, we are not stagnant, and we are making progress, although it is not as fast as we hope for. It’s encouraging to see that education completion rates have been on the rise across all levels in recent years.

Helena Nunes, serves as the National Director of Pedagogics, Technology, and Research at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). She has over 34 years of service in the MEYS where she served roles including leading the School Feeding Programme 2007-2009 and Program Coordinator at the State Secretary of Gender Equality, a political appointment.

The SDG 4 Progress Assessment results indicate there is a concerning reversal trend in preschool enrolment. Could you explain the current situation and factors contributing to these negative trends?

Let me start with the current state of preschool education in Timor-Leste. Why I’m starting with preschool education, because it provides the foundations for long-term learning success, lowers dropout rates and lays the groundwork for a child’s emotional, social, and mental readiness to excel in school. Also given the high rates of malnutrition and stunting, having access to preschools where hot meals are served can contribute to reducing malnutrition in the country.

Timor-Leste has made progress in expanding preschool education. But as you correctly point out, the gross enrolment rate was only 27% in 2020 according to the Education Management Information System. It shows that we are far off from reaching not only the SDG target 4.2 but also our SDP target of reaching 50% enrolment rate by 2024 and 80% by 2030.

During the national consultation, it was mentioned there were 202 Community projects inaugurated. Can you tell us about these community projects? What are they and how do they contribute to education?

Despite the overall growth in preschool attendance since 2013, disparities remain among the municipalities. Some regions, such as Ermera and Manufahi, have seen impressive growth although the overall enrolment rates remain lower than the national average in these municipalities (Figure 40). Municipalities with large population such as Dili and Baucau, lag behind with less than 20% of children enrolled. For example, an assessment in 2017 revealed that in Timor-Leste, 16% of grade one students across 128 schools couldn’t identify any letters, and 76% demonstrated zero reading comprehension. This suggests that problems in foundational learning are profound (World Bank, 2019a).
Could the lower literacy rates in rural areas be associated with a lack of preschools and early childhood education opportunities?

Yes, it’s plausible. Indeed, literacy rate is one of the important indicators for measuring progress in education and in the Human Development Index of the United Nations in general. Because improving literacy rates is essential to address economic disparities, reduce inequality, improve health outcomes, increase political participation, and promote gender equality.

As per the 2022 Census data, the overall literacy rate for individuals aged ten and over is 72.4%, marking a significant improvement from 67.3% recorded in the 2015 Census. However, gender disparity still persists, with male literacy at 74.7%, compared to female literacy at 70.0%. This gap, although narrowed, persisted from 2015 when male literacy was at 70.6% and female literacy was at 63.9%. There is also an age specific gender gap in literacy rates. The older generations have more pronounced gender gaps while the gender gap has almost closed among younger generations.

One worrying trend is you correctly point out is the persistent regional disparity in literacy rates. Dili, the capital, holds the highest literacy rate at 89.6% for residents aged ten and over, which is considerably higher than in Oecusse (56.7%) and Manufahi (75.8%), the second-highest municipality.
While it appears that lower literacy rates in municipalities may be linked to a lack of preschools, this correlation doesn’t tell the full story. It’s crucial to recognize that this is just one among many factors impacting literacy rates in rural areas. There are other plausible factors such as uneven resource allocation, poverty rates, a lack of qualified teachers in rural areas, and limited accessibility to schools. Also, language barriers can pose challenges to delivering effective education and improving literacy. In many municipalities, the mother tongue is not Tetum while at schools, children need to learn Tetum and Portuguese. In Oeccuse (RAOEA) for example, the majority of people speak Baiqueno rather than Tetum.

Are there any ongoing initiatives in Timor-Leste to address the lack of availability of preschools, especially in remote areas?

There are numerous collaborative partnerships between local governments, development partners and local communities to run community-based preschools. For example, development partners like UNICEF collaborated on a project involving 104 community preschools in Viqueque and Ermera. The programme is comprehensive, offering teacher training, resources that are sensitive to local culture, and a curriculum centred around play-based learning to establish a solid foundation. Also, ChildFund Timor-Leste has been making significant progress in early education accessibility by establishing ten community preschools in remote areas, catering to children aged three to five. We also have community-led projects that have been supported by the GoTL’s decentralized financing through the National Program for Village Development to build preschools in various villages nationwide. The active participation of communities in decision-making processes illustrates how such financing can effectively supplement the formal education infrastructure in regions where it is deficient.

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15 National Program for Village Development (PNDS) allocates up to US$ 50,000 budget annually based on the proposed, voted and approved priorities at village level.
It is clear that the community-based preschools are a good practice in achieving the SDG 4. Because it requires collaborative partnerships between local governments, non-governmental organizations, and communities to pool resources to run these community preschools. This approach not only increases the availability of preschools, but also fosters a sense of local ownership and responsibility, supporting the sustainability of these initiatives. One such example is Veterana Kasian's initiative where she uses her Veteran Pension to establish preschools in her village.

**Good Practice 14: Community based preschools run by Timor-Leste’s female veteran, Kasian**

Madaglena Bidau Soares, known as Kasian, grew up in Timor-Leste during the Portuguese rule, a time when women had few rights and were limited to domestic roles. The political climate was tense and dangerous, with women at risk of violence and abuse. At 19 years old, she became part of two platoons of women trained in using weapons alongside men, when the Indonesian forces invaded Timor-Leste in 1975. Throughout the occupation, she participated in armed resistance as a volunteer soldier and continued her guerrilla activities. She suffered injuries during her time in the armed resistance but persevered in her efforts to improve the situation for her community. Kasian’s journey reflects her dedication to the fight for freedom and rights in Timor-Leste, as well as her personal resilience.

In 2008, Veterana Kasian, took on a new mission: to bring education to the children in her community. She started community preschools in her village because there were almost no preschools available for the children in her community. Recognizing the importance of education and the need for access to early childhood education, Kasian took it upon herself to provide these opportunities for the children in her village. As a former fighter for Timor-Leste's independence, she was also driven by a desire to honour the sacrifices made by the nation's heroes and to ensure that the younger generations would learn about their history and appreciate the struggle for independence.

She emphasized community awareness for preschool is low. For the community, it feels like they’re wasting money and time to send their children to kindergartens when they can just stay at home. They don’t realise it’s the most critical age for cognitive development. That’s why communities prefer to send their children straight to primary schools and do not realize children are not prepared for schools.

With no buildings or students to start with, Kasian visited every household, identifying children between the ages of 2.5 and 4 years old to enrol in her preschools and persuading parents. She began teaching the children herself, giving them basic lessons on reading and writing, and eventually sought out volunteer teachers to help her. There are five pre-schools and as of the current year, the schools have 140 male and 134 female children enrolled, making a total of 274 children. All preschools are staffed
solely by female teachers, with a total of 10 across the five schools. Since the inception of each school until 2022, the schools have collectively graduated a total of 1,179 students.

Kasian’s initiative gained the attention of local and national government, as well as international organizations like UNDP, UNICEF, World Vision, and the Alola Foundation. Her preschools received support in the form of funding, building materials, and school supplies. Despite facing scepticism and criticism, she persevered, opening multiple schools named in honour of Timorese freedom fighters and historical figures.

Kasian uses her own money to provide meals for the children and plans to introduce uniforms with the Timor-Leste flag colours. Parents have not been asked to contribute financially to the schools, but Kasian hopes for continued government support and resources, such as a boat for fishing and a second-hand car for school trips.

By 2030, Kasian’s vision for her schools is to continue providing education and opportunities for the children in her community, while also maintaining the legacy of the nation’s heroes. She wants the government to increase teacher salaries, build houses for the poor, and support her efforts to sustain the schools. Despite the challenges she has faced, Kasian’s determination to offer a brighter future for the children of Timor-Leste has led to a remarkable success story in community development and education.

It is also encouraging to see that despite the complexities and challenges in achieving the SDG 4, we are not stagnant, and we are making progress, although it is not as fast as we hope for. The extensive consultations of the VNR-2 with various stakeholders and communities showed the people are also experiencing these progresses.

**VNR Consultations 7: The progress made in the education sector**

The VNR-2 consultations have been instrumental in providing insights into the progress made in the education sector across Timor-Leste. The findings from these discussions present a promising outlook, highlighting achievements and progress made while acknowledging ongoing challenges and areas for future focus.

Consultations were carried out in Baucau, Liquica, and RAOEA, where local communities reported significant advancements in the education sector. Key successes included the **provision of free education** to all citizens’ children (SDG 4.5), an integral step towards ensuring quality education for all. The establishment and **expansion of schools, especially in rural areas** (SDG 4.5), along with the
Deployment of an increased number of teachers and continued teacher training initiatives (SDG 4.c), have notably improved the accessibility. In all three municipalities, the School-Feeding Programme was seen as one of the successful and notable programmes implemented in Timor-Leste (SDG 2).

Additionally, the LGBTIQ community and people with disabilities, have observed a shift towards greater inclusivity in the education sector. For instance, the LGBTIQ community acknowledged improvements such as the inclusion of LGBTIQ related content in school materials, reduction of discrimination in job vacancies and educational opportunities, and the creation of LGBTIQ inclusive spaces within higher education institutions (SDG 4.5). Similarly, people with disabilities reported increased access to various levels of education, training centres (SDG 4.5), and the provision of necessary resources such as laptops and sign language translators. The establishment of an inclusive education policy and the construction of a Sign Language Training Centre in Ermera further underscored this progress.

Youth groups also appreciated the broader inclusivity, with the government’s policies currently being drafted allowing pregnant adolescents and young women, who previously faced stigma and barriers, to return to school (SDG 4.5). The government has also introduced several programmes aimed at promoting youth education and employment opportunities (SDG 4.4 and SDG 8), including scholarships (SDG 4.b), School Feeding Programme (SDG 2), youth parliamentary and sports activities, and job opportunities for secondary school graduates.

At the national level, stakeholders highlighted improvements in infrastructure accessibility (SDG 4.a and SDG 9), teacher training for inclusive education started in the country, and successful programmes such as the ALMA (apprenticeship support for future leaders) mentorship programme (SDG 4.4) and the School-Feeding Programme (SDG 2). They also applauded the government’s swift response to recent floods, demonstrating disaster preparedness by implementing Disaster Risk Reduction guidelines for schools. In total 28 primary schools implemented the Disaster Risk Reduction guidelines especially in Aileu and Ainaro municipalities (SDG 13).

The focus on equipping Timorese children and youth with 21st-century skills was seen as a significant advancement. The implementation of new curriculum for cycle 1 and cycle 2 and subjects focusing on climate change, inclusive policies for equal rights, and reproductive health, coupled with efforts to bridge the preschool attendance gap, demonstrate a concerted effort towards sustainable and inclusive education. There was an inauguration of 202 community projects and distribution of 812 school desks and 2,000,000 books.

How about the situation in primary and secondary levels?

The VNR-1 report highlighted the primary school enrolment rate was one of the achievements. However, using school completion rate would be more relevant as it gives an indication of how many students stay in school long enough to graduate. This rate can help identify issues with student retention and the overall effectiveness of an education system in ensuring students complete their education.
It’s encouraging to see that education completion rates have been on the rise across all levels in recent years. For primary education, boys have seen their completion rate jump from 66.2% in 2015 to 71.3% in 2020. Even more promising, girls have seen an even larger increase during the same period, going from 76.2% to 82.2%. In pre-secondary education, we’re observing a similar trend. Girls have seen their completion rate go up. Boys are also making strides. When we look at upper secondary education, the progress is a bit slower, but still headed in the right direction. Overall, completion rates have risen slowly from 49.8% in 2015 to 51.8% in 2020. Girls are leading the way here, meanwhile, boys have seen almost no change, with rates inching up from 48.9% to just over 50%.

But it is worrying to note a persistent gender gap in education completion rates in Timor-Leste, with females generally having higher completion rates than males across all education levels. Also, there are significant falls in completion rates from 77% in primary to 62% in pre-secondary and 52% in secondary levels.
We observe that boys’ school dropout rate is higher and fewer boys than girls attend basic education. On the other hand, during the period of 2017-2019, the number of out-of-school children was increasing. The school dropout rate amongst girls and female adolescents decreased during the period of 2016-2019, however, it remained high even in grade one. Reasons for this could be linked to low access to preschool and hence lack of readiness for primary school.

As of 2020, the combined dropout rate for primary and pre-secondary levels was 3.5% at the national level, 2.99% for girls and 3.99% for boys. Dropout rate was highest in Liquica (5.4%) and lowest in Dili (1.8%). In Covalima, dropout rate for boys was 6.4%, significantly higher than the national average.

Note: The latest data available before 2020 was for 2011.
Source: (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2023)

For preschool, the pupil-to-teacher ratio has increased, suggesting an increase in class size or a decrease in the number of teachers, which could impact the quality of education. The primary education level shows improvement, indicating better resources, more teachers, or fewer students per class. For secondary education, the ratio has slightly increased, suggesting larger class sizes or fewer teachers.
What are the main causes for dropout rates or children and youth being left out from accessing education?

There could be many factors. The more fundamental factor is poverty. It can lead to higher dropout rates as students may need to work to support their families, or the costs of schooling (including indirect costs like uniforms or transportation) may be high. The from the education sector side, the poor quality of education may push children to be disengaged and drop out. This can include factors like untrained or absent teachers, lack of learning materials, or an irrelevant curriculum. Health problems such as malnutrition, or other illnesses can affect attendance and completion rates. This includes issues related to safety and infrastructure including access to toilets and sanitation facilities and menstrual hygiene management in schools. If schools are located far away, are unsafe, or lack basic facilities like sanitation, this can discourage attendance and lead to higher dropout rates. These issues were all highlighted during the VNR-2 consultations by local communities and target groups.

In Timor-Leste, the physical punishment and violence against children is widely accepted as a form of behaviour correction both within homes and educational institutions. Surveys done in 2016 indicate that a significant portion of the population agrees with the use of physical violence for behaviour correction, with 74% of women and 54% of men supporting its use. Common practices include slapping, beating with a stick, and pinching or twisting a child’s ears. Unfortunately, this acceptance of physical punishment extends to educational settings as well, where a study conducted in 2016 revealed that 75% of boys and 67% of girls experienced physical punishment from teachers, such as being kicked, slapped, or pulled, within the last year (World Vision, Save the Children, Plan International and ChildFund, 2019). This could also contribute to dropout rates.

There are also other factors from institutional side. For example, in 2022, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and UNICEF conducted a comprehensive review of the preschool subsector. The study found several factors that hinder the preschool education in Timor-Leste, of which majority were related to governance. First, there are many players in the preschool subsector, there’s no overarching national plan tying everything together. Especially, given municipalities have the primary responsibility for preschool financing and implementation, they expressed during the study for improved guidance on preschool standards (MEYS, UNICEF and AIR, 2022). It should be noted that preschool education is not compulsory by law in Timor-Leste.

What about teachers, you might ask? We’re seeing a severe shortage of qualified teachers and trainers especially in rural areas. Most of those teaching preschool lack formal training. There are strategies in place to professionalize the preschool workforce, but it’s a bumpy road due to funding constraints. Plus, there’s a scarcity of training opportunities for educating children with disabilities, denying these children access to educators equipped to meet their needs. This is coupled with a lack of necessary teaching and learning materials. As you know, Timor-Leste has nearly 30 indigenous languages. Therefore, there’s also some confusion around using first-language instruction not only at preschool but also at all levels of education.
The VNR-2 team held extensive consultations on the challenges, progress, and priorities of respective SDGs in Timor-Leste. Several challenges expressed by various groups.

**Insufficient budget allocation on education**

**Concentration of resources in Dili**

**Poverty and lack of economic opportunities**

**Unequal access to education**

**Policy implementation gaps**

**Need to increase skills for employment**

The feedback from youth groups reveals a deep set of concerns. They highlighted that inequalities are evident in formal education. **Economic limitations** of households (SDG 1) coupled with lack of parental knowledge and support for education (SDG 4) hindering the access and quality of schooling for children. The youth expressed that traditional practices in the country including funerals and wedding ceremonies can be costly and burden poor households and at times supersede the importance of education. In the context of non-formal education and extra-curricular activities, challenges stem from the concentration of resources in the nation’s capital (SDG 10 and SDG 4.a), with limited accessibility and high indirect fees acting as barriers for many. The youth recognized the need for acquiring skills to prepare for future work (SDG 4.4 and SDG 8). The youth would like to see more extra-curricular activities and libraries in the country. Existing inequalities in education – inclusive education and school distance in remote areas worry the youth consulted (SDG 4.5).

The community of people with disabilities had their own set of challenges. Until today, there is an absence of an education at secondary level equivalent in Timor-Leste, forcing people with disabilities to attend exams in Indonesia for a secondary diploma (SDG 4.5). There is no national sign language developed in the country. Teachers lack the necessary training to teach children with disabilities and the Faculty of Education at UNTL lacks a curriculum unit on disabilities (SDG 4.c). Public schools lack facilities that allow children with disabilities to attend schools increasing the likelihood of people with disabilities for not accessing education (SDG 4.a and SDG 9).

Due to these reasons, although an Inclusive Education Policy exists, many schools are not accepting children with disabilities to enrol. Although an inclusive resource centre was established, it doesn’t function effectively, indicating gaps between policies and their implementations on the ground (SDG 16).

The LGBTIQ community raised their concerns too. They felt that public schools weren’t sufficiently engaging with their community and that some higher education institutions continued to discriminate against them (SDG 4.5). Similar to the people with disabilities, the LGBTIQ community noted Government policies supporting the rights of the LGBTIQ community exist, but their implementation has not been maximized (SDG 16).
Local communities in Baucau, Liquica, and RAOEA brought to light location-specific issues. In Baucau, the distance students must travel to school, especially in highlands in rural areas (SDG 4.5). Although school facilities are available, they are often substandard, lacking libraries, tables, chairs, electricity, and sanitation facilities (SDG 4.a). This is coupled with teachers often teaching outside their areas of specialization, indicate an urgent need for quality improvement in education (SDG 4.6). Poverty as key factor hindering children’s access to education and increasing dropouts was highlighted (SDG 1 and SDG 4.5). In Liquica, communities called for enhancements in basic infrastructure and quality of education, as well as job creation (SDG 4.4 and SDG 8). Meanwhile, communities in RAOEA put forth their needs for better teacher accommodation, school libraries, and more educational materials (SDG 4.a). They also emphasized the need for online schooling and the establishment of training centres in RAOEA covering various fields including education, industry, health, agriculture, and tourism. These fields are most promising, according to local communities in generating incomes for the communities in the coming years (SDG 4.4 and SDG 8). The well-being of teachers in rural areas including their accommodation also cannot be ignored (SDG 4.c). All groups noted the insufficiency of general state budget for education (SDG 16), need for improving availability and quality of infrastructure and learning materials and focus on quality implementation on the ground of various policies.

How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected education? Has it brought more opportunities or more challenges?

All schools were closed during the first three months of the State of Emergency across the country. After that, when schools reopened schools in border areas and Dili were most affected by the State of Emergency, and schools in eastern municipalities were less affected and generally remained open throughout the State of Emergency. We highlight the profound impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our children’s learning and recognize that the pandemic also created opportunities and spurred new ways of thinking about how we learn and teach.

The first ever distance learning programme in the country called ‘Escola ba Uma or School Goes Home’, was launched within two weeks of school closure. Also, several educational TV shows were broadcast on the national television and made available on YouTube and other online platforms. Video production content is from the Timor-Leste curriculum covering from preschool until grade 6. The script was prepared by the teachers and presented by them. Also uploaded on Eskola ba Uma YouTube Channel and Facebook pages were active. There were a total of 3,462 subscribers and 179,172 viewers of the courses. There was also a children’s radio programme which would host stories and educational content, and even a weekly SMS delivery with “homework” for children and teens.

During the pandemic, an important task for the MEYS was to find a platform which is available to all students, cost-efficient for the users, and teachers and students/parents alike can use easily. Therefore, the Learning Passport platform, a collaboration between UNICEF, Microsoft and the MEYS, was used for this purpose. We had to digitalize and upload the entire national curricula to the platform, train teachers, and roll out. The content that in the learning passport are from grade 0-12. This app/website
version of *Escola ba Uma* includes books, story books, courses on 21st Century skills, audio books, and all videos that were uploaded to YouTube and broadcast on TVs. There were a total of 25,923 users of the app, most of them from Dili.

To address the lack of digitalization resources in schools, the MEYS is aiming to install internet to all 210 schools. So far, **160 schools have already been connected to internet.**

**Is there a specific education sector Covid-19 recovery plan?**

The **Economic Recovery Plan** sets ambitious goals for improvement of education and professional training. It envisages an **increase the percentage of spending on education** in the context of annual General State Budget until, at least, the end of the legislature, setting as a goal for five years the doubling of the weight of these expenses in the General State Budget. The programme targets include extending the number of Centres for Learning and School Training; extending the network of secondary education, preschool and vocational training centres; maintenance/restoration works of school buildings; and improving teacher training programmes for the various levels of education.

**Box 14. The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on education**

*Figure 47 Reason for discontinued/irregularly continued study during school closure by residency (% of households)*


Students in rural areas and those in the lowest wealth quintile tended to use offline sources such as student workbooks, and students in urban area and those in the highest wealth quintile tended to use online resources.
7.3. Progress and challenges in higher education

In relation to the issues of higher education, the VNR-2 team discussed with Rui Hanjam, Adviser at Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Culture about the reforms in higher education sector, focusing on Human Capital Development Fund and the Bolsa Hakbiit Scholarship for disadvantaged children.

**Rui Hanjam:** The Bolsa Hakbiit programme, which offers higher education scholarships to students from vulnerable households, represents a pioneering initiative in the higher education sector. It marks a meaningful stride in enabling access to higher education for the economically disadvantaged, reflecting Timor-Leste’s commitment to its people. This initiative epitomizes the country’s investment in its people, particularly the youth.

Rui Hanjam presently serves as an Adviser at the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Culture. He has previously held significant roles such as Vice-Minister of Finance and Vice-Minister of Economy and Development. Prior to this, he was a Social Development Officer at the World Bank, managing various projects in education, small enterprises, labour, social protection and youth.

**Youth and adult participation in vocational education and higher education and scholarships were another SDG targets that are showing reverse trends in Timor-Leste. Why is that and what is being done to change course?**

In Timor-Leste, the Ministry of Higher Education is separate from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. It allows the Ministry to focus on higher education institutional development and quality...
improvements. Currently, there are 18 higher education institutions with around 65 thousand students of which four are universities and the rest are institutes.

A significant challenge here is that the education options at vocational and higher education level are very slim in rural areas. This forces young people to move to urban areas in search of opportunities. This could be for themselves or for their children. While there are courses being offered outside of Dili, the capital, they are often seen as inadequate to get skills students believe they need to find formal employment. You know, as a study by UN and NGO Belun in 2018 found, the youth valued technical and administration skills as well as English and Portuguese language skills for employment (United Nations and Belun, 2018).

The National Polytechnic Institute and the National University of Timor-Leste are a couple of notable exceptions, as they enrol students across the country, including rural areas. The downside is that most private institutions are concentrated in urban areas, specifically Dili. There are very few university or technical courses available outside the capital (currently, five higher education institutes have branches in six municipalities, Liquica, Ermera, Manufahi, Baucau and classes at municipalities of Bobonaro, Aileu and RAOEA).

**During the consultations, all stakeholders, especially youth recognized the Bolsa Hakbiit scholarship programme is a key progress in Timor-Leste. Can you tell us about this programme?**

I’d like to start with the history of the programme. As an important foundation, Timor-Leste had established the **Human Capital Development Fund** in 2011. The Human Capital Development Fund is instrumental in promoting skill development and economic growth in the country. The Fund provides scholarships and training to young people to enable them take advantage of opportunities in newly expanding sectors, like petroleum, tourism, hospitality, agriculture and construction, horticulture, fisheries. Especially targeting the youth for local and overseas employment opportunities. The fund also supports 'training of trainers' programmes and basic education in languages and mathematics. Moreover, the Fund aligns with the national Strategic Development Plan by sponsoring training for civil servants across all government agencies, thus enhancing public sector competency and contributed to the country’s long-term development.

In Timor-Leste, since the restoration of independence in 2002, there has been three national congress that involves all stakeholders on education to reach consensus to improve education and to secure their commitment. The priorities from the third Congress, the last being held in 2017, included the country should focus on quality of education and increasing access to finance for vulnerable children. As such, the education sector financing to allow educational institutions and families was a priority.

Within this framework, when the New Ministry on Higher Education, Science and Culture was formed in 2018, the Ministry of Higher Education proposed the concept of the **Bolsa Hakbiit laek or Scholarships for Vulnerable Students** to the Government. As such providing the scholarship for disadvantaged children and youth became one of the important mandates for the Government 8th Constitutional Government.
**Good Practice 15: Expanding access to higher education through scholarships: Human Capital Development Fund and Bolsa Hakbiit scholarship**

Ministerial Decree No. 9/2021 outlines the regulations for scholarship allocations. Known as the *Bolsa Hakbiit* is an initiative of the Government of Timor-Leste to support higher education for students from vulnerable families. The scholarships are funded by the Human Capital Development Fund and aim to reduce socio-economic inequalities and democratize education. The scholarship’s objective is to promote the participation of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education, and to decrease the instances of these students discontinuing their studies.

The term *Hakbiit laek* refers to a state of vulnerability, defined as groups of individuals or families who are marginalized or socially excluded due to socio-economic factors. The Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion has the authority to identify and declare if a candidate is from a situation described as *Hakbiit laek*. The regulation does not apply to scholarships awarded to public administration employees.

The scholarship consists of monetary payments to students who meet the required conditions. These payments are intended to cover costs associated with attending higher education studies, including tuition fees, school materials, accommodation, and other living costs. The scholarship amount includes a monthly payment of $120 to cover accommodation and living expenses.

Scholarship recipients have a set of rights and duties, including the timely receipt of payments and the obligation to report any changes that might affect their scholarship status. They must also agree to work exclusively on their studies, with some exceptions.

The number of scholarships awarded annually is determined by the budget availability. The application process is public and transparent, requiring submission of various documents and a commitment to work in Timor-Leste post-studies. This programme is a significant step towards facilitating higher education for the economically disadvantaged, aligning with the country's broader development goals.

Since the Scholarship’s programme’s launching until March 2023, there were **3,331 students** who received the scholarship, of which 59% were female and 41% were male. In addition, the scholarships are distributed covering all municipalities in the country, targeting rural areas.
The budget allocated for the scholarships programme (*Bolsa Hakbi’it* - for vulnerable youth; Veteran’s children; Merit based scholarship; Scholarship for lecturers in private universities; and Partial scholarship in country and overseas) from the Human Capital Development Fund has doubled in 2023 indicating a positive change and the political will for investing in people.

*Figure 50 Total budget for scholarships funded by the Human Capital Development Fund, 2020-2023*

*Note: for 2023, the budget execution is as of March 2023.*


**How does the programme align with the Government’s People-Centred Sustainable Development approach and the SDGs in general?**

The approval of the "*Bolsa Hakbiit Scholarships for Vulnerable Household Members Attending National Higher Education*" in Timor-Leste has significant implications for the SDGs and is an excellent example of good practice in Timor-Leste.

By providing scholarships to members of the *Kbi’it laek* (most vulnerable) families, the programme offers an opportunity to **escape the cycle of poverty through education** (SDG 1: No Poverty). Of
The scholarships enhance access to higher education, contributing to the SDG’s aim to ensure **inclusive and equitable quality education** and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (SDG 4: Quality Education). The scholarships aim to address economic, social, and cultural **inequalities**, directly aligning with this goal’s focus on reducing inequality within and among countries (SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities).

Once the students graduate universities, they have higher chances of finding work and contributes to SDG 8 by fostering an educated workforce, increasing employment opportunities, and potentially stimulating economic growth in Timor-Leste. It helps equipping youth from disadvantaged families with the **skills and knowledge necessary for better-paying jobs**. Higher education often leads to **better job opportunities and conditions**, contributing to the goal of decent work. By enabling access to higher education, the programme helps to enhance the prospects of **decent work** for those in vulnerable situations and to reducing youth unemployment, a specific target under SDG 8.

The programme is also an example of good practice for several reasons. The scholarships are designed to target a specific group (**Kbi’it laek vulnerable households**) that is often marginalized or socially excluded due to socio-economic factors, thus **promoting inclusivity**. The application and selection process for the scholarships is outlined clearly, ensuring **transparency**. By providing access to higher education for poor individuals, this programme fosters social mobility, economic growth, and long-term sustainable development in Timor-Leste.

Currently, public opinion about the programme is positive, as highlighted in the VNR-2 consultations as well. But the programme is in its initial stage. There should be an evaluation after 2-3 years to see the real impact of the programme to identify what are the students who received the scholarships are doing, and those who couldn’t get the programme, where are they now. Also, the budget allocated should not be decreased and should be at least sustained as the Programmes has many multiplier effects benefitting other areas of development.

**There is a lack of digital resources and ICT skills in the education sector at all levels (from VNR Consultations). What actions are being taken to improve digitalization, especially in education?**

It is true that Timor-Leste **grapples with a widening digital divide**, underscored by disparities in effective access to modern technologies. Despite progress in basic internet access, the country lags in high-speed connections, cloud-based tools, and unlimited data access, with connectivity costs among the world’s highest.

There is a widening digital inequality in Timor-Leste. Without significant efforts to catch up, the progress towards inclusive development could be undermined. The digital divide, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, has revealed the disparity in 'effective access to present-day technologies' both across and within countries. Thus, bridging this digital divide in relation to other countries is essential.

Also, digitalization is crucial in Timor-Leste's enhancing areas access to quality education, health care, decent employment opportunities (including remote work), enhanced standards of living, and
improved personal safety. Moreover, it fosters political participation and promotes good governance. Digital innovation can serve as a catalyst, expediting the country’s technological advancements and thus enabling rapid gains, especially in the education sector.

The Government of Timor-Leste is aware of these benefits as well as divides and challenges. That’s why in 2022, the National Strategic Plan for Digital and ICT Development (2022-2032) was developed. This Strategic Plan provides strategies to harness digital and ICT tools in areas like e-governance, inclusive economy, health, education, and agriculture. In terms of education, the Strategic Plan provides ways to enhance the quality and reach of educational service delivery. Key initiatives include connecting all educational institutions to the government ICT network and the internet, establishing ICT labs, developing digital and online libraries and knowledge repositories, and implementing comprehensive student records and academic management systems using unique IDs. Furthermore, Goal 13 of the Strategic Plan outlines an important objective to integrate digital and ICT skills into educational curriculums at all levels, starting from preschool. The implementation of this goal, beginning in 2024 and with a high priority through to 2027, aims to equip the youth with the digital skills necessary for specialized job opportunities and to foster a digitally adept society.

A study by the Asia Foundation, Oxfam, and Love Frankie NGOs underscored the need for enhanced digital literacy, online safety education in Tetun, and improved monitoring of online behaviour in Timor-Leste. It highlighted a knowledge gap in areas like online privacy and security and suggested integrating these into the education curriculum and conducting youth-targeted awareness campaigns. The study also stressed the need for effective government policies to upskill rural youth, increase educational access, promote youth employment, and better support young people with disabilities (The Asia Foundation; Oxfam and Love Frankie, 2022).

So, there is a need to enhance ICT skills and expand digital infrastructure in schools and training centres and enhance access to digital resource. But whilst talking about ICT skills, we should also not forget about even more foundations of promoting and providing foundational literacy and numeracy skills with focus on the most marginalised students including children with disabilities and children from minority language group.

From the VNR-2 national consultations and an interview with Helena Nunes also, the adequacy of budget is identified as a key challenge. Can you elaborate on the financing of education sector in Timor-Leste?

Timor-Leste has committed to an undertaking to the Global Partnership for Education to increase public expenditure compared with a base year and to maintain public expenditure on education at 20% or over. By 2019, Timor-Leste’s budget allocation to education represented just 5.5% of the total budget and the annual budgetary allocation to MEYS has not exceeded 8.4% of the total national budget over the past decade, and its share has steadily declined since 2014. There’s still a significant gap in budgeting, with preschool education receiving less than one-tenth of the recommended 1% of GDP (MEYS, UNICEF and AIR, 2022). Even within the education sector budget, preschool gets only a third or less of the recommended share.
7.4. Priorities

Based on the stakeholder consultations with various groups, desk review and expert interviews, the priorities for enhancing education in Timor-Leste can be organized around six main themes: investment and budgeting, curriculum development, digital resources, teachers, infrastructure and data collection and analysis system.

1. **Prioritize education in the national budget**, with the target of dedicating 15-20% of the national budget to education. Annual increments of 10 – 11% of the current education budget, as per the National Statement of Commitment to Transform Education, should be allocated based on evidence-based priority needs (Government of Timor-Leste, 2022b). While increasing budget, improving budget execution and **efficiency of spending** for better student learning outcomes should be prioritised by balancing investments in capital and goods with those in services such as salaries and textbooks.

2. **Develop a comprehensive national plan on enhancing and expanding preschool services with the goal to achieve universal enrolment**. This plan should include all vital elements of the preschool ecosystem, propose immediate, mid-term, and long-term objectives rooted in feasible accomplishments, outline the path towards reaching these objectives through properly costed activities, and delineate the duties and responsibilities of all stakeholders in the subsector in executing these steps (MEYS, UNICEF and AIR, 2022).

3. **Prioritize vocational education and training** as a pathway to employment, engaging private sector stakeholders in skills training investments, and scaling up overseas educational programs in strategic sectors will contribute to a skilled workforce, economic development, and bridging the rural-urban divide. To address the limited access to vocational training and skills gaps in Timor-Leste, it is crucial to increase financing for vocational education, establish standardized vocational education and training centres in rural areas. Collaboration between the government, private sector, and education/training providers is essential to design and deliver comprehensive programmes that facilitate access for participants at all career stages.

4. **Enhance literacy, numeracy, and digital skills across all ages and regions to meet labor market demands and life skills**. Adapt the curriculum to foster 21st-century skills like critical thinking and leadership. Expand access to digital resources, promote innovative digital learning strategies, and establish a Centre of Excellence for teacher training in innovative pedagogical practices and ICT skills. This can be established by strengthening implementation of the **National Strategic Plan for Digital and ICT Development (2022-2032)** and by focusing on Goal 13 of the plan with the focus on education sector.

5. **Implement universal design approaches** to promote accessibility, enhance basic infrastructure across all education levels, and establish safe spaces in schools. To reduce student absenteeism and increase learning outcomes, strengthen school feeding programmes to address student malnutrition and provide accessible water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities including menstrual hygiene management in schools.
6. **Enhance efforts to retain girls and young women in education** by providing gender-sensitive facilities and transportation, safe learning environments, eliminating child marriage, raising awareness, and strengthening incentives for parents to send their daughters to school.

7. **Improve the education sector management and information system (EMIS).** Refine the data systems by enhancing the regularity of updates and human resources capacity to monitor educational progress. This can be achieved by inviting **professional data experts** in line ministries’ planning and monitoring departments, who will oversee data management and further cultivate the data collection and analysis skills of staff. The data gaps in measuring implementation and progress of SDG 4.4 (skills for employment), SDG 4.7 (sustainable development education) and SDG 4.c (qualified teachers) should be filled. Attention should be paid to improve the data disaggregation by disability status. The quality and timeliness of this data are critical for policy makers to make informed decisions.
8. An Inclusive and Resilient Economy

In 2002, students wrote their aspirations for their country 20 years later as follows:

... Create job opportunities for young people, construct new schools for students so that we can focus on our studies. Because we are the future to construct this country (Jose M Marcal, male, 17 years old, Dili).

... Timor-Leste should have modern factory and technology. We will have tall buildings in Dili City and many hotels. All the population will enjoy tall buildings, new houses, cars, motorbikes, tractors, containers and lastly helicopters will take us to Liquica and Atauro (Ivo Jesuino G. Araujo, male, 18 years old, Dili).

8.1. Overview of progress of the SDG 8

Recognized as one of the four key strategies for accelerating the SDGs in VNR-1, economic diversification in Timor-Leste has encountered a standstill, necessitating further advancements in SDG 8. The nation’s economy has yet to recover to its pre-pandemic state, and its capacity to generate remains limited. The agriculture sector, which is the largest employer in the country, suffered major setbacks due to the Covid-19 pandemic and natural disasters. Additionally, as the VNR national multi-stakeholder consultation results highlight, limited connectivity and underdeveloped digital services hinder overall progress.
**SDG 8:** Decent work and Economic Growth aims to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. The goal comprises 12 targets, each with specific indicators to measure progress. In Timor-Leste, progress is currently on track for one target, but there is a need to accelerate efforts across three other targets. However, the country is showing a reversal in trends for five targets.

*Figure 52 SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth, Progress assessment at target level*

- **8.1** Per capita economic growth
- **8.8** Labour rights and safe working environment
- **8.10** Access to financial services
- **8.a** Aid for Trade
- **8.2** Economic productivity and innovation
- **8.3** Formalization of SMEs
- **8.4** Material resource efficiency
- **8.5** Full employment and decent work
- **8.6** Youth NEET
- **8.7** Child and forced labour
- **8.9** Sustainable tourism
- **8.b** Strategy for youth employment

The following target is on track to be achieved:

- Timor-Leste is on track to achieve **Target 8.1**, which aims to promote sustainable economic growth by targeting at least 7% GDP growth per annum in the least developed countries. This target is measured through the real GDP per capita growth rate, and Timor-Leste is expected
to meet it by 2030. In 2020, the GDP per capita growth rate in the country was reported to be 9.1%, according to the ADB Key Indicators database. The growth rate was highest in 2019 at 17.2% (Asian Development Bank, 2023). Data for 2021 and 2022 were not available. Timor-Leste’s GDP growth is heavily tied to the global volatility of oil and gas prices, introducing certain risks to the country’s economic expansion. While there have been years of substantial growth, it doesn’t necessarily guarantee that the pattern will persist in the future.

The following four targets have shown a reverse trend in achieving their objectives by 2030:

- **Target 8.2** - aims to achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading, and innovation in high-value added and labour-intensive sectors. The target is measured by real GDP per employed person growth rate (the output per worker growth rate, 2010 USD). The regional benchmark for this target is a 5.25% growth rate. However, in Timor-Leste, the growth rate was 15.3% in 2019, followed by a sharp decline of -9.9% in 2020, and a small recovery of -0.3% in 2021. The Covid-19 pandemic, political uncertainty of 2019-2020, and a natural disaster in 2021 had significant effects on Timor-Leste’s fragile economy that is largely reliant on the public sector (World Bank, 2022).

- **Target 8.3** - This target aims to promote policies that support job creation and growing enterprises. The proportion of informal employment in non-agricultural employment is used to measure progress. The 2021 Labour Force Survey indicated that 70.5% of total employment was informal, a reverse trend from the 55.1% proportion recorded in 2013.

- **Target 8.4** - aims to improve resource efficiency in consumption and production, measured by domestic material consumption of fossil fuels, biomass, and metal ores. However, data are only available up to 2019 and are far behind target values.

- **Target 8.5** – aims to achieve full and productive employment, decent work for all, and equal pay for work of equal value. The target is measured by unemployment rate. Unfortunately, Timor-Leste is experiencing a reverse trend in achieving the target, with a total unemployment rate of 2.3% in 2021. The rate was higher for youth aged 15-24 years old at 5.4%, significantly higher for women aged 15-24 years old at 8.3%, and even higher for people with disabilities at 10.3%.

- **Target 8.6** - This target aims to reduce the proportion of youth aged 15-24 who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET). Unfortunately, Timor-Leste has one of the highest NEET rates in the Asia-Pacific region, with a total rate of 30.5% in 2021, an increase from 21.0% in 2016. The NEET rate for male and female youth did not show significant differences, with 31.3% of female youth and 29.8% of male youth being NEET.

Several targets in Timor-Leste still require acceleration.

- **Target 8.8** aims to protect labour rights and promote safe working environments for all workers, including those in precarious employment and migrant workers, is measured by an index score that ranges from 0 (better) to 10 (worse) compliance with labour rights.
Unfortunately, the score has remained fixed at 0.34 between 2015 and 2020, indicating no improvement in this area.

- **Target 8.10** seeks to ensure universal access to banking, insurance, and financial services, but Timor-Leste falls short of the goal, with only 13.45 automated teller machines and 5.64 commercial bank branches per 100,000 adults in 2020, an increase from 6.63 and 4.97, respectively, in 2015. This number is still far below the target of 200 per 100,000 adults.

- **Target 8.a**, Timor-Leste’s official flows disbursements have been declining, falling short of the target of US$148.2 million. In 2020, the amount was only US$60.9 million.

The following targets did not have sufficient data to assess progress:

- **Target 8.7** lacks sufficient data to measure progress accurately. As of 2016, only 7.2% of children aged 5-17 were engaged in economic activity, higher than the regional average of 4.8% in Asia-Pacific as of 2020. However, there is a need for more recent and comprehensive information (UNICEF, 2016).

- **Target 8.9** aims to develop and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. Timor-Leste has adopted the National Tourism Policy 2017-2030, but there has been no index produced to measure the sustainable tourism criteria.

- **Target 8.b** – Even there are no official reporting on this indicator, available evidence suggests the country is fulfilling this target. Although there is no dedicated youth employment strategy, the issues of youth employment are reflected in the National Employment Strategy 2017-2030.

*Figure 53 SDG 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure, Progress assessment at target level*

- **Target 9.1** - Passenger and freight volumes (Container port traffic, maritime transport): This indicator measures container port traffic in million TEU (Twenty-Foot Equivalent Units). From 2010 to 2020, Timor-Leste experienced growth in container port traffic, increasing from 4.3 thousand TEU in 2010 to 16.8 thousand TEU in 2020. This growth indicates an improvement in the country’s maritime transport infrastructure and capacity.

- **Target 9.2** - Manufacturing value added (as % of GDP and USD per capita): This indicator measures the contribution of the manufacturing sector to GDP and its value in US$ per capita.
The manufacturing sector's share of GDP rose from 0.92% in 2010 to 1.47% in 2021, while the manufacturing value added per capita increased from US$ 10.85 in 2010 to US$ 23.5 in 2021. This growth suggests progress in Timor-Leste's manufacturing sector; however, the progress is slow and far from achieving the target value by 2030.

- **Target 9.a** - Official international support to infrastructure: This indicator measures the total official flows for infrastructure in million 2019 USD. The data shows fluctuation in international support for infrastructure projects in Timor-Leste, with a peak of US$ 80.03 million in 2019 and according to the latest available data for 2021 indicates a decline in support to US$ 53.24 million.

- **Target 9.c** - 96.5% of the population are covered by at least 3G network, only 45% are covered by 4G network (ESCAP, 2023b). In total, 51.0% are internet users accessing mainly via mobile networks and the number of broadband users is significantly lower, at 0.01% of the population (Digital 2022: Timor-Leste, 2022).

*Figure 54 SDG 10: Reduced inequalities, Progress assessment at target level*

**Target 10.4** - Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality. This target is measured through the labour income share as a percentage of GDP. From 2010 to 2019, the labour share of GDP in Timor-Leste has remained relatively stable, hovering around 41%, with a peak of 42.1% in 2017. However, in 2019, it dropped to 40.1%, suggesting that the share of income generated by labour has decreased slightly compared to capital income.

**Target 10.7** – on responsible migration and mobility of people is measured by the number of refugees originating from Timor-Leste per 100,000 population. The numbers fluctuated from 2010 to 2021, with a peak of 1.588 in 2015. In 2021, the value was 0.81852, indicating a decrease in the number of refugees relative to the population.

**Target 10.a** – aims to implement the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in accordance with WTO agreements. This target is measured by the percentage of tariff lines applied to imports with zero-tariff for all products. Timor-
Leste showed progress in this aspect, increasing from 57.03 in 2015 to 71.42 in 2019. However, the percentage dropped to 55.30 in 2020, suggesting a potential increase in import tariffs.

**Target 10.b** - Total resource flows for development: This indicator measures total assistance for development in million USD, including ODA, other official flows (OOF) and private types. From 2015 to 2020, the assistance fluctuated, with a 207 million in 2016. The value was 273 million in the latest available data in 2020, indicating an increase in development.

The VNR-2 finds that SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth has strong synergies with SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9 and 6 as shown in Figure below.

**Figure 55 Synergies of the SDG 8 with selected SDGs**

Note: SDG 8 ties to all SDGs, but for report relevance and based on consultations, interviews, and case studies, only certain SDGs are featured. One-way arrows suggest stronger influence on SDG 8; two-way arrows denote mutual influence. Source: Adapted by the author

The **Strategic Development Plan** envisions that by 2030, Timor-Leste will have a modern, diversified economy, with high-quality infrastructure such as roads, power plants, ports, and telecommunications. The nation will transition from subsistence agriculture to a more commercially oriented, smallholder agricultural system. Timor-Leste aims to achieve self-sufficiency in food production while supplying a variety of agricultural products to global markets, including grains, livestock, fruits and vegetables, and other cash crops. The country also intends to capitalize on its forestry and fisheries resources. Under the umbrella of the Economic Development Area, rural development, agriculture, tourism, and private sector investment are prioritized as key goals. In rural regions of Timor-Leste, the private sector will
serve as a driving force behind income and employment growth, propelling the nation towards a more prosperous future (Government of Timor-Leste, 2011).

8.2. Progress and challenges

Helder Lopes: Timor-Leste has achieved commendable progress in state-building and strengthening its democratic institutions. However, progress in economic and social development is not happening at the same pace. Economic diversification should not just be an aspiration and instead, should be implemented through tangible sector policies. Private sector development at all levels - micro, small, medium and large - is the foundation for economic diversification.

Helder Lopes holds the position of Economic and Financial Advisor to the President of Timor-Leste. He previously served as Vice Minister of Finance and Chief Economist at the Ministry of Finance of Timor-Leste and has provided numerous advisory services to UN-ESCAP, and the Asian Development Bank. This has equipped him with comprehensive insights into Timor-Leste’s economic and financial landscape.

What comes to your mind when reading these postcards written by students 20 years ago?

I believe that Timor-Leste has achieved certain aspirations, such as strengthening democracy, promoting freedom, and fostering social cohesion. Examining various indicators related to democracy, the country ranks among the top performers in the region. However, the anticipated pace and extent of economic and social development for the youth have not been fully realized. This implies that significant efforts are required in the next seven years as we work towards the 2030 vision set forth in the Strategic Development Plan: “By 2030, Timor-Leste will join the ranks of upper middle-income countries, eliminate extreme poverty, and establish a sustainable, diversified non-oil economy.”

How successful has Timor-Leste been in ensuring that there are secure and decent jobs and economic opportunities for all and for different socio-economic groups?

To answer that question, we need to look at the data how many people have access to jobs and livelihoods, which groups have access and which groups have not and are these jobs and livelihoods sources are secure, decent and resilient?

Timor-Leste still faces significant challenges in promoting inclusive economic growth and decent jobs, particularly among women, youth, people in rural areas and people with disabilities. The 2021 Labour Force Survey showed that the overall labour force participation rate is very low at 30.5%. This means that out of the total population of working age, only 30.5% are either employed or actively seeking employment (Table 4). The SDG indicators 8.5.1 on full and productive employment, decent work for all, and equal pay shows a reverse trend, unemployment rates especially high for people with
disabilities; and 8.6.1. on youth NEET has also substantially regressed meaning there are more youth who are not in employment, education and training.

There is still a significant disparity between men and women. Only 24.2% of women are participating in the labour force, while 36.9% of men are, which is a 12.7 percentage point difference! It’s clear that way fewer women are working compared to men, and it shows that women still face more challenges when it comes to finding jobs and participating in the labour market. There is a huge untapped potential in the economy if women were participating in the workforce at the same rate as men – we could be seeing more growth and development. Even when women are working, they’re less likely to have wage jobs than men (31.5% vs. 59%). Women are more likely to be self-employed or helping out with family businesses (67.3% vs. 39%). Wage jobs usually come with more security and better conditions, but those self-employed and family roles are considered vulnerable employment. So, it’s clear that women are facing some serious obstacles when it comes to finding decent work. Even if women have wage jobs, the gender pay gap is large. Overall, women earn 6.3% less on average than men among salaried employees and 34.2% less among the self-employed, with the largest disparities observed in craft trades, management, technical professions, and among business owners.

In Timor-Leste, the youth population constitutes a significant portion of the total population. In other words, we have a youth bulge which presents both challenges and opportunities. According to the 2022 Census data, young people aged 15-34 comprise nearly 37% of the population, youth aged 15-24 comprise around 22% (Government of Timor-Leste, 2022a). The VNR-1 and many other reports in the past have warned the policymakers on taking advantage of this youth bulge by creating full employment in productive sectors which in turn will increase economic productivity. If the youth bulge is steered carefully and engaged in productivity, this will create a demographic dividend. Unfortunately, so far, we have not been able to create a demographic dividend. Today 30.6% of our youth are not in employment, education or training. This is an increase from 2016, when the rate was 21.0%. The high NEET rate underscores the urgency of addressing this issue, as a large number of young people are currently disconnected from the educational system and the labour market. This disconnect not only hampers individual prospects but also limits the country’s overall potential for economic growth and social development (Table 4).

Table 4 Selected indicators on labour and employment, Labour Force Survey 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key indicators</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour force participation, %</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 8.5.2 Unemployment rate, %</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 8.5.2 Unemployment rate by disability status, %</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 8.6.1 Youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) aged 15-24 years old, %</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 8.3.1 Proportion of informal employment in total employment (%)</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>77.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment by economic activity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General public administration activities, %</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, forestry and fisheries, as a proportion of total employment %</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Industry employment as a proportion of total employment, %

<p>| | | |</p>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>8.7</td>
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Services employment as a proportion of total employment, %

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>59.3</td>
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Manufacturing employment as a proportion of total employment (%)

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<th></th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>8.4</td>
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Average monthly wage (USD)

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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>252</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: (SEFOPE, General Directorate of Statistics and ILO, 2022)

**What are the reasons for this overall low labour force participation, gender disparity and high rates of youth not in employment, education and training?**

There are many reasons. According to the Labour Force Survey results, the predominant reasons for the working age people, meaning those aged above 15 years old being outside the labour force were personal and family-related reasons (61.8% overall, 66.0% for women versus 56.7% for men) followed by retirement and other economic reasons (22.6%). These are factors mentioned at the individual and household levels. However, there are more factors related to the economic structure of Timor-Leste. These include the high share of informal employment, public sector driven growth, the reliance on oil economy, lack of diversification and the insufficient investment in priority sectors.

**First, the prevalence of informal employment (whether in the formal or informal sector).**

Informal employment is the one which features ‘lack job security, benefits, and access to social protection’. According to the Labour Force Survey 2021 estimates, 38.6% of the people are employed in the informal sector, 43.2% in the formal sector while 18.2% are employed in households. The informal sector is made up of small businesses and activities that are not regulated or protected by the government. This means that workers in this sector often lack job security, benefits, and access to social protection. Because the informal sector is so prevalent in Timor-Leste, many people, especially women and young people, end up working in vulnerable and low-quality jobs. Since there’s a lack of formal job opportunities, people might choose to stay out of the workforce altogether or engage in subsistence farming or other informal activities instead. At the same time, **unpaid domestic and care work are often undervalued.** It should be valued as a part of women’s contribution to the economy. Countries like Australia estimate the value of unpaid work in their GDP. If Timor-Leste estimates this, the figures might be significant.

**Second, considerably higher proportion of working-age women are involved in subsistence production than men in both urban and rural areas.** In urban areas, 62.4% of women in contrast to 24.9% of men rely on subsistence production as their primary work. In contrast, rural areas have a higher percentage of people engaged in subsistence production, with 70.7% of women and 51.7% of men. As the findings from the VNR-2 consultations with women’s groups reveal, this high proportion of women engaged in subsistence production can be attributed to limited access to formal employment opportunities for women and to some extent traditional gender roles. Consequently, women are more likely to hold vulnerable positions, such as self-employment or contributing family worker roles, which can perpetuate poverty and hinder their economic empowerment. These statistics suggest we need targeted policies and programmes to promote gender equality in the labour market in our country.
The high youth NEET rate in Timor-Leste is similarly tied to the informal employment. It is interesting to note that during the VNR-2 target group consultation, youth participants identified limited access to capital, insufficient human resources (education and skills), and underdeveloped infrastructure as primary barriers. Young people often struggle to secure formal employment due to scarce job openings, inadequate skills and qualifications, which can push them towards informal work or leave them unemployed. This situation can foster feelings of hopelessness and detachment from the labour market, potentially resulting in long-term adverse effects on their future prospects and well-being.

**VNR Consultations 9: Barriers hindering economic participation by target groups and local communities**

The VNR-2 consultations with various target groups highlighted the following challenges that hinder economic participation. The table shows which groups named the given challenge.

**Youth groups** highlighted several barriers to economic participation, such as limited access to capital, human resources issues, natural resource limitations, and inadequate infrastructure conditions. **Women’s groups** identified a number of challenges, including a heavy focus on applications in Dili, weak control systems, insufficient research on the benefits of the Rotative Fund, and the severe impacts of COVID-19 and flooding on women. Moreover, they reported issues related to inadequate infrastructure and market access, market domination by foreign imports, and meagre budget allocations for economic development. Accessing credit was another hurdle, compounded by a strong patriarchal system and gender inequality that economically depend women on men.

**LGBTIQ** communities expressed concerns about the lack of youth participation in the agriculture sector due to low demand for local products and inadequate road conditions to tap into rural potential. The community also pointed out the importance of diversifying products in the private sector to create jobs. Persistent patriarchal culture still impeded women’s employment opportunities, while a lack of attention and improvement in the tourism sector was another issue.

In Oecusse, barriers included bureaucracy and transparency issues in obtaining shipping licenses and recruitment processes, along with the domination of Chinese companies in the tenderization system. The marketplace system was flawed and there was a lack of entrepreneurship and innovation, limiting job creation for families. The tourism sector was similarly affected due to lack of facilities and long processing times for permits. Consultations in Liquica highlighted that natural disasters have devastating impacts on their lives, destroying homes, infrastructure, and local community products. Challenges in the agricultural sector such as poor irrigation, climate change, and inadequate agricultural mapping further complicated matters. The lack of competition in the business sector and insufficient attention to the tourism and fisheries sectors were other hurdles. In Baucau, issues were pointed out with credit programme criteria not aligning with community capacities and knowledge, absence of private investment employing young people, and lack of support for companies. The abandonment of productive sectors due to youth emigration, insufficient workplace facilities, lack of socialisation, and limited market
opportunities for local products were among other challenges mentioned. A lack of amenities such as electricity, water, and sanitation in rural areas and slow internet speed added to the difficulties.

Thirdly, although the Strategic Development Plan highlights sectors such as agriculture, tourism, private sector investment, and quality education as crucial for job creation, the investments and strategies used in these strategic sectors have been insufficient. The 2020 mid-term evaluation of the Strategic Development Plan found that the Economic Development Sector received significantly less funds between 2018-2021 and has not been the policy priority (Government of Timor-Leste, 2021b).

**Timor-Leste's economy is predominantly driven by the public sector and oil industry**, with the private sector contributing less than 25% to the GDP. The current economic model is unsustainable, as the government relies heavily on the Petroleum Fund for revenue. **The political deadlock that began in 2017 and persisted through 2019** resulted in budget contractions that significantly impacted the economy. Considering the size, structure, and nature of Timor-Leste's economy, it is vital for the government to promote the development of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

*Figure 56 Distribution of the 2018-2021 Budget by SDP Sectors*

Source: (Government of Timor-Leste, 2021b, p. 36)

**VNR Consultations 10: National stakeholders' views on job creation and private sector development**

During the national consultation, stakeholders from the Government, Chamber of Commerce, and civil society identified several challenges that hinder job creation and livelihood development in Timor-Leste:

1. Climate change, including long-term El Niño and La Niña events, poses a significant threat to economic activities.
2. The unresolved Land Law and lingering land disputes discourage potential investors from committing to investments.
3. The private sector’s limited capacity to invest in industrial areas has led to a shortage of employment opportunities.
4. Despite some private sector investment in certain industries, there are not enough positions available to accommodate all the trainees who have completed their training.
5. High electricity costs negatively impact the livelihoods of smallholder groups and hinder the growth of their activities.
6. Access to soft credit is hindered by requirements that benefit established sectors with existing capital, instead of considering the circumstances of poor individuals who need it the most.
7. Numerous cooperatives exist, but they often rely on seasonal production, making it difficult to maintain year-round operations.
8. Allocated budgets frequently do not align with the priorities planned by the respective planning entities’ directorates.
9. Training centres’ priority programmes are not implemented due to insufficient budget allocations.

There are ongoing government-led initiatives implemented in partnership with development partners. To name few, the Workforce Development Programme funded by DFAT has been crucial, and the YEES project led by MTCI also shows the potential of young Timorese in becoming successful entrepreneurs.

**Good Practice 16: Boosting youth employment in Timor-Leste: A sustainable pathway to skills development and entrepreneurship**

The collaboration between the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and UNDP is an example of a sustainable development initiative to support youth employment. The initiative began with the ‘Supporting Employment and Entrepreneurship for Women and Youth (SEEWAY) Project’ in 2021, in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and youth-led MSMEs. Under the SEEWAY project, 125 university graduates gained internship opportunities in public and private sector institutions, with 80 subsequently securing full-time jobs. Furthermore, over 250 young people received business training, with 185 qualifying for grants to start their own businesses. This initiative also pioneered a low-interest loan guarantee scheme, which has since been ratified into law.

Building on this success, the ‘Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Skills (YEES) Project’ was launched in 2022, with significant funding from the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and co-funding from the Government of Timor-Leste. The Government through the Office of Prime Minister has committed to sustain and scale up the soft loan component by investing US$ 50 million of collateral funds in the National Commercial Bank of Timor-Leste, adding to the initial collateral fund of US$ 1.4 million invested by UNDP and MTCI.

Key aspects of the YEES project include **skills-building, career development support, and the establishment of an online job portal**. The initiative is led by the Ministry of Tourism, Commerce and Industry and co-implemented by SEFOPE, government training institutions such as INDMO, IADE and SERVE entities. Collaborations with various governmental departments and institutions target different
aspects of youth employment and entrepreneurship. Youth Centers of the Secretary of State for Youth and Sports are an integrated premises to provide capacity building and information to youth in employment and entrepreneurship areas. As such, this multi-stakeholder approach of the initiative and ownership contribute to sustainability of the initiative.

The YEES initiative focuses on Timorese migrant workers, returnee migrants, and rural youths from Baucau, Ermera and Liquica. Further, a tailored approach needs to be developed to reach out to more marginalized groups in rural areas, as well as to build grassroots connections with youth groups and disability groups to ensure inclusivity and equal access to the project activities.

The initiative aims to reach more than 35,000 Timorese people (24,000 direct beneficiaries of youth and 11,000 indirect beneficiaries) by December 2027, representing a considerable investment in Timor-Leste’s human capital and its alignment with several SDGs, including Quality Education (SDG 4), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), and Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10).

The Project, currently active in four municipalities (Dili, Baucau, Ermera, and Liquica), has demonstrated the potential for expansion. The Timor-Leste government can scale up the project, extending its scope and maintaining relationships with international training institutions in countries such as Korea and Australia, thereby broadening the project’s reach for seasonal workers. The Project can also expand activities. For example, the Project is developing partnerships with local bakeries, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Agriculture, with plans to provide nutritious bread for students in Dili and Baucau starting next year.

Crucially, the evolution from the SEEWAY project to the YEES project highlighted the importance of enhancing the capabilities of not just the beneficiaries, but also the project partners, particularly government entities. This valuable lesson has informed the structure of the YEES project, which now includes capacity-building activities such as Training of Trainers. This aims to cultivate skilled trainers within government institutions who can effectively conduct training for project beneficiaries, thereby ensuring sustainability and wider impact of the project.

What are the primary factors driving rural-urban migration and emigration trends in Timor-Leste, and how is the government addressing these issues?

Timor-Leste like many other developing countries, experienced increased rural-to-urban migration, particularly into the capital city of Dili. Many people have left rural areas and moved to urban areas, looking for better chances in employment, education, for family reasons and for security and safety reasons as well as healthcare, social services, connectivity, and infrastructure.

This has led to higher concentration in the capital city and a significant decline in labour force in rural areas, causing less interest in rural development. Even though finding a job or going to school can be tough in the city, people would rather take their chances there than stay in rural areas. According to the 2018 study by UNFPA and NGO Belun, more than half (56%) of young people who migrated in the
past year did so for education, while 19% followed family members to Dili, with women more likely to migrate for this reason.

In addition to rural-urban migration, there is an emigration trend among young especially people aged 15-45 years old. The IOM and GoTL conducted an in-depth assessment of these migration trends in Timor-Leste. The report found that there were between 40,000 and 50,000 Timorese nationals living abroad, mainly in Australia, Indonesia, and the UK as of 2020. Approximately 55% of these emigrants are male. Most Timorese migrants are young and working-age adults, with men more likely to migrate both within the country and abroad. Women often stay in their place of origin to care for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Employment was the primary driver for migration, followed by family and friends, education, and safety and security related reasons (IOM, 2021).

In response to limited domestic job creation, the GoTL is trying to help by creating job opportunities in other countries, through seasonal migrant worker programmes in South Korea and Australia. The Australian Seasonal Work Programme has provided low-skill, seasonal jobs in horticulture and hospitality.

Between 2019 and May 2023, there were a total of 6149 individuals enrolled in the programme. Horticulture included the majority of the seasonal jobs, accounting for 5641 jobs with a noticeable gender disparity, employing 4064 males and 1577 females. On the other hand, the hospitality sector exhibits a more balanced gender distribution, employing 54 males and 46 females. The meatfields sector accounted for 406 jobs (SEFOPE, 2023).

In South Korea, Timorese migrant workers have found employment in the fisheries and manufacturing sectors. But when people come back home, it can be hard to find a job because some industries, like fishing and manufacturing, are not very developed in Timor-Leste.

The good news is that the money sent home by people living abroad through remittances is really helping the country’s economy. Remittances already serve as the country’s second-largest source of foreign revenue, but the diaspora can also boost other sources of revenue, such as tourism, trade, and investment. The National Employment Strategy (2017-2030) clearly stated that engaging Timorese diaspora can facilitate skills and knowledge transfers on the areas of agriculture, fisheries, tourism, trade, and investment that are essential for Timor-Leste’s development. But to make sure migration helps Timor-Leste grow in a sustainable way, it’s important to also address the reasons why people left in the first place. This way, those living abroad will be more likely to invest back into the country and help it develop.
Good Practice 17: Leveraging remittances as an innovative financial diversification tool

International remittances from the Timorese diaspora are the second-largest source of foreign revenue for Timor-Leste, primarily benefiting micro-level development by contributing to household incomes, education, small businesses, investments, access to health and social services, and general living standards. Between 2013 and 2019, Timor-Leste received over US$ 100 million annually in remittances, which accounted for 4.8% of the country’s GDP in 2020. The UK, Australia, and South Korea are the top sources of remittances sent through major outlets like Western Union and Banco Nacional Ultramarino (BNU). A joint IOM-GoTL diaspora study found that 72% of remittances were sent to support families’ basic needs and care for vulnerable relatives in Timor-Leste.

Figure 57 Annual Inward Remittance Flow (2006 – 2019)

Source: KNOMAD Remittances Data 2020 cited in (IOM, 2021)

In recognition of the diaspora’s important contribution to development in Timor-Leste, the Government advanced the first ever Timor-Leste National Diaspora Engagement Policy and Action Plan 2023 – 2027 (2022), and with the support of the IOM, the Government developed the Remittance Mobilization Strategy. The Strategy provides legislative and policy priorities to leverage remittances for development as an innovative financial diversification tool for an oil-dependent economy. These policies are the prime examples of good practice in the region because the policies address multiple SDGs and their indicators at once.

Remittances continuously contribute to the socioeconomic development in Timor-Leste as the government has greater awareness of economic diversification opportunities related to diaspora engagement. As a direct result, MNEC has begun implementation of engagement with diaspora groups abroad more concertedly in the latter half of 2022. On that account, a specific Secretariat has been established for Engagement of Timorese Community Abroad that not only seizes on remittances, but also leverages economic and trade between home and host countries.

The policy and the strategy stemmed from one of the priorities of the Sixth Constitutional government to reform public administration. As Timor-Leste is one of the world’s most oil dependent countries, the
necessity of economic diversification, coupled with the rising prominence of remittances to the economic well-being of the country in addition to the active role that diaspora communities play, is paramount. The forthcoming fiscal cliff requires GoTL to embrace active and innovative tools of economic diversification. The government set its priority with the help of development partners to materialize it, which in turn results in the Development Finance Assessment led by the Office of the Prime Minister, then was transformed into the INFF and Financial Diversification in Timor-Leste project implemented by IOM and the Minister of Finance in June 2022. However, the introduction of a novel concept before the government entities could absorb it required securing political commitment to implement the policy in question.

The implementation of policy and the strategy would entail high-level political commitment to policy and action plan from the new government. To ensure the sustainability of the project and maximize its tangible outcomes and impact on the ground, it is imperative to establish continuous support from development partners. Additionally, the governance structure of the policy should be designed to incorporate collaborative opportunities for investment by both the government and international cooperation partners.

How about the situation of people with disabilities? Has it improved since the VNR-1 report highlighted the stark inequality for the people with disabilities?

The Labour Force Survey 2021 found that around 20,300 people over the age of 5 had some form of disability, making up 1.6% of the total population. When looking at unemployment rates based on disability status, it's clear that people with disabilities face higher unemployment rates than those without disabilities. For people with disabilities, the unemployment rate is 19.6% overall. When broken down by gender, the rate is much higher for men with disabilities at 27.8%, while women with disabilities have an unemployment rate of 3.1%. On the other hand, people without disabilities have lower unemployment rates. The total unemployment rate for those without disabilities is 5.1%. When considering gender, men without disabilities have an unemployment rate of 4.5%, and women without disabilities face a slightly higher rate at 6.0%.

Good Practice 18: Disability National Action Plan to reduce the barriers to economic participation of people with disabilities

During the VNR-2 consultations with organizations for people with disabilities, several barriers to economic participation were identified. These included access to credit, particularly for women; inadequate infrastructure, including roads, high electricity costs, slow internet, and insufficient irrigation systems; limited access to information about job promotion programmes, which are primarily focused in Dili; and lack of access to markets and supply chain development, such as connections to vendors. Limited education and illiteracy affect their ability to manage finances for their small businesses; stigma and discrimination from banks and micro-credit institutions, inaccessibility of most banks for persons with physical disabilities.
Various small-scale initiatives are being implemented, depending on organizations' funding availability and ability to reach rural areas. This includes establishing self-help groups and supporting individual small businesses. However, these initiatives are small-scale with irregular funding.

The Disability National Action Plan (2021-2030) by the Government of Timor-Leste highlights additional barriers, such as limited data on employment for people with disabilities in both private and public sectors; lack of understanding by employers about the advantages of employing people with disabilities and the absence of commercial incentives from the government; exclusion of people with disabilities from self-employment, vocational training, and youth training programmes; inadequate workplace accessibility; and lack of confidence among people with disabilities to apply for jobs due to their disability or job vacancy limitations. Most training centres cannot provide space and training for people with disabilities.

What has been the impact of Covid-19 on the employment and economic productivity in Timor-Leste? Can you summarise what has been done to reduce the negative impacts?

Certainly, despite relatively shorter lockdown durations in Timor-Leste, the impacts of Covid-19 on employment, livelihoods, and domestic work were significant. This was compounded by a contraction in state budget spending, which left many public sector-dependent companies inactive.

The MSMEs survey during Covid-19 revealed that the various movement restrictions severely affected MSMEs, resulting in disrupted supply chains, decreased demand, and reduced income. Many MSMEs also had a pessimistic outlook on their future sustainability. Surprisingly, almost half of the MSMEs were unaware of the GoTL's support measures aimed at assisting their recovery, particularly for informal businesses and those outside the capital city. Consequently, they couldn't utilize these recovery measures. The survey also indicated that medium-sized businesses fared better than micro and small businesses (UNDP Timor-Leste and GDS, 2021). As we discussed earlier how the majority of the labour force are in vulnerable employment and in subsistence work, this shows if other shocks hit the country, the vulnerable and small-scale businesses will be the hardest hit.

In response to the crisis, the GoTL introduced the Economic Recovery Plan. These were timely and appropriate interventions given the circumstances. However, for a sustainable recovery from the pandemic, natural disasters, and budget impasse, I believe the focus should shift towards economic diversification and the creation of decent jobs. This indeed presents a significant challenge for the upcoming government.
Box 15. Covid-19 mitigation and recovery measures, impact on the economy, employment and MSMEs in Timor-Leste

In August 2020, the GoTL approved a package of four short-term Emergency Response Measures under the first phase of their economic recovery plan, set to last until the end of 2020. The second phase of the Economic Recovery Plan has a “recovery with transformation” approach and aims to expand productive sectors - agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing. In 2021, the General State Budget allocated funds to address the severe impacts of Cyclone Seroja and the global pandemic crisis. In 2022, the GoTL implemented additional Economic Recovery measures to curb the rising food and commodity prices. Duration of the Economic Recovery Plan was between April 2020 – December 2022. In total, around US$ ~437 million were spent in 2020, 2021 and 2022.

The pandemic resulted in **job losses** affecting both men and women aged 15 years and above. In total, 11.0% of jobs were lost, equivalent to 303.4 thousand people. Men were more affected, with 6.5% (or 252.3 thousand) losing their jobs, compared to 4.5% (or 51.0 thousand) of women. The age group most affected was those aged between 25-64 years, which saw a total job loss of 10.2% or 282.3 thousand individuals. In this age group, again men were more affected, with 6.0% (232.2 thousand) losing their jobs compared to 4.2% (50.0 thousand) of women. In addition, as the Figure below shows, this was coupled with **income losses**.

*Source: (SEFOPE, General Directorate of Statistics and ILO, 2022)*

Figure 58 Income losses from total income losses due to Covid-19 pandemic, by main industry and sex (US$), 2021

According to the SEIA-2 report, around 22% of households interviewed reported an increase in the time spent on care and domestic work. Women in age groups 25-64 were the persons who were most affected by an increase in **time spent on care and domestic work**.

The impact of Covid-19 on micro, small and medium enterprises

Out of the 11,368 registered MSMEs, 8,308 or 73% are located in the Dili municipality, an area where just 25% of Timor-Leste’s population resides. This underscores the **concentration of business activity in**
Dili. The State of Emergency invoked due to Covid-19 imposed longer restriction periods and business closures in Dili, which in turn, significantly impacted the MSMEs.

**Reasons for income loss among MSMEs** were low demand from customers (57.1%), fear of catching Covid-19 (39.7%), increase in cost of supplies (28.4%) and mandatory closures of businesses (24.7%). More than half (57.0%) of the MSMEs reported they were aware of the GoTL Economic Recovery Measures aimed at MSMEs. However, the awareness was significantly lower among informal businesses and businesses located outside of Dili municipality.

**Figure 59 Proportion of MSMEs aware about the Economic Recovery Measures, 2021**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dili</th>
<th>Other municipalities</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aware</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>57.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaware</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
<td>43.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (UNDP Timor-Leste and GDS, 2021)

**8.3. Notable policies and programmes**

*We discussed quite a bit about the setbacks the last four years. How about progress and achievements? What have been the notable policies and programmes?*

I facilitated the VNR-2 national consultation with multi-stakeholders on the economic diversification where participants from Trade Invest, Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Institute of Petroleum, TIC Timor, Chamber of Commerce and others. All sectors expressed their optimism that the country will be going forward. They also presented challenges in order to be competitive, even after joining the ASEAN, we need make significant improvements.

One progress agreed by all participants was that **Timor-Leste has improved legal and policy environment to promote inclusive economic growth.** The country has the National Youth Employment Policy, the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and the *Maubisse* Declaration, has ratified the International Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and National Migration Policy to protect migrants' rights and promote their social and economic integration. Small-scale community livelihood groups and cooperatives have been active and supplying products to local markets.
The Government employment promotion schemes are in operation such as the Employment Fund implementing a job guarantee scheme, cash for work schemes (R4D, Ministry of Public Works), programmes to improve youth employment and entrepreneurship skills (YEES, MTCI).

Stakeholders also mentioned having already entered Phase 2 of the Strategic Development Plan, the Economic Recovery Plan is more focused on transforming the economic structure and develop productive sectors. Based on the Economic Recovery Plan, it is anticipated that more funding would be directed to economic development, and particularly to sub-sectors of agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing.

Infrastructure, critical for economic diversification has been expanding. These include providing people with road access, water and sanitation, access to electricity and telecommunication. The Institute of Equipment Management mentioned during the national consultation that at the aftermath of the Flooding, community support in remote areas in rehabilitating roads was significant.

A new Tibar Bay Port was built and launched operation in 2023. The Tibar Bay Port as the maritime freight trade and commerce will facilitate the connectivity between Timor-Leste and the global and regional markets, will support the GoTL’s efforts to boost export and attract foreign investors to invest and start businesses.

Following several years of economic downturns in 2017, 2018, the Central Bank of Timor-Leste adopted the Credit Guarantee System for SMEs in 2019. Through the Programme, the State shares credit risk with commercial banks, aiming to promote entrepreneurship and job creation, encourage the formalisation and growth of SMEs, facilitating access to credit in priority sectors, and contributing to the expansion of access to banking and financial services. VNR-2 consultations with local communities in rural areas and among women revealed this programme helps expanding access to finance among small businesses.

During the consultations, sector-specific achievements were emphasized in tourism, manufacturing, and agriculture. Timor-Leste became a signatory to the Pacific Sustainable Tourism Statement of Commitment and developed an Integrated Strategic Plan for tourism. Successes in the manufacturing sector include supporting local entrepreneurs, implementing production quality certification, and streamlining legislation and bureaucracy.

In the agriculture sector, stakeholders highlighted successes such as the construction of irrigation systems, livestock industry development, deforestation mitigation through tree plantation, policy support, and assistance to fishermen. Youth were supported in economic recovery through international study opportunities, and domestic production interventions were implemented to reduce imports. Additionally, the export of seaweed has expanded, and the potential for agricultural growth was identified. The National Institute for Fisheries Aquaculture was established, improving research and development for fisheries and aquaculture. Rice production more than doubled, livestock numbers increased by 20%, and revenue generated from ocean fishing and fish exports rose between 2017 and 2021.
VNR Consultations 11: Progress and achievements in employment and livelihoods

The results from the VNR-2 consultations on the perceived achievements by various groups on employment highlight the efforts and initiatives put in place to empower different societal groups, enhance their economic capabilities, and combat discrimination.

Youth: Achievements point to a collaboration between government, local, and international partners, showing the role of inter-organizational relationships in promoting youth employment. This also emphasizes the important role of the private sector in creating employment opportunities for the youth.

Organizations for women’s rights and gender equality: Their achievements are marked by international recognition of products (e.g., tais products via UNESCO), involvement in decision-making processes, access to credit and funds, and promotion of local products on the international market. Encouraging women’s participation in economic, social, and political decision-making processes signifies progress towards gender equity. Access to credit and funds suggests financial inclusion and opportunities for entrepreneurship.

Organizations for people with disabilities: The recruitment of people with hearing disabilities to work in Australia and Korea shows attempts at inclusion and reducing discrimination. However, it’s not clear whether this is a one-time initiative or a sustainable strategy for inclusion.

LGBTIQ representatives: They report a reduction in discrimination, with job and educational opportunities being more accessible since 2019. This is a sign of progress towards equal rights and opportunities, but it’s unclear how comprehensive and consistent this progress is across different areas and sectors.

Local communities in Oecusse: Various forms of government assistance and local initiatives are credited as achievements. This includes subsidies, scholarships, housing programmes, and the prosperity of the country’s economy. Infrastructure improvements (roads, electricity, airport, port) suggest broader economic development benefiting the region. Liquica: Achievements are tied to businesses boosting the household economy, facilitated by capacity building, trader presence, and low-interest credits. Unique initiatives like transforming seawater to clean water highlight innovative approaches to local economic development. Baucau: The self-employed here are recognized for their contribution to the local economy. There are diverse business activities (e.g., horticulture, furniture industry, bakery, agriculture), with support mechanisms in place (e.g., employment training, low-interest credit, competitions for innovative business plans).

The VNR-2 national consultation with multi-stakeholders:

1. The country has been promoting overseas employment schemes to create job opportunities and generate remittances. However, these schemes should be carefully assessed to prevent brain drain, ensuring that workers return and contribute to the economy with their acquired skills.
2. The Employment Fund implements a job guarantee scheme creating pathways for young graduates to stable and secure jobs.
3. Timor-Leste launched its National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security in 2017, focusing on promoting women’s participation in the economy, increasing access to credit, and supporting women’s entrepreneurship. Additionally, the Maubisse Declaration, signed in October 2015, promotes the economic empowerment of rural women in Timor-Leste.

4. A National Youth Employment Strategy has been established, aiming to create job opportunities for young people through skills training, entrepreneurship programmes, and public works projects. The National Youth Policy, approved in 2016, aims to assist rural youth by decentralizing livelihoods and providing viable opportunities outside urban areas.

5. Efforts have been made to support people with disabilities and migrant communities in accessing economic opportunities. Timor-Leste has ratified the International Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, promoting inclusion in education, employment, and other areas of life.

6. The government established a National Migration Policy to protect migrants’ rights and promote their social and economic integration.

7. In 2019, the GoTL announced plans to reduce the poverty rate by 10% and create 300,000 new jobs by 2023.

8. SEFOPE provides training to young people through 23 accredited training centres, meeting market needs and helping trainees secure jobs both domestically and abroad.

9. Job creation for youth is facilitated through public-private sector cooperation, and successful foreign employers are encouraged to invest and create jobs in Timor-Leste.

VNR-1 in 2019 focused on sustainability as an important area of focus. In your opinion, what does it mean in the context of Timor-Leste today?

Timor-Leste as of today is a lower middle-income country. The last four years have shown the fragility of our economic development to external and internal shocks. When the public expenditure was reduced in 2019 and 2020, this has filtered into other sectors such as construction and infrastructure.

The GoTL emphasizes the importance of a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient economy. These interrelated principles are crucial for small island developing states; however, they also involve significant trade-offs. Timor-Leste remains heavily reliant on its oil and gas reserves, which account for over 90% of the country’s revenue. However, these resources are finite and are expected to be depleted within the next decade. The green and blue economy offer an alternative, diversified revenue stream that can help mitigate the country’s dependency on oil.

The La’o Hamutuk, independent think tank based in Dili wrote: “Diversification is not an option; it is the only way forward” (Scheiner, 2021). The stakeholders during the consultations were also in agreement with this viewpoint.

What areas do you believe should be prioritized moving forward?

Unfortunately, today, goals related to inclusive and resilient economy remain aspirations for us. Timor-Leste needs to turn its economic goals into tangible actions. Recognizing that Timor-Leste is still recovering, it is essential to shift from a subsidy-based economy to a resilient and sustainable
one. Focus should be placed on long-term economic development objectives rather than short-term gains that might lead to long-term drawbacks. For this, there needs to be a political will to enforce sound and prudent fiscal policies. In this sense fiscal consolidation and structural reforms to secure fiscal sustainability should be implemented in the coming years. Increasing revenue from domestic tax beyond the Petroleum Fund, and government expenditure rationalization are needed in future budgets to underpin fiscal consolidation. Government spending should prioritize investment projects to enhance the productive capacity of the economy and programmes to protect the poor.

These investments should be aimed to restructure the agriculture, tourism, and renewable energy, while also commercializing and industrializing them. It should concentrate on cultivating the blue economy through the expansion of fisheries and the green economy by adopting environmentally friendly practices. The focus here is not to exploiting the sea but sustainable use it. The promotion of renewable energy, currently costly and ecologically harmful, is crucial. Furthermore, a commitment to human capital development is crucial to ensure a healthy and well-educated workforce capable of sustaining economic growth.

Through structural reforms, creating an economy that is connected to markets, resilient and innovative, generates jobs and revenue in the productive sectors in green and blue economy, and reinvigorate agriculture. There is significant potential for Timor-Leste to develop a green economy. The country's rich biodiversity and natural resources provide a strong foundation for sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and ecotourism initiatives. In agriculture, there is potential for expansion of organic farming and agroforestry practices, which can improve food security, enhance climate resilience, and provide additional income opportunities for rural communities. Supporting small-scale farmers through access to resources, training, and markets can help drive this transition.

In the renewable energy sector, Timor-Leste has abundant solar, hydro, and wind resources that can be harnessed to provide clean, affordable, and reliable energy. Expanding investments in renewable energy projects, particularly in rural areas, can improve access to electricity and create new job opportunities. This would also reduce the country's dependence on fossil fuels, which currently account for the majority of its energy consumption.

Blue economy, defined as sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and job creation, is emerging as a promising sector for Timor-Leste. The blue economy in Timor-Leste is primarily centred around fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, and shipping. Fisheries and aquaculture provide food security and support the livelihoods of a significant proportion of the population. The tourism sector, which is largely driven by marine and coastal attractions, has grown rapidly in recent years, contributing to employment and foreign exchange earnings. Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture can also help to address food security concerns, create jobs, and reduce pressure on wild fish stocks. The development of aquaculture, such as seaweed and fish farming, can provide additional income opportunities for coastal communities while also contributing to the conservation of marine ecosystems.
Timor-Leste's pristine beaches, rich marine biodiversity, and unique cultural heritage make it an ideal destination for **ecotourism**. By promoting sustainable tourism practices, the country can attract more visitors, generate employment, and preserve its natural and cultural assets.

**The private sector should be the primary driver of growth**, while the government's role is to facilitate and establish an attractive environment for both international and local investors. Timor-Leste should be positioned as a desirable investment hub for foreign and domestic investors alike. **Public-private partnerships** should be encouraged to share risks and draw private sector investments. Investment in private equity and backing sectors like agriculture through carefully evaluated investments can stimulate private sector involvement.

**What are the other new and emerging challenges?**

We are becoming increasingly aware of **climate change**, as Timor-Leste is a small-island developing country. Timor-Leste is located in a region prone to natural disasters, and unfortunately, these events have had a devastating impact on the country and its people. The floods and landslides that occurred in April 2021, for example, caused significant damage to homes, infrastructure, and agriculture. Many people were displaced, and some lost their lives. It should be noted the National Adaptation Plan (2020-2030) was approved in 2021 in Timor-Leste to respond to these challenges.

**Technology dynamic** where the economy is relying more and more on technology and electronification. This means now **digital divide** will be even greater between Timor-Leste and other countries. We are still far behind and cannot catch up if we continue with the current speed of digitalization. Timor-Leste has to prepare for this emerging challenge. The economy is not resilient enough to external and internal shocks. We still rely on government expenditure.

The **demographic dividend** aspect is not an emerging topic – as it has been known for a decade at least. Still, we need to focus on that. Our economy is unable to create jobs for youth. Therefore, we need to promote and attract private investment although it will take time. Infrastructure can create jobs for youth. Self-employment, especially for MSMEs. Need to help them to access to credit, access to market and train them – financial literacy, specific technical skills. Promote overseas employment scheme – to get jobs, send remittance. This should continue but should be assessed carefully so we don’t have a brain drain issue. They get their jobs, skills and come back to contribute to the economy. Job guarantee scheme through the Employment Fund.

At present, **MSMEs are the backbone of the economy, providing jobs for the population**. To support this, it is essential to provide training, create markets, and facilitate access to credit for these enterprises. We need to support self-employers to access to credit, access to market and train them – increase financial literacy as well as specific technical skills. Simultaneously, **larger investments** should be directed towards industries focused on export-oriented products, targeting markets in countries such as Australia, China, and Indonesia. This approach will help diversify the economy and pave the way for sustainable development.
8.4. Priorities

Drawing from stakeholder consultations, desk reviews, an SDG Progress Assessment, and expert interviews, the VNR-2 team has identified several priorities. There is greater alignment among stakeholders that the priorities for recovery should be shaped by a **people-centred socioeconomic strategy**, aimed at fostering full and productive employment and ensuring decent work conditions for all. These priorities include unlocking job-rich growth through public finance, engaging the private sector to promote decent work, creating pathways to formality, and investing in climate action for job creation. These strategic areas are crucial in formulating a holistic approach to both recovery and growth.

1. **Focus on agriculture, fisheries, and tourism sectors:** Pay specific attention to the agriculture, fisheries, and tourism sectors as they have the greatest potential for driving structural economic transformation and generating large-scale employment. For translating the prioritization into action, **development and implementation of an investment promotion strategy** targeted at stimulating private investment is needed. This strategy can be coordinated by TradelInvest Timor-Leste (the Investment and Export Promotion Agency of Timor-Leste). The Investment Promotion in Productive Sectors Strategy can tackle different aspects of the business environment, investment, and export promotion in key sectors. TradelInvest already facilitates investments in productive sectors however more work is needed to develop comprehensive plans that integrate between the productive sectors, mainstreams job creation and decent work.

2. **Accelerate structural reforms that aim at building a connected, resilient, and innovative economy by focusing on rural development.**
   a. The Ministry of Justice should expedite the implementation of the **land legislation** and develop support regulations and processes to effectively address land disputes and prevent future conflicts. It is crucial that this law minimizes the exclusion of women, youth, and other vulnerable groups, ensuring equitable ownership of land as a means for economic empowerment.
   b. Reducing **electricity costs** and providing access to reliable and renewable electricity in rural areas is needed.
   c. This should also involve strategic investment in **urban-rural road networks** to improve connectivity and economic opportunities.
   d. Improving basic infrastructure in **key value chains** including cold chains to bridge the gap between urban and rural communities.
   e. Implementation of the Strategic Plan for **National Digital and ICT Development 2032** – specific focus on Goal 11 (enhance national broadband networks and improving the quality and cost of internet connectivity); and Goal 16 (Developing a strategy for the attraction of investment in digital technologies, ICT and Telecommunications).

3. **Address the jobs-skills mismatch in key sectors – agriculture, tourism, blue economy and entrepreneurship.** The country needs experts in various fields, including marine science,
fisheries management, aquaculture, tourism, and maritime transport, to drive sustainable growth in the sector.

a. **Access to quality education and vocational training** in the productive sectors as stipulated in respective sectoral development policies (e.g. Timor-Leste National Tourism Policy 2017-2030, The Strategic Plan of Fisheries and Aquaculture 2012-2030) should be facilitated domestically and for internationally by improving VET and utilizing the existing Human Capital Development Fund.

b. **Develop a skilled migration programme** to encourage the return of the Timorese diaspora, either temporarily or permanently. This could take the form of an exchange or skill transfer project. SEPFOPE and MNEC should lead collaborative initiatives to recruit skilled emigrants for short- or long-term exchange projects, with the objective of transferring valuable skills to local workers in Timor-Leste; this should be done in coordination with other stakeholders to identify the most needed sectors and skills, thereby enabling targeted skill transfer and contributing to the development of key sectors.

4. **Support entrepreneurship and small business development to harness the demographic dividend and empower the youth population.**
   a. Financial support measures such as **low-interest loans** for citizens and reviewing credit laws to facilitate group access to credit. This will stimulate economic activity, reduce unemployment rates, and promote economic growth.
   b. **Empowerment of local communities** by fostering community engagement, promoting local initiatives, and providing resources and support for community-led projects. This can include initiatives for economic development, sustainable practices, and social cohesion.
   c. **Youth empowerment and job creation:** Provide capacity building and self-employment training programs specifically tailored to equip youth with the skills necessary for job creation and entrepreneurship. This can be achieved through the establishment of training centres focused on the industry sector. Additionally, create activities for young people that foster creativity, innovation, and leadership development to unlock their potential. Initiatives such as SEEWAY, Workforce Development Programme, Seasonal Work Programme should be scaled up.

5. **Develop programmes aimed at reducing women’s unemployment and promoting their access to employment in the formal sector** and social security coverage. This includes a focus on women with disabilities, to ensure that they have access to social protection, including with regard to maternity protection.

6. **Revitalizing the agriculture sector is crucial to fostering sustainable growth.** Allocate a larger percentage of the state budget for agriculture to accurately reflect the economic diversification priorities and provide necessary resources for sector development. Construct irrigation systems and invest in agricultural infrastructure to improve production capacity and yield.
   a. Strive for greater self-sufficiency in food production by cultivating a variety of agricultural products for domestic consumption and global markets, including staples,
livestock, fruits and vegetables, and cash crops. Support local food products through training and marketing support, establish a market network for local goods, enhance fishing techniques knowledge, and provide necessary equipment to agricultural groups.

b. Introduce production cycle management practices, establish quality certification for products, standardize production processes, and closely monitor food security groups to ensure consistent quality and safety.

c. Enhance data collection on consumption and production within the agricultural sector to gain a better understanding of its needs and effectively plan interventions.

7. **Enhance opportunities for people with disabilities.** Data and statistics pertaining to employment of people with disabilities in both the private and public sectors remain limited. It is noteworthy, however, that disability organizations and disabled people's organizations have incorporated economic empowerment and subsistence activities into their core programs. Despite these initiatives, many employers lack an understanding of the benefits of employing people with disabilities, as well as the methods to do so effectively. The government, on its part, has yet to establish commercial incentives that would encourage employers to hire individuals with disabilities. Integrate the concept of job coaching into the Secretariat of State for Vocational Training and Employment's (SEFOPE) on-the-job training programmes. This will not only improve employment prospects for people with disabilities but also promote an inclusive and diverse workforce.

8. **Continue investments in climate resilient infrastructure** is key to building resilience to natural disasters and further integrate the National Adaptation Plan into budgetary planning. There should be greater investment in disaster risk reduction measures, including the rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure, and implementation of measures to protect areas at high risk of disasters.
9. Institutions that Deliver for the People

The role of effective institutions and partnerships for development is vital in accelerating the implementation of the SDGs. Through their influence on policy, resource allocation, capacity building, research, and advocacy, institutions can significantly contribute to achieving sustainable development. Throughout the VNR-2 report, SDG 16 and SDG 17 were considered as underpinning factors to deliver for the people. By institutions, the VNR-2 report refers to institutions meeting the needs and expectations of the people they serve including everything public services like healthcare and education, to regulatory oversight and protections, and to social services.

Collectively, the four youth in 2002 expressed a desire for a peaceful, united, corruption-free, and democratic Timor-Leste, emphasizing the need for responsible leadership and unity among the populace.

- Latonia M.L Araujo hoped that by 2020, Timor-Leste will have achieved greater freedom and democracy, and she urged the country’s leaders to act selflessly and work for the benefit of the people. She expressed that love, peace, and collaboration will help build a better nation.
- Bemvinda Da Costa envisioned a Timor-Leste without corruption, hoping that its eradication will lead to improvement in the country by 2020.
- Ivo Jesuino G. Araujo emphasized the importance of mutual understanding to prevent violence, including domestic violence.
- Jose M, Marcal pleaded for unity among the country’s leaders, calling for an end to internal conflict as seen in the past. He also emphasized the need of eradicating corruption and domestic violence.

Under Part 5 of the SDP on Institutional Framework: Public sector management and good governance sub-goal stipulates: ‘By 2030, the public sector in Timor-Leste will be central to building trust in government, which is a prerequisite of nation building’.

9.1. SDG 16 Progress Assessment

Figure 60 SDG 16 and SDG 17 Progress Assessment Snapshot
**SDG 16** aims to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies that are free from fear and violence. SDG 16 was the overarching theme for VNR-1 and the key achievements and challenges related to the goal were extensively reported. Overall, the progress of the SDG 16 is on track however,

*Figure 61 SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions, Progress at the target level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>Reduction of violence and related deaths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>Human trafficking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>Justice for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>Illicit financial and arms flows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>Corruption and bribery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>Effective institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>Inclusive decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>Inclusive global governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>Legal identity and birth registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.10</td>
<td>Public access to information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.a</td>
<td>Capacity to prevent violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.b</td>
<td>Non-discriminatory laws and policies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (ESCAP, 2023b)

The following five targets are on track to be achieved by 2030 if progress is maintained.

- **Target 16.1** aims to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. The number of intentional homicides per 100,000 population decreased from 4 in 2015 to 5.1 in 2016. Data for subsequent years is missing. The target value is set at 29.4.
- **Target 16.2** aims to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against children. The number of detected victims of human trafficking varied, with 20 victims in 2015 and 2 in 2017. No data is available for the remaining years. The target value is 0.
- **Target 16.3** aims to promote the rule of law and equal access to justice. The percentage of unsentenced detainees in the prison population fluctuated from 76.1% in 2015 to 23.82% in 2016 and 23.2% in 2017. No data is available for subsequent years. The target value is set at 0.
- **Target 16.7** aims to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. It is measured by the ratio of female members of parliaments to the female national population. The indicator has shown an increasing trend, reaching 0.8048 in 2022. The target value set is 1.0.
- **Target 16.a** aims to strengthen national institutions to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime. National Human Rights Institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles consistently receive a rating of "Yes" (1), indicating compliance.

One target is showing a regression and needs to be reversed:
• **Target 16.6** focuses on effective institutions, measured by government expenditures as a percentage of the original approved budget. The indicator shows fluctuations, with spending exceeding the budget in 2016 and under-spending in subsequent years, particularly in 2022 when expenditures dropped to 54.48%. The target value is 100.

For the remaining targets, there is a lack of data to assess progress.

• 16.9 Percentage of Children Whose Birth is Registered: The percentage of children under the age of 5 whose birth is registered with a civil authority was reported as 60.4%. The target value set by ESCAP is 100.

This chapter explores the ‘enabling environment for SDGs implementation’. The underlying principle is that effective service delivery and entrepreneurial diversification can be achieved through comprehensive government reforms, policy coherence, digitization, and the creation of appropriate financial structures.

To delve deeper into these topics, the VNR-2 team conducted interviews with three experts. The Minister of Finance of Timor-Leste on development financing, the Commission of Civil Services on institutional and civil service reforms. The team also consulted with a representative from a Civil Society Organization to gain insights into ongoing reforms.

This chapter presents the findings from these expert interviews, national and local consultations, and an extensive desk review.

9.2. Progress and challenges: Financing the SDGs

**Rui Augusto Gomes:** We need to show that Timor-Leste is a reliable partner and ensuring that investing in the country and its people produce results and contribute to global stability, reduction in global inequality, and the common socioeconomic progress of the world. Lessons learnt from the key policy and programme reforms is that before making systems more complex, we should optimize and improve what is already in place.

Rui Augusto Gomes has been the Minister of Finance for the 8th Constitutional Government since November 2020. He has served as an economic advisor to President General Taur Matan Ruak, Chief of Staff, and the Minister of Planning and Finance from 2017-2018. His career also includes eleven years at UNDP heading the Pro-Poor Policy Unit and acting as an Assistant Country Director and three years as Economic Specialist at the Asia-Pacific Resource Centre in Bangkok. He is a seasoned economic researcher and policymaker specializing in poverty, human capital, structural change and fiscal policy in Timor-Leste.

Several previous chapters in this report with sector-specific focuses underscored the necessity of increasing investment, enhancing the efficiency of public expenditure, and
funding high-impact interventions. Now, we’d like to delve more deeply into the financial aspect of SDGs in the coming years. Could you please provide some insight into the current state of SDG financing in Timor-Leste?

The Public Expenditure Review conducted in 2021 pointed that if Timor-Leste’s public expenditure continues to grow at the current pace of 28% per year, the Petroleum Fund could be depleted by the end of the decade. Therefore, in addition to improve fiscal sustainability and the quality of public spending, the GoTL needs to be innovative and use various strategies can be employed to expand the fiscal capacity for the SDGs. These include aligning public spending with new priorities, implementing tax reforms to support sectors crucial to the economy and public policy, and introducing initiatives that encourage a shift from informal to formal economic structures. Furthermore, ODA in the form of both grants and concessional loans, among other approaches can be sought.

First, I would like to discuss about improving domestic resource mobilization. It would depend on how domestic resource mobilization is defined. The reality is that Timor-Leste funds its expenditure mainly with domestic resources, since the ODA and the external loans’ disbursements that we plan to get in 2024 is less than 10% of the total State Budget. It is true that most of the State Budget is financed through the Petroleum Fund, circa 60% for 2024 estimates. Thus, the main challenge is to extend the life of the Fund and diversify the sources of domestic revenue. This includes the creation of new taxes, in particular over activities that produce negative social impacts like environmental pollution and degradation, consumption of goods associated with health problems, but also of new tax instruments that allow to identify and reach wealthy citizens with higher capacity to pay more taxes, who currently are out of our radar. However, although the creation of new taxes and/or the increase of tax rates to those who can contribute more is part of the strategy for domestic revenue mobilization, strengthening the sustainability of Timor-Leste public finances must first and foremost rely on the expansion of the tax base by bringing more citizens into the formal economy, creating decent, well-paid, productive jobs, supporting the development of national industries MSMEs, and investing in the economic sector where we have comparative advantage like the blue economy, the agro-industry or the ecotourism.

Second, in terms of ODA, it is declining and a similar trend affecting all developing countries. Particularly following the Covid-19 pandemic, donor countries have changed their priorities and the size of their ODA budget to support their internal needs and to increase the capacity of assistance in case of future health crisis. Moreover, we have seen a decrease in ODA financing worldwide and, in the case of Timor-Leste, as it develops and grows, development partner push for other alternative sources of financing, like concessional loans and grants from multilaterals. But also, it is my belief that this is the result of the efforts we have made to strengthen our public financial management systems, our own financing capacity, and the channelling of our partners’ support through the State Budget – direct budget support. Every year in June or July there is a Development Partners Conference to discuss what has been done, what should be prioritized, and other high-level issues regarding the implementation of the SDGs.
What can be done to increase the ODA in the coming years?

Timor-Leste needs to take advantage of its geo-strategic position in the region, by maintaining its strategic partnerships with its traditional partners (e.g., EU, Australia, USA, Korea, Japan) and, at the same time, seeking to build new relationships with emerging global players including China and ASEAN to assist the country where the former donors were not able to assist. Also, Timor-Leste needs to strengthen its financial system to channel more resources through the State Budget and its own national systems, advocating for more country programmable aid in international institutions and discussion forum, showing that Timor-Leste is a reliable partner, and ensuring that investing in the country and its people produce results and contribute to global stability, reduction in global inequality, and the common socio-economic progress of the world.

How about the current implementation of the INFF? What is working well and what is not working well so far?

The INFF process is useful as it supports identifying innovative financing possibilities. In Timor-Leste, the INFF was launched recently, and the state of implementation is rather low, leaving apart the initiatives contained in it that were already being implemented by the GoTL. Apart from the inherent difficulties to further mobilize domestic revenue for a small-island development state and a least developed country like Timor-Leste, some of the INFF’s recommendations are beyond the capacity of the Government to implement, including the establishment of blue carbon markets. Other areas like the introduction or increase of health taxes have already been applied. National Remittance Mobilisation Strategy has also been approved. The INFF is a solid product, but it lacks a roadmap or clear implementation plan to materialize it into sequenced and costed effective policy actions. Therefore, further work is needed to draw a more specific roadmap.

One of the main obstacles in effective service delivery, particularly for initiatives like the School Feeding Programme was the recurring issues of budget approval, disbursement, and procurement delays. What factors have been contributing to these delays?

As the only Government procurement body, the National Procurement Commission (NPC), which is an autonomous public entity under the tutelage of the Ministry of Finance, has completed 349 procurement processes in the last five years (2018—2023). The number of procurement processes is significantly higher compared to the period under previous governments, even with very limited human resources with procurement qualifications. However, most of the delays in the procurement process can be explained by the absence of proper procurement plan at the line ministries. As a result of poor planning, the NPC receives most of procurement requests by the line ministries (i.e., the project owners) in the third and fourth quarters of the year. Normally, a procurement process takes four to six months to complete depending on the complexity of the project, as well as the response provided by the project owner to technical questions raised during the bidding process. If a project is worth US$ 5 million and above, the Audit Court has to approve, and this will add to further delays. As with the quality issue of the projects, the responsibility falls upon the project owner
and or the National Development Agency. The latter verifies the price/cost of the bidding
documents. This contributes to more delays in the process. The NPC ensures that all the procurement
processes follow the best international quality standards. Furthermore, delays in the procurement
process can be attributed to bureaucratic and administrative approval processes based on Decree
Law 10/2005. This decree law was then simplified in the Decree Law 22/2022. However, the
procurement period is still lengthy due to the constraints referred to above. The NPC have suggested
minor revisions to the Decree Law 22/2022 in order to expedite the whole process.

There are also several reasons for lower rates of budget execution. The tendency to increase the
State Budget without being accompanied by adequate implementation capacity might end up in a
downward trend in budget execution. The general pattern that we see in other countries shows that
larger budgets generally end up in lower execution rates. Other factors include especially in the past
three years, is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on public works and infrastructure
development – which traditionally absorbs an important share of Timor-Leste’s budget. The
impossibility to approve the budget following the normal cycle in some years, thus forcing the State
to function with the duodecimal regime, and the proliferation of public entities included in the
budget, some of which especially Public Agencies and Institutes having ad-hoc mission result in lower
capacity to deliver than the line ministries and secretaries of state.

Could you explain the progress of the various public financial management reforms the
GoTL has been undertaking? And what are the emerging lessons?

The Ministry of Finance has been working on the Public Finance Management Reform, which is a key
priority of the Program of the 8th Constitutional Government. There is limited use of evidence in the
preparation and allocation of budgets, which contributes to allocative inefficiencies in spending.
Therefore, to address this issue, we have introduced five different markers in our public financial
management system (gender, children, climate, nutrition and value chain). I would say that the
stage of development of the tagging system is middle-low. With the introduction of the markers, we
can already produce some analysis about how public resources are planned to be used in order to
address the need of some of the most vulnerable sections of the population and critical global issues.

Nevertheless, the system still needs to be developed to allow for more detailed analysis and be
more comprehensive. The gender marker, for example, although it covers the full budget perimeter,
is not applied at the activity rather at the subprogram level. The other markers, despite being applied
at the activity level, they cover only a limited part of the budget perimeter. Moreover, tagging
guidelines and an initial investment to thoroughly tag all budget lines accurately and the use of
evidence-based analysis would improve the quality of the data generated. Finally, the markers are
currently embedded in the Dalan ba Futuru system but not in Financial Management System, which
means that budget reallocations are not easily tracked using the markers. That means the actual
expenditure cannot be easily analysed just by using them. It still can be done but the exercise requires
a lot of manual work. The main lesson learnt from this exercise is that before making systems
more complex – in this case, for example, by adding new markers – we should optimize and improve what is already in place. Hence, the implementation gaps just keep accumulating.

There are several discussions about the need to have fiscal sustainability and a gradual exit from Petroleum Fund excess withdrawals. Given this strategy, what are the synergies or trade-offs between increasing the social sectors financing and ensuring fiscal consolidation?

While there's potential for the Petroleum Fund to expand and prolong the timeline for government expenditure through additional revenue from new oil or gas fields, we're currently facing limitations in terms of broader financing options. Yet, I don't see a trade-off between investing in social sectors and ensuring fiscal consolidation. Prioritizing social sectors such as health, education, and social protection is crucial in building a productive labour force that can contribute to the country's socioeconomic development.

The impact isn't only through the production of goods and services in the private market, but it's also felt in the generation of income for families, profit-making that aids the growth of MSMEs, and the contribution of taxes and social contributions. By remaining healthy, citizens reduce the strain on the public health care system, and as law-abiding individuals, they avoid participating in criminal activities or conflicts, which incurs both direct and indirect public expenses.

As I mentioned, increasing financing for social sectors can be effectively executed by expanding Timor-Leste's tax base bringing more citizens into the formal economy; creating decent, well-paid, productive jobs; supporting the development of national industries and MSMEs; and investing in the economic sectors where Timor-Leste has comparative advantage like the blue economy, the agro-industry or the ecotourism for which quality education and health are essential.

As an independent policy analyst, Guteriano Neves warned while Timor-Leste's oil wealth funds development, it doesn't solve all the country’s complex challenges. Instead, it raises issues like overspending, rapid expenditure pressure, institutional erosion, policy misdirection, resource misallocation, and political deadlock, which collectively hinder economic diversification and long-term development (Neves, 2022).

How is the decentralization reform, which aims to enhance municipal autonomy in service delivery and finance management, progressing? What are the next steps?

This is a rather complicated issue. People in various locations have diverse preferences for public goods and services. This choice often reflects their preference for either a more private-market-oriented production or a more robust public sector, affecting local tax levels and public expenditure.

In Timor-Leste, we grapple with challenges on two fronts. Firstly, we need to ensure that subnational human resources can effectively manage and provide services typically associated with decentralization, such as education and health. For instance, it's a challenge to find skilled professionals to run a public hospital in Lautém or a prestigious national university. Moreover, we must
consider how to compensate professionals like doctors, teachers, or firefighters working in remote areas where facilities are often inferior to those in Dili.

Secondly, on the financing front, we need to establish a fair system where citizens requesting more public services contribute more through taxes or fees. If goods and services are decentralized, they should not be primarily funded by the central state budget. The core challenge is that Timor-Leste isn’t yet ready to delegate tax management and collection to municipalities, let alone creating taxes, determining tax rates, or borrowing. This presents risks that we currently don’t have mitigation measures for. Building trust will take time, but piloting some minor taxes, like a circulation tax in a few municipalities, could give us an idea of how far Timor-Leste can go on with it.

In this case, how should we move forward to ensure public services are closer to citizens in a decentralized manner?

We should ask this question first. Do the Timorese citizens really have different preferences for the provision of public goods and services to the extent that justify on efficiency grounds the decentralization of the administration? In the end, we are a small country and maybe more homogenous than we think. Research about citizen’s preferences should come first to assess how much and what needs to be decentralized. In any case, if some services need to be, the allocation of the human resources needed to produce public goods and services in the quality and amount required by municipalities should come first. Financial arrangements of what part is centrally funded and what from local administrations own budgets can come later. However, to make the former possible there are a lot of things that must precede it: training enough professionals, probably reforming the civil service so that they are directly hired by local governments, offer them attractive working conditions but also improving public infrastructure and standards of living out of Dili so that living in other municipalities is attractive for doctors, teachers, nurses, etc.

You were instrumental in adopting the Economic Recovery Plan in August 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Now looking back, how would you describe the successes and lessons from the Economic Recovery Plan?

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 Programme of the 8th Constitutional Government. This is the reason for the approval of the Economic Recovery Plan. The fact that the State Budget was passed by the Parliament in the first quarter of 2021 and promulgated by the President marked the end of the political impasse and we had expected an economic growth of 4%. As such, the 2021 budget was based on programmes—a transition from the item-based budget, that has been in place since the Restauration of Independence, and it is guided by the Economic Recovery Plan. To finance the Economic Recovery Plan meant it was necessary to reallocate some of the General State to reinforce the Covid-19 Fund and the contingency reserve also implied that some programme activities were postponed till the following year.
The Economic Recovery Plan encompassed four short-term measures to protect employment and secure income for struggling families and companies until December 2020. Alongside these, we implemented **71 structural measures designed to recover and transform the economy in the medium and long term**. As a result, combined with other emerging measures to combat, manage, and mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Economic Recovery Plan has played a significant role in helping citizens to overcome the health, economic, and social crises.

Indeed, these measures actively mitigated the negative economic and social impacts by promoting the sustainable increase of local and national production, especially in putting domestic food supply on the country’s governance agenda. These measures also helped to preserve jobs by supporting companies most affected by the crisis, providing humanitarian assistance to thousands of families which significantly reduced the risk of hunger, malnutrition, and extreme poverty.

The Economic Recovery Plan measures sought to ensure no one was left behind, contributing to Timor-Leste emerging from the pandemic crisis stronger, more cohesive, and more united. The 2.9% GDP growth rate in 2021 stands as a testament to our economic recovery.

**What are the priorities for ensuring Timor-Leste achieves key SDGs by 2030? Which government reforms are needed first, which policies should be adopted/revised and who should do it?**

We need to invest more and more in human capital and in sectors that generate higher economic growth rates, whilst at the same time trying to promote environmental sustainability through investing in blue economy, ecotourism, and agro-industries. Future governments need to keep working on establishing conditions for a peaceful and inclusive society, in particular bridging the rural-urban divide. Timor-Leste also needs to strengthen its public sector to overcome corruption, good management has to become the tone in public institutions, and good governance and the rule of law needs to be the guiding principle in the country. I think we are making progress to improve our data collection and analytical systems to be able to measure and track the achievements done regarding the Agenda 2030, but also to identify what is missing or need to be reinforced.

Operationalising this would require getting all citizens on board for the national cause, that is, the delivery of the Agenda 2030 is possible with the cooperation from all segments of society. The allocation of budgetary resources in 2024 should be the beginning of the process of achieving most of the SDGs. In the meantime, we should reinforce our M&E capacities in particular regarding the planning, programming, budgeting system and better aligning its M&E function with the tracking of the SDGs, so that we will be able to make better budget allocations to those SDGs whose results are not being achieved.

The integration of Timor-Leste into the ASEAN membership can also serve as a platform to advocate for new partnerships and financing for the SDGs, as well as development in general, including the transfer of know-how and learning from other countries that share similar characteristics how they have performed with regard to delivering on the SDGs. Finally, **we need to work better with**
the development partners, and in particular with the UN agencies, to avoid duplications – which unfortunately still happen a lot to promote more joint programming and country programmable aid, and ensure that development partners focus on the areas in which they specialize and have a comparative advantage. The Prime Minister’s Office should continue to lead the reform agenda needed to deliver the SDGs in time, having the Ministry of Finance as the main partner for M&E and financing aspects. Currently, planning functions are split across several government entities which results in duplication and lack of coordination. This structure should be streamlined and rethought thoroughly.

9.3. Progress and challenges: Inclusive and Effective Institutions

Another set of underlying challenges affecting the SDGs and SDP implementation was related to good governance. These include the need for improving coordination in planning and implementation of policies, institutional capacities, and the ability to make evidence-based decisions. These issues relate to financing and budgeting but also the civil service function. Therefore, the VNR-2 team interviewed Maria Oliveira to explore in detail about the ongoing public administrative reforms including human resource management and development.

Maria Oliveira: The most significant gap in policy and programme implementation relates to the digital literacy of most civil servants. Changing the organizational culture poses another challenge, as implementing new tools and strategies requires more time initially, though they bring long-term benefits.

Maria Oliveira currently serves as the Executive Secretary (General Director) for the Civil Service Commission. She has an extensive career in civil service. Previously, she served as the Chief of the Department of Planning, Administration, Logistics, and Finance of the Civil Service Commission and the Chief of Cabinet (National Director) of Support to the Executive Secretary of the Civil Service Commission Secretariat.

How do you interpret these postcards penned by the youth of Timor-Leste in 2002?

The postcards prompt me to evaluate the performance, responsiveness, and accountability of our institutions. They urge a critical look at our institutional structure, celebrate our achievements, and pinpoint areas needing improvement. The goal is to ensure our institutions optimally serve our people’s needs. A recurring theme in the postcards is the challenge posed by corruption. In this regard, the GoTL has instituted several anti-corruption measures, including setting up the Committee Against Corruption, the Scientific Police for Criminal Investigation, the PDHJ, the Audit Court, and the Civil Service Commission. These bodies, though, still lack the experience and skills to probe major corruption cases and tend to concentrate on minor, politically safe issues. Concerning the Civil Service Commission recruitment process, there are frequent public grievances about corruption. To address
or diminish these, the Commission has, since its second mandate, been implementing e-recruitment and merit-based selection, which extends to career progression via e-recruitment tests.

The VNR-2 consultations indicated that the capacities of local governments and their human resources are inadequate. There is a call for decentralization. How can the Timor-Leste government address this in the next 4-5 years?

Currently, municipalities can implement services including hiring for schools and local health roles, agriculture extension works and public infrastructure works (up to $500,000 annually) and local programmes such as the Merenda Escolar. As the VNR consultations on decentralization progress and challenges indicate, sufficient delegation of functions, insufficient funding and procurement challenges, lack of human resources remain challenging.

There is a need to delegate more functions to municipalities for effective public service delivery. This necessitates facilitating civil servants' transfers to municipalities. The government should create the conditions that allow civil servants to be stationed in municipalities and administrative posts. Many Dili-based civil servants hail from these municipalities, and with the right incentives, they may consider transferring back to their hometowns. Additionally, the Government must create a comprehensive plan with clear strategies, targets, and timelines for implementing decentralization. Regular progress assessment will be key to identify areas needing adjustments to achieve the desired results.

### VNR Consultations 12: Concerns about the decentralization progress in Timor-Leste

- **Need to align budget with municipal development plans**
- **Insufficient funding and procurement challenges to finance programmes**
- **Lack of human resources in municipal and local levels**
- **Greater clarity needed in Decentralization policies**
- **Need to improve monitoring and evaluation system**

The consultation with local communities in Oecusse, Liquica, and Baucau presents several key challenges concerning legal frameworks, municipal planning, budgeting, procurement, and infrastructural issues.

In Liquica, there are issues related to the legal framework and municipal instruments. While laws exist, the central issue lies in their implementation, indicating a potential disconnect between policy creation at the central level and its execution at the municipal level. The belief that central governments are not serious about delegating competencies as per the law further amplifies this concern. Regarding municipal planning, while investment plans are in place, they are impeded by insufficient funding, potentially limiting the implementation of strategic initiatives. Procurement challenges are rooted in the misalignment between municipal procurement rules and actual practice, with the national level managing budget plans below $500,000 contrary to stipulations. Furthermore, the budget allocation does not seem to align with the municipal priority plan, hinting at a top-down approach in budget allocation rather than a participatory budgeting process.
In Baucau, the challenges are primarily infrastructural and related to fiscal decentralization. Poor internet speed and inconsistent electricity supply potentially hinder the provision of basic services and impede technological advancement and economic development. The funds being centralized in the central government point to issues of fiscal decentralization and local autonomy, which can adversely impact the municipality’s ability to respond to local needs and priorities effectively. The lack of standardized municipal urban roads might indicate issues with infrastructure development and maintenance, affecting mobility and connectivity within the municipality.

The multi-stakeholder national consultation on decentralization surfaced several issues that span political instability, policy implementation, human resources, monitoring, evaluation, and planning at both the national and municipal levels:

- The consultation highlighted political instability across various government institutions as a major impediment to effective service delivery. This instability, manifested through changing governance methods, has the potential to disrupt continuity in public services, hampering their efficiency and effectiveness.
- The consultation pointed out a lack of human resources, with some personnel not assigned to suitable areas of work and facilities being inadequate. This suggests the need for a more strategic approach to human resource management, focusing on aligning individuals’ skills with appropriate roles and ensuring adequate resource provision for efficient operation.
- The multi-stakeholders raised concerns about the quality of monitoring and evaluation at the national level, indicating that feedback mechanisms to both national and municipal levels are suboptimal. This could hinder the improvement of public service delivery and policy implementation.
- There’s ambiguity regarding the decentralization of certain services such as those related to agriculture. The question of whether these services should be managed at the municipal or national level implies the need for greater clarity in decentralization policies.
- Finally, the report highlights challenges in the formulation and approval of the Municipality Plan. The intent to involve various directors and department heads in the planning process is a positive step towards participatory planning, although the plan does not pass through the National Parliament.

The VNR consultations also recommended having skilled human resources in vital sectors like education and health. Can you elaborate on this a bit more?

As a member of the Civil Service Commission, I can confirm our focus on improving human resources. In the past 4-5 years, the Civil Service Commission has helped public administration organizations in devising their staffing profiles to ascertain personnel needs and develop recruitment and training strategies. There is proposed legislation to improve staff recruitment and mandate a clear definition of staffing needs, which is pending government approval.
In terms of human resources, it is crucial to increase civil servant mobility from the national to the municipal level. As municipal structures gain more competence in delivering public services, priority should be given to stationing civil servants in these municipalities. However, in addition to the existing **gender gap in the civil service**, this might pose difficulties for female employees to move unless a comprehensive support for relocation for jobs is provided for the whole family.

**Figure 62 Number of public servants (permanent and non-permanent), 2023**

As of May 2023, there were a total of 36,198 employees. There is a significant disparity in gender representation across both employment categories. In the permanent employees category, 18,435 are male, and 9,268 are female, illustrating a gender imbalance in favour of males. Similarly, among non-permanent employees, there are 4,908 males compared to 3,587 females.

Of the total number of public servants, only 2.4% were aged 18-30 years old.

*We can see that gender gap in civil service is quite large. Could you provide an update on the representation of women in decision-making and leadership positions in Timor-Leste?*

Following the 2018 national election, we have seen positive developments in terms of female representation in government. Currently, 40% of parliamentarians are women, reflecting a notable increase. Furthermore, women make up 33% of members in local *Suco* (village) councils, indicating progress in their participation at the grassroots level. However, it is important to note that when it comes to the representation of women in leadership positions, there are still large gaps. Out of 442 *Suco* Chiefs, only 21 are women, highlighting the need for further efforts to promote gender balance and equal opportunities in leadership roles. Also, from the 13 Presidents of Municipalities, only one President is female.

One significant highlight worth mentioning is the commitment made by the Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration (STAE) to ensure greater female representation in the electoral process. STAE has pledged to have 50% of polling station staff composed of women, which is a commendable step toward increasing female trust and confidence in the electoral process. By having more women...
involved in the administration of polling stations, it enhances inclusivity and helps promote gender equity in the democratic processes of the country.

Timor-Leste is investing in **local development and capacity strengthening to reduce the divide between urban and rural areas**. Decentralization is a key component of this investment, and 13 designated Municipalities are being established to provide public services, create new opportunities for democratic participation, promote strong and accountable State institutions, and create an enabling environment for the private sector to grow in rural areas.

The development of a Gender Baseline Study in conjunction with recent CEDAW recommendations yields to a **legislative roadmap for National Parliament to establish clear guidelines for a legislative strategy to strengthen women’s rights**.

**Gender-responsive budgeting** in Timor-Leste includes specific gender requirements in Budget Circulars, budget preparation, budget review processes, budget monitoring, and budget reporting. The government has conducted an analysis of expenditures versus resources allocated for gender equality. The Gender-responsive Working Group made nine submissions on the state budget to the National Parliament (World Bank, 2020).

**Box 16. Gender equality in policymaking: The case of Guilhermina Saldanha, the first female President of Municipality in Timor-Leste.**

Guilhermina Saldanha is serving as the first and only female President of a Municipality in the country. Her journey in breaking gender barriers and assuming a leadership role is an inspiring case study.

Her political career began with her involvement in community development initiatives. She actively participated in various grassroots organizations, advocating for women’s empowerment, social justice, and local governance. Her continuous work to improving the lives of marginalized communities led her to pursue a career in politics.

She highlighted: “**In my family, we have equal opportunities and respect for each member. As the eldest daughter, I continue the tradition of respecting the hierarchy, just like my mother and we all value the importance of family dynamics and mutual respect. This gave me an opportunity to be confident**”.

Her political career has not been without challenges. She explains how she became the first female President of a Municipality: “**In 2020, I applied for the position of President of the Authority of Dili Municipality. The competition was intense, with numerous political candidates competing for the role, including two women. Despite facing challenges and protests which claimed that the position should be held by a man, I persevered. It took approximately five months for me to be inaugurated**”. She faced cultural and societal barriers that questioned women’s leadership capabilities. She highlighted that
it is not easy for women to compete with men and access opportunities in today's society. Gender bias and societal expectations can create barriers for women in politics and hinder their career advancement.

As the President of a Municipality, she made significant contributions to her local community with notable advancements in socioeconomic development. She has prioritized infrastructure development, improved access to education and healthcare services, and initiated programs to alleviate poverty and create economic opportunities for marginalized communities. Recognizing the importance of community participation in decision-making, Guilhermina Saldanha has actively engaged with citizens, civil society organizations, and local stakeholders.

Implementing a legal and policy framework (CEDAW, NAP 1325) that facilitates the comprehensive and efficient participation of women, and offers equal leadership opportunities across political, economic, and public domains. The 2017 Timorese Electoral Law for Parliamentary Elections upheld the quota system that was initiated in 2012, demanding a minimum of one woman for every three candidates. By 2022, women accounted for 40% of the parliament, significantly higher than the regional average of 19% and the global average of 26%. This achievement aligns with SDG target 5.5. However, the representation of women at local levels is insufficient, with only 4.6% of Suco (village) Councils Chiefs being women.

Data from the 2022 Presidential Elections indicates active political involvement of Timorese women. The first round of the presidential elections witnessed female participation exceeding male participation (women: 77.91% /men: 76.65%). Despite this, the representation of women in senior positions at the executive level remains alarmingly low. In October 2021, the SEII, in partnership with CSOs, introduced the “Strategy Framework of Strengthening Women’s Leadership and Participation in Elections.

Can you elaborate on the challenges encountered in the planning and execution of national programs in Timor-Leste?

There is a notable discrepancy between the planning and execution of national programmes. Plans are often ambitious and broad in scope but executed in limited areas. Our plans need to align more realistically with our execution capacity. The most significant gap in policy and programme implementation relates to the digital literacy of most civil servants. A wider understanding of current ICT tools would be essential in executing numerous public service-related activities.

There is a disconnect between the macro stages of implementation and control, such as linking global objectives, goal definition, and operational activities, which often suffer from poor communication and documentation. Changing the organizational culture poses another challenge, as implementing new tools and strategies requires more time initially, though they bring long-term benefits.

The VNR-2 consultations show that ensuring access for all vulnerable citizens and addressing systemic shortcomings in various areas such as youth empowerment, women’s rights, disability
inclusion, and LGBTIQ equality is crucial. The group consultations also highlight the need for systemic changes in **societal attitudes and legal frameworks** to accommodate the diverse needs of marginalized communities and promote inclusivity.

Ultimately, I would like to add that an effective implementation of the national policies and public services require **a robust M&E framework and tools** to assess the implementation of each action plans. A robust monitoring will not only help ensure the implementation is strong and efficient but will also allow rapid adjustment and regular improvements. This is one area we can significantly improve in ensuring institutions in Timor-Leste deliver for the people.

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<tr>
<th>VNR Consultations 13: Key setbacks facing effective institutions</th>
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<tr>
<td>The VNR-2 team held extensive consultations on the challenges, progress, and priorities of respective SDGs in Timor-Leste. Several challenges expressed by various groups.</td>
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The **youth** groups noted the **lack of policy assessment** and capacity building for the civil service is of concern. It points to a systemic shortcoming in policy follow-up and professional development for those charged with the implementation of these policies. Furthermore, **the lack of sustained youth empowerment policies** suggests the need for comprehensive, long-term strategies to keep youth involved in decision-making processes consistently. The challenge of capacitating youth at ASEAN and international levels also highlights the need for programmes that equip youth with skills to compete and contribute on global platforms.

In the case of **organizations for women and gender equality**, the consultation outcomes show the patriarchal system and reluctance of political parties to entrust women with leadership positions reflect **deep-seated cultural and structural barriers**. Moreover, the unplanned implementation of budgets allocated for gender equality indicates a gap in strategic planning and execution. Lastly, the incidental capacity building and limited focus on Dili for socialization/training activities underscore the need for systematic, inclusive, and geographically widespread capacity development programmes for women.

**Organizations for people with disabilities** have highlighted the absence of sign language translators in judicial proceedings and a lack of understanding by National Police on how to assist victims with disabilities demonstrate considerable accessibility and sensitivity gaps within the justice system. This extends to judges’ insufficient knowledge in handling cases involving people with disabilities, particularly...
sexual abuse cases against women with disabilities. Lack of service documents for people with disabilities at the municipal level and an ineffective case service system amplify these issues.

For the LGBTIQ community, the absence of laws protecting the LGBTIQ community, widespread misunderstanding about sexual orientation, and continued discrimination indicate societal and legal barriers. The lack of consistent confidence in the justice system among the LGBTIQ community may stem from these challenges. Furthermore, the lack of outreach to rural areas restricts the spread of necessary information and resources.

9.4. Priorities

Based on stakeholder consultations, desk reviews, an SDG Progress Assessment, and expert interviews, a set of priorities has been identified in the areas of enhancing public financial management, streamlining the decentralization process, and promoting institutional inclusiveness. Each of these areas significantly influences the implementation of SDGs in the country, leading to a greater number of priorities.

Continuing the public financial management reforms:

1. Similar to the VNR-1 recommendation, the VNR-2 also prioritizes improving fiscal management and the quality of government spending as a key concern. Given previous chapters in VNR-2 have prioritized increasing funding and investment in key sectors (i.e., food and nutrition security, social protection, health, education, reducing GBV, WASH, promoting private sector and jobs), rebalancing government spending and reallocating resources on these sectors should be the main exercise for the incoming Government.
   - Increase financial allocation to sectors with growth potential, such as agriculture, tourism, commerce, and industry, which currently account for only 1% of total expenditure.
   - Implement measures to control rising rigid expenditures, especially legally binding ones. This involves managing potential risks related to salaries, professional services, fuel costs, and pensions. Look for opportunities to consolidate spending on goods and services and implement procurement reforms to enhance competitiveness and transparency.

2. Assess the impact of increasing institutional fragmentation on decision-making and implement measures to mitigate it. This could include developing an allocation formula based on needs and implementation capacities, and considering consolidation of autonomous public agencies (World Bank, 2021a).

3. Improve the production and use of administrative data, ensuring timely, relevant, and high-quality data availability. Encourage Parliament to perform monitoring and community engagement, and ministries to conduct comprehensive evaluations of their annual plans.

4. Facilitate the transfer of existing technologies from ASEAN countries to enhance local capabilities. Prioritize investment in technology infrastructure for digitalization and develop a
skilled digital workforce to foster a conducive environment for technology adoption and innovation.

Decentralization:

1. **The Government must update a comprehensive plan with clear strategies, targets, and timelines for implementing decentralization.** This plan should focus on financial, human resources and capacity building strategies especially in local service delivery and programme implementation.

2. This plan must be based on a **renewed consensus among the central government and municipal authorities** regarding the control and management of financial resources. Prior to consultations and reaching consensus, conduct a baseline survey and a feasibility assessment on the decentralization capacities at local levels.

3. **Once consensus reached, establish inter-ministerial agreements to accelerate the decentralization process,** with the goal of creating one-stop service centres at the municipal level. Continue building on the Decentralization initiatives by the Ministry of State Administration and the National Parliament which already conducted feasibility studies in establishing One Stop Shops in Timor-Leste; and digital capacity and needs assessments.

4. **Update the municipal development plans in line with the SDGs/SDP by focusing on relevant goals, in the form of localised SDGs.** These plans should be accompanied by cost analysis and target and results indicators. The Medium-Term Plan and the ongoing public financial management reforms should align with the updated Decentralization Plan. This exercise can start with three to four pilot municipalities based on the ongoing Decentralization initiatives by the Ministry of State Administration and the National Parliament.

5. Following development of local plans, **endorse the Municipal Level Public Financial Management Law** to allow for more resources to be allocated at village and municipal levels for performing regular functions. This would contribute to the goal of improved service delivery and overall functioning of local administrative units.

6. **Support institutions at the national and local levels in adopting ICT solutions** to increase efficiency, improve coordination, reduce time spent in accessing government services, and build infrastructure for national data systems.

7. **Support the National Institute of Public Administration (INAP),** a key government institution under the Ministry of State Administration responsible for human resources training in the civil service. There should be coordinated support in strengthening the INAP’s modules, training deliveries and results including topics such as monitoring and evaluation, planning, involving citizens for accountability and decision-making and financial management.

8. **The need for improved M&E and data collection systems at sub-national levels were highlighted during the national consultations.** In addition, it is important to involve youth groups, CSOs, and local communities in the evaluation processes.
Inclusive institutions:

9. **Emphasize gender equality and youth representation in decision-making.** The Law on Local Power and Administrative Decentralization (2021) and the Municipal Electoral Law (2021) could take inspiration from the Electoral Law for Parliamentary Elections, incorporating a quota system to mandate a minimum number of positions for women. Recognizing the capacity gaps at municipal and village levels, the GoTL and CSO networks like Rede Feto could initiate training and educational programs. These programs would aim to empower women and youth groups, providing them with essential leadership skills, such as public speaking, political campaigning, policy development, and negotiation. These initiatives should align with the GoTL’s fundamental efforts to enhance women’s economic empowerment and youth empowerment.

10. Leveraging Partnerships for the SDGs

10.1. SDG 17 Progress Assessment

**SDG 17** aims to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development. There are 19 Targets and 25 Indicators for SDG 17. Of those, Timor-Leste is on track to achieve two targets, needs to accelerate the progress of six targets and showing reverse trends in three targets. In total, five targets could not be assessed due to lack of sufficient data points.

*Figure 63 SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals, Progress at target level*

| 17.12 | Duty-free market access for LDCs |
| 17.19 | Statistical capacity |
| 17.3  | Additional financial resources |
| 17.4  | Debt sustainability |
| 17.8  | Capacity building for ICT |
| 17.10 | Multilateral trading system (WTO) |
| 17.17 | Partnerships (public, private, CSO) |
| 17.18 | National statistics availability |
| 17.1  | Tax and other revenue collection |
| 17.6  | Science and technology international cooperation |
| 17.9  | Capacity building for SDGs |
| 17.2  | ODA commitment by developed countries |
| 17.5  | Investment promotion for LDCs |
| 17.7  | Transfer of technologies |
| 17.11 | Exports of developing countries |
| 17.14 | Policy coherence for sustainable development |

**Note:** Targets 17.13, 17.15, 17.16 are reported at international levels and therefore not included in the country-level SDG Progress Assessment.
The progress and challenges relate to statistical capacity and national statistical availability were discussed in detail in Chapter 3.2 of this report. This section focuses on Timor-Leste’s international partnerships and private sector engagement, based on the interview with Licínio Branco. The chapter also includes potential for enhancing engagement with the civil society based on the interview with Marta da Silva.

10.2. Progress and challenges

**Licínio Branco:** Timor-Leste’s partnerships align financing with policy priorities, securing memberships in ASEAN, WTO, and continuing its development partnership with the EU. These milestones enhance economic competitiveness and market access. The National Diaspora Engagement Policy harnesses the diaspora’s knowledge and investments. Joining ASEAN and WTO ensures market access and fosters economic integration.

Licínio Miranda Branco has been the Director General for Multilateral and Regional Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation for the 8th Constitutional Government since April 2022. He has extensive experience in diplomacy and human rights and has served as First Secretary to Timor-Leste Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York and Embassy in Washington D.C. and Counsellor to the Embassy of Timor-Leste in Singapore.

**What are the key changes that happened since the first VNR was presented?**

First of all, we witnessed a time of global pandemic, economic downturn and an intensified climate and human induced disasters. Such a “perfect storm” required the government to strengthen existing partnership and seek for new alliances to be able to navigate these challenging years. In the specific, the Covid-19 pandemic has underscored the crucial role of international partnerships in managing global health crises, particularly in resource-limited settings. The COVAX initiative for example helped ensuring equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines in Timor-Leste. This initiative, along with numerous regional and bilateral partnerships, have allowed the sharing of resources, knowledge, and commitment to effectively mitigate the pandemic’s impact. Their transformational influence has been particularly significant in our country, providing critical access to tools necessary to combat COVID-19 and highlighting the power of global cooperation in responding to health crises.

In the context of these international crisis, international solidarity, including technical assistance, South-South and triangular cooperation, and various types of financial engagements, resulted to be more critical than ever. For Timor-Leste, this solidarity can help improve capacity to develop and
manage employment programmes and sustainable social protection systems. While we have observed
the ODA for financing development declining since the last VNR, we are hopeful this trend can be
inverted. The Government of Timor-Leste and the g7+ were among the strongest advocates for goal
16 of the SDGs. In this regard, the GoTL approved the Foreign Aid Policy which identifies Priority
Areas for External Assistance to advocate for the increased use of country systems in ODA while
adhering to the New Deal Principles for Fragile States.

Table 5 Priority Areas for External Assistance, Foreign Aid Policy of Timor-Leste

| 1. Education | 7. Infrastructure for growth, connectivity and accessibility |
| 2. Health | 8. Water and Sanitation |
| 3. Tackling malnutrition | 9. Regional Integration |
| 4. Youth and Gender | 10. Private Sector Development |
| 5. Agriculture and Rural Development | 11. Public Sector Management |
| 6. Tourism | |

Source: Foreign Aid Policy, (Government of Timor-Leste)

Which partnerships have been successful and which ones are still under development?

The alignment of financing and partnerships with policy priorities, is a key enabler for the
implementation of the SDG and is something that could be achieved through the engagement
from public development banks and international financial institutions can significantly bolster this
process and the UN-led Joint Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Fund that aimed to increase
investments in sustainable development.

At the time when the intervention was proposed to the Fund, Timor-Leste did not have a holistic,
national, integrated financing framework to ensure sustainable investments in the SDGs. This Joint SDG
Fund commissioned this Joint Programme to assist the GoTL develop and establish an INFF for
sustainable development.

In spite of the host of challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic during its implementation, the JP
has successfully produced a government-owned SDG Financing Strategy that elaborates strategies
to finance other national development priorities like – blue economy diversification; disaster risk
management; sustainable forest management; education and skills development; water, sanitation &
ygiene; food security; and social protection.

Timor-Leste made advancements towards strengthening its trade relations and securing
membership in global and regional bodies. Specifically, Timor-Leste is indeed working towards
becoming a member of ASEAN, WTO, and also securing the European Union-Economic Partnership
Agreement. These memberships can significantly enhance Timor-Leste's economic competitiveness
and facilitate international trade transactions. Additionally, they will help secure growing market access
for Timorese goods and services.
A significant achievement in the partnerships is that Timor-Leste already developed and approved a National Diaspora Engagement Policy. This opens up a powerful resource for knowledge transfer, investment, and as ambassadors promoting the country’s interests and partnerships for the SDGs abroad.

Can you tell us about Timor-Leste’s negotiations for WTO and ASEAN accession and what are the implications for the implementation of the SDGs and the SDP?

As part of the WTO accession process, candidate nations need to sign bilateral agreements which include various sectors. These commitments then apply to all WTO members once the candidate’s accession is final. Timor-Leste is keen on maintaining momentum in these negotiations, which it views as a strategic priority. In parallel to WTO, negotiations for ASEAN membership are ongoing. The EU has recently signed an agreement to support Timor-Leste’s in these accession negotiations.

As a small island state that relies on trade, joining the WTO and ASEAN can guarantee Timor-Leste market access and contribute to growing exports, particularly in Asia. They are also working on customs and tax reforms to better integrate economically with ASEAN member states and other regional countries.

In addition, we can partner with other developing countries - South-South cooperation - or with developed countries and developing countries through triangular cooperation. This collaboration can lead to knowledge and experience sharing, as well as sharing of best practices related to SDG implementation. Timor-Leste has partnerships with other Small Island Developing States to collaborate on shared challenges such as climate change, sustainable tourism, and marine conservation. The SAMOA Pathway, a global commitment to support the sustainable development of small island development states, is an avenue Timor-Leste can utilize.

Bilateral relationships with countries like Australia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Portugal, and the USA are crucial. They have been instrumental in Timor-Leste’s reconstruction phase and will continue to play a vital role in the country’s state-building efforts.

Timor-Leste has been spearheading the g7+ intergovernmental group is a peer group of conflict-affected countries.

What are the potentials of private sector partnership?

In recent years, Timor-Leste has been active in exploring pathways to harness the green and blue economy as a way of economic diversification. There were several partnerships that included identifying clear plans for supporting renewable energy, development of agriculture and fisheries sectors and the associated value chains and logistical development. For example, the Tibar Bay Port financed through Timor-Leste’s first public-private-partnership showed that there is a great potential in using public-private-partnerships in realising these economic diversification potentials.
In addition, two renewable energy projects are setting the pace for sustainable development and exemplifying good practices in leveraging partnerships for the SDGs. The projects, both orchestrated by Electricity of Timor-Leste (EdTL), are transforming the energy landscape of the country through the development of solar and wind energy. The Solar Power Development project led by EdTL is a large-scale solar power project, which is projected to produce between 72 and 85 MW of power, coupled with a 42 MWH battery. This ambitious initiative, occupying a 300+ Ha site in Manatuto, is expected to cover approximately a third of the nation’s total electricity use. The partnership is between the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to provide transaction advisory support. A comprehensive Solar PV feasibility study concluded in 2022 established the potential installation capacity and affirmed the viability of the project. With the Council of Ministers' approval, the project has entered the procurement phase, illustrating the government’s commitment to green energy solutions.

Another example of successful partnership is in wind and battery development project. In collaboration with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), EdTL is making progress towards harnessing wind energy. The partnership commenced with a country-wide study conducted by the IFC, with the pre-feasibility phase now in progress to evaluate potential sites for the wind farm.

In the area of blue economy, including promoting fisheries and sustainable marine transportation have major blue economy investment opportunities in Timor-Leste. With the Timor-Leste having developed its first Blue Economy Financing Roadmap also lays out several ways the partnerships and financing can be leveraged – for example through blue bonds. The Roadmap notes that development partners can play an important role to support the Blue Financing Facility with both technical assistance and concessional financing, especially in its early days (Altangerel, Hurley, & Trivedy, 2022).

Timor-Leste is interested in learning from other countries’ experiences and implementing innovative financing mechanisms. But we are also in a position to share some of our financing experiences with other countries too, especially in the areas of public-private partnerships in green and blue economy. We must explore collaborative solutions with development partners to address this through technology transfer, concessional finance, and other opportunities for least developed countries to close the gaps and facilitate low-carbon transition in energy infrastructure. In this context, UNCTAD can dedicate special attention to the least developed countries within its new Global Alliance of Special Economic Zones.
Marta da Silva: Learning from the last 20 years of development assistance, the Government and CSOs both should have the capacity to continue and take over the management of development projects. It is essential to foster government and national ownership of development initiatives rather than seeing them solely as the work of international donors.

Marta da Silva is a Researcher and Coordinator at La’o Hamutuk, a position she has held since 2016. She has a background in social and political science from the National University of Timor-Leste. Marta has previously worked with BESIK and UNFPA.

How about the civil society engagement in advancing the people-centred sustainable development in the country?

CSOs play a significant role in Timor-Leste's development. Especially, their role in good governance – meaning advocating for the rights and needs of all citizens, advancing citizens’ political participation, raising awareness among the communities on various issues, promoting peace, demanding transparency and accountability from the national and local government authorities is crucial.

According to the Varieties of Democracy index on women’s civil society participation index (from 0-1) Timor-Leste had a high score of 0.74 and ranked 8th in the region as of 2020.

According to the Varieties of Democracy’s index on civil society organization consultation scale which asks ‘Are major CSOs routinely consulted by policymakers on policies relevant to their members? Timor-Leste scored 1.04 (on a scale of 0-2), ranking 9th in the region in 2020 (cited in USAID, 2023).

For example, in disaster risk reduction, they complement the government’s efforts by raising awareness, enhance preparedness and early warning, disaster response, and recovery. The 2021 Cyclone Seroja floods served as catalyst, solidifying their position and capacity as crucial partners in disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response activities. In response, the Government has made commitments to mainstream CSO inclusion in disaster risk reduction and response mechanism. The CSOs have emerged as an indispensable partner in this area.

Timor-Leste has had a robust NGO community since independence, but many of the nascent NGOs find their advocacy skills limited by a lack of administrative capacity and sustainable financial support. NGO Advocacy for Good Governance will provide technical training and support to make local NGOs more sustainable and better able to represent citizen interests with the government. Counterpart International, a United States-based.
What has been Lao Hamutuk’s engagement with the GoTL?

The consultations conducted by MSSI and MoF focused on identifying the vulnerable households, and based on those consultations, we revised the subsidy criteria to include households with an income of less than $500. This change aimed to target those who needed assistance the most. While the government can have numerous plans, it has not made serious investments in crucial sectors like education, health, agriculture, and water and sanitation. This lack of investment has been a concern, as it has hindered the progress and development of these sectors. It is crucial for the government to come up with investment proposals and show tangible results from these investments.

I encourage the new government to learn how to effectively spend money and also explore avenues for generating revenue. It is important to invest in the economy and society, particularly in the younger generation. Currently, during political campaigns, promises are made without clarity on how the resources will be obtained. Additionally, a significant amount of money is leaving the country through international companies, particularly from China, and excessive food imports.

Could you elaborate on the new Public Financial Management law and what has been the civil society involvement?

The new PFM law, which became active in January, is expected to enhance the efficiency of budgeting through strict timelines and clear cycles. However, ensuring the quality implementation of projects remains a challenge. Lao Hamutuk suggests that the National Parliament increase the budget allocation to address the capacity limitations faced by ministries. Good leadership and improved management capacity, including coordination, procurement processes, and timely expenditure, are necessary for effective implementation.

What are your views on Official Development Assistance?

The government should advocate for increased ODA and ensure that it aligns with the government’s plans, which should be based on community needs. It is important to address any overlaps between ODA projects implemented by the government and Development Partners. Once projects are completed, the government should have the capacity to continue and take over their management. The government should approach development partners with existing programs and collaborate on allocating funds effectively. It is essential to foster government ownership of development initiatives rather than seeing them solely as the work of international donors.

What do you believe should be the focus moving forward?

The next government should prioritize investments in the productive sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, manufacturing, and tourism. This will contribute to the growth of our economy and help move away from dependency. Investing in human resources, particularly in education, nutrition, and health, is crucial to nurture a high-quality younger generation. Additionally, building basic
infrastructure, including roads in rural areas, improving water supply, and addressing the high cost of energy, will contribute to decentralization and benefit those in need.

10.3. Priorities

1. Clearly identify the interlinkages between the ASEAN roadmap and the SDGs/SDP implementation. Areas of convergence between ASEAN's initiatives and the SDGs, such as poverty eradication, quality education, technology transformation, public-private partnerships, gender equality, climate action, and partnerships for goals, should be emphasized. The roadmap should align with ASEAN's community pillars - Political-Security Community, Economic Community, and Socio-Cultural Community.
   - Carry out widespread awareness campaigns to inform the public and CSOs about the ASEAN ascension process and its implications. This should involve the use of various communication channels, including traditional and social media. Alongside, capacity-building programs for government officials, CSOs, and other stakeholders should be arranged to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate the ASEAN integration process effectively.
   - All political parties and leaders in Timor-Leste should reach consensus on ASEAN ascension in their agendas to ensure continuity of the process irrespective of political changes. A consensus-building approach would also be instrumental in minimizing potential political roadblocks in the ascension process.
   - Establish or strengthen existing institutional mechanisms for effective coordination and monitoring of the ASEAN ascension process. This includes the setting up of a dedicated ASEAN ascension task force that liaises with different ministries, CSOs, and other stakeholders.

2. Enhance partnerships with international entities and the private sector is essential for Timor-Leste in two key areas. The Public-Private Partnerships framework should be exploited in vital, job-rich sectors like green and blue economies, and connectivity and infrastructure. This strategy can mobilize substantial resources and expertise for ambitious projects, particularly in the green and blue economies and infrastructure development, crucial for economic growth and SDG achievement.

3. Maximize the existing and future partnerships with development partners, the national government’s capacity to forge and manage partnerships should be strengthened. Invest in institutional strengthening of government entities, inter-ministerial bodies, Coordination Units and bodies such as the Stunting Unit under the Prime Minister’s Office, and line ministries, to ensure managers can effectively engage with external organizations. Key actions should include:
   - Develop and implement clear policies and principles guiding the formation and operation of partnerships.
• Establish explicit rules and procedures to guide all phases of partnership engagements, from initiation to conclusion.

• Implement a systematic approach to identifying and mapping potential partnership opportunities, ensuring alignment with national priorities and SDGs.

• Set up comprehensive tracking, monitoring, and knowledge management systems to manage partnership relationships effectively and measure their impact.

• Develop and implement legal agreements that are supportive of partnerships and provide a framework for their operation and management.

• Introduce partnership-supportive human resources policies and key performance indicators to motivate and incentivize effective partnership management and performance.

4. **Revise the Foreign Aid Policy** to align with the updated Public Financial Management reforms, Medium-Term Planning, and the forthcoming updated SDP. In doing so, continue emphasizing preferences for Sector and Budget Support mechanisms, allowing for greater government ownership with limited daily involvement from development partners. This could include pooled funding arrangements or single development partner support.

5. **Strive to raise ODA to more than the current 10% of the state budget.** Leverage Timor-Leste’s geo-strategic position to maintain and expand partnerships with traditional allies and emerging global players. Advocate for more country programmable aid to ensure greater resource allocation via the State Budget, enhancing Timor-Leste’s reputation as a reliable and investment-worthy partner. Prioritize government-executed projects where assistance is managed by a government agency with development partner support. This can include pooled funding arrangements or single development partner support, which could entail a capacity-building component beneficial to the government.

6. While focusing on government-led initiatives, **the scope of international partnerships with CSOs and NGOs should not be limited.** Support for development and technical assistance projects can also be directed to national and local organizations, enhancing the broad impact of partnership efforts.
Part IV. Conclusions and next steps

11.1. Strategies for accelerating the SDGs implementation

The Strategic Analysis of the SDGs acceleration in Timor-Leste, considering the Strength-Opportunity, Strength-Threat, Weakness-Opportunity, and Weakness-Threat perspectives, provides an insightful roadmap for informed policy and decision-making.

1. **Malnutrition (stunting) and food insecurity should be treated as emergencies, warranting heightened attention and increased investments.** Addressing malnutrition, which encompasses stunting, wasting, anaemia, and food insecurity, is critical. Given the scale of the issue, it can be regarded as a food and nutrition emergency in the country, warranting increased investments and urgent attention. Consequently, efforts to combat malnutrition should be harmonized with poverty reduction strategies. To better support vulnerable groups, introducing an additional layer of social protection specifically designed for equity-based assistance to households with children suffering from severe acute malnutrition should be considered. The opportunities of already established institutional mechanisms and successful programmes against stunting should be harnessed. Enhancing agricultural productivity can contribute significantly to food security.

2. **The scale-up of social protection programmes should be pursued.** It is crucial to tackle poverty, malnutrition, and health issues in an integrated manner, recognizing their interconnectedness. ILO estimates that for low-income countries to guarantee social protection to all their populations, 15.9% of their GDP is required and Timor-Leste is no exception with only 30.6% of the population covered by at least one social protection benefit. Funding for the National Action Plan on People with Disabilities, Child Protection, National Action Plans for Gender-based Violence and other programmes targeting the poor and vulnerable and adhering to the "Leave No One Behind" principles should be secured, reinforcing Timor-Leste’s commitment to inclusivity. In pursuing and upscaling social protection programmes targeting vulnerable groups, external, high-quality evaluations to ensure effective investments should be conducted.

3. **Pre-school enrollment must be amplified to address foundational learning challenges.** This can be achieved by developing and implementing a national plan, offering more training opportunities for pre-school teachers, and increasing the budget for pre-school education. Initially, the absence of a comprehensive national plan for the pre-school sector should be addressed. As such, the development and implementation of a national plan become essential. Emphasis should be placed on increasing training opportunities and preparing pre-school teachers adequately, with a particular focus on equipping teachers with the skills necessary to work effectively with children with disabilities. There is a considerable budgetary deficit in pre-school education, with funding currently at a level ten times less than the recommended 1% of GDP. Hence an increase in budget allocation for preschool education is needed.
4. The labor force participation and formal employment must be improved. There is a pressing need to increase labour force participation and formal employment. On one hand, the education sector warrants enhancement, necessitating prioritizing education in budget allocation with a target of dedicating 15-20% of GDP. There should be an expansion of digital infrastructure within schools, alongside the establishment of a Centre of Excellence for teacher training. Ongoing programmes such as the Human Capital Development Fund and the Bosla Hakbiit should be sustained. While the expansion of schools and health facilities is encouraging and has been positively received, efforts must be intensified to alleviate existing geographic disparities. In the labour market, policy measures aiming to integrate young people and workers, especially those in informal employment who lack social protection into the social protection system, should be initiated. On the other hand, adopting the UN Secretary General’s Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection can provide strategic direction. This accelerator aims to direct investments towards a job-rich recovery by using Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs) to catalyze financial resources.

5. Economic diversification should be accelerated, with more substantial investments directed towards export-oriented industries. These industries should target robust markets in countries such as Australia, China, and Indonesia. Timor-Leste’s blue economy, which primarily comprises fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, and shipping, has shown significant promise. Fisheries and aquaculture are key pillars of food security and livelihood for a large portion of the population. Meanwhile, the tourism sector, stimulated largely by marine and coastal attractions, has witnessed rapid growth over recent years, contributing to employment and foreign exchange earnings. In the agricultural sector, there exists potential for the expansion of organic farming and agroforestry practices. These can improve food security, boost climate resilience, and provide additional income opportunities for rural communities. The private sector should spearhead growth, with the government acting as a facilitator by creating an inviting environment for both international and local investors. Encouraging public-private partnerships can help share risks and attract private sector investments.

6. Invest in overcoming development hurdles and reducing underlying factors hindering public service delivery and economic diversification. Specifically enhance the civil registration system at all levels, ensuring every child is provided with a birth certificate. Advance ICT development by increasing internet speed and fostering digital literacy among the population. As the digital divide between Timor-Leste and other countries grows, the country needs to accelerate its pace of digitalization to avoid falling further behind. Expand access to financial services, including digital financial services, to broaden the population’s financial inclusivity. Work on reducing energy costs, improving reliability, and transitioning towards renewable energy sources. This shift will not only be environmentally friendly but could also prove to be economically beneficial in the long run. Accelerate the modernization of land reform to align with contemporary needs and circumstances.

7. Continue with institutional reforms like improving public financial management, decentralization and streamlining government agencies Develop strict fiscal policies and guidelines to ensure more sustainable public expenditure. This could be in the form of a Fiscal
Responsibility Law or similar legislation could be drafted to avoid depletion of the Petroleum Fund by the end of the decade and increase the return on public investment. Improving the budgeting process is crucial to address the recurring delays in the annual budget process that leave entities without funding in the first quarter of each year. The expansion of the tax base by bringing more citizens into the formal economy should be a priority. Accelerate the decentralization process for instance, by endorsing the Municipal Level Public Financial Management Law. This step would help to address significant disparities between rural and urban areas in key development areas.

8. **Improvements in the policy environment that enables SDGs should continue.** The Prime Minister’s Office should continue to lead the reform agenda needed to deliver the SDGs in time by reducing the duplication of autonomous agencies, streamlining structures, and increasing coordination. Incorporate the SDGs at the sub-national level in tandem with the ongoing decentralization process. This implies aligning the SDGs with municipal-level plans and conducting M&E of SDGs at the municipal level, as suggested by stakeholder consultations.

9. **Strengthen climate change resilience.** A vital strategy for long-term sustainability, particularly crucial given the agricultural reliance of Timor-Leste and potential threats to infrastructure. In line with the National Adaptation Plan explore financial preparedness strategies that increase the ability of the government to strengthen financial resilience (post-disaster financing). Invest in risk reduction when “building back better” (TC Seroja post-disaster recovery programme).

10. **Enhancing partnerships with international entities and the private sector is essential for Timor-Leste in two key areas.** Firstly, the Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) framework should be exploited in vital, job-rich sectors like green and blue economies, and connectivity and infrastructure. This strategy can mobilize substantial resources and expertise for ambitious projects, particularly in the green and blue economies and infrastructure development, crucial for economic growth and SDG achievement. Secondly, Timor-Leste should actively seek to increase ODA, targeting more than the current 10% of the state budget. Utilizing its geo-strategic position, the country should maintain and expand partnerships with traditional allies and emerging global players. Advocacy for more country programmable aid can ensure greater resource allocation via the State Budget, showcasing Timor-Leste’s reliability as an investment-worthy partner.
11.2. Post-VNR activities

Following the VNR presentation at HLPF in New York, several crucial next steps towards realizing the SDGs will be taken. Over the 3 to 6 months following the presentation, the VNR-2 report will be published and disseminated more widely and made easily accessible. Special attention will be paid to local level engagement, which includes sharing results with communities and municipal authorities, and simplifying the report into a digestible format, such as a brochure. The use of platforms like WhatsApp for dissemination will ensure that the report reaches the grassroots level.

Regional consultations will be conducted, and high-level individuals will be involved in communicating the progress of our nation's development. The aim is to ensure that the results of the VNR are accessible to various groups and to foster a sense of ownership in the nation's development journey.

Over the 6 to 12 months after the presentation, the VNR Commission will socialize the findings with the incoming government and support the development and refining of the 9th Constitutional Government programme using the VNR-2 results. The focus will be on digesting key priorities from the VNR and aligning them with immediate actions. This will be done in the form of sectoral/thematic workshops focusing on refining the priorities into specific action plans.

To ensure the sustainability of these initiatives, the government aims to incorporate the VNR's findings into the Medium-Term Plans, thereby informing government decisions on priority setting and resource allocation. As part of this plan, it's vital that SDG indicators be included in the Medium-Term Plans and annual plans and use the SDG indicators and results from the VNR to inform the development of the Medium-Term Plan M&E framework.

The establishment of a permanent SDG Commission will be a key step forward. The SDG Commission will not only oversee and monitor regular reporting against SDG indicators but will also maintain an open line of communication with the community, notably through social media. This move ensures accountability and keeps the citizens informed about the nation's progress towards SDGs.

Partnerships will be crucial in moving forward, and key actors responsible for implementing these steps will be identified. In addition, appropriate financing mechanisms will be outlined, ensuring the sustainability of the initiatives.

Community and civil society engagement will be prioritized in planning and monitoring and evaluation. The Government aims to ensure that SDGs and their desired goals are understandable and accessible to all citizens through continuous training and socialization. The translations of the SDG goals and indicators into Tetum will be disseminated among civil servants, especially those engaged in planning and monitoring.
References


GDS, MoH and ICF. (2018). Timor-Leste Demographic and Health Survey Key Findings 2016. Rockville, Maryland, USA.


https://extranet.who.int/countryplanningcycles/sites/default/files/planning_cycle_repository/timor-leste/stories_from_the_field_issue3_timor-leste.pdf


Annexes

Annex 1. SDG Progress Assessment Snapshot by Targets

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<th>Goal 1</th>
<th>1.1 International poverty</th>
<th>1.3 Social protection</th>
<th>1.4 Access to basic services</th>
<th>1.5 Resilience to disasters</th>
<th>1.8 Resources for poverty programs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal 2</td>
<td>2.1 Undernourishment and food security</td>
<td>2.2 Malnutrition</td>
<td>2.3 Investment in agriculture</td>
<td>2.4 Food price anomalies</td>
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<td>Goal 3</td>
<td>3.1 Maternal mortality</td>
<td>3.2 Child mortality</td>
<td>3.3 Communicable diseases</td>
<td>3.4 NCD &amp; mental health</td>
<td>3.5 Substance abuse</td>
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<td>Goal 4</td>
<td>4.1 Effective learning outcomes</td>
<td>4.2 Early childhood development</td>
<td>4.3 TVET &amp; tertiary education</td>
<td>4.5 Equal access to education</td>
<td>4.6 Adult literacy &amp; numeracy</td>
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<td>Goal 5</td>
<td>5.5 Women in leadership</td>
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<td>Goal 6</td>
<td>6.1 Safe drinking water</td>
<td>6.2 Access to sanitation &amp; hygiene</td>
<td>6.4 Water-use efficiency</td>
<td>6.6 Water-related ecosystems</td>
<td>6.8 Int. cooperation on water &amp; sanitation mgts</td>
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<td>Goal 7</td>
<td>7.1 Access to energy services</td>
<td>7.2 Share of renewable energy</td>
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<td>7.a Int. cooperation on energy</td>
<td>7.b Investing in energy infrastructure</td>
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<td>Goal 8</td>
<td>8.1 Per capita economic growth</td>
<td>8.2 Economic productivity &amp; innovation</td>
<td>8.3 Formalization of SMEs</td>
<td>8.4 Material resource efficiency</td>
<td>8.5 Full employment &amp; decent work</td>
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<td>Goal 9</td>
<td>9.1 Infrastructure development</td>
<td>9.2 Sustainable/inclusive industrialization</td>
<td>9.3 Resilient Infrastructure</td>
<td>9.5 Access to ICT &amp; the Internet</td>
<td>10.4 Fiscal &amp; social protection policies</td>
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<td>11.1 Housing &amp; basic services</td>
<td>11.5 Resilience to disasters</td>
<td>11.6 Urban air quality &amp; waste mgmt.</td>
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<td>Goal 11</td>
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<td>12.a Support for R&amp;D capacity for SD</td>
<td>12.b Sustainable tourism monitoring</td>
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<td>Goal 12</td>
<td>13.1 Resilience &amp; adaptive capacity</td>
<td>13.2 Climate change policies</td>
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<td>Goal 13</td>
<td>14.1 Marine pollution</td>
<td>14.5 Conservation of coastal areas</td>
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Source: (ESCAP, 2023b)
## Annex 2. Statistical annex

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Target</th>
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<th>Indicator value</th>
<th>Target value</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td>By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than $1.25 a day</td>
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<td>1.1.1</td>
<td>Proportion of population living on less than US$1.90 a day in total employment</td>
<td><strong>Total (15+ years)</strong></td>
<td>10 %</td>
<td>ADB (2022), ADB Key Indicators Database; UN DESA (2023), SDG Indicator Database</td>
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<td>19.6 %</td>
<td>17.4 %</td>
<td>22.6 %</td>
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<td><strong>15-24 years</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>24 %</td>
<td>21.3 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3.1</td>
<td>Population covered by social assistance programmes</td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>30.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Severe disabilities receiving disability cash benefits</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>19.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Children/households receiving child/family cash benefits</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>30.7 % in 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Above statutory pensionable age receiving a pension</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>89.7 % in 2016 (male 83.9 %; female 95.1 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Indicator value</td>
<td>Target value</td>
<td>Source</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance</td>
<td>Proportion of population living in households with access to basic services</td>
<td>Using basic drinking water services</td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicator Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.4.1</td>
<td>75 % (Rural 69 %; Urban 90 %)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>84 % (Rural 79 %; Urban 95 %)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>85 % (Rural 80 %; Urban 96 %)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters</td>
<td>Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population</td>
<td>Deaths/missing persons attributed to disasters</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.5.1</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5.2</td>
<td>Direct economic loss attributed to disasters in relation to global GDP (in million US dollars)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>*0.66 in 2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.a</td>
<td>Ensure significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources, including through enhanced development cooperation, in order to provide adequate and predictable means for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions</td>
<td>Proportion of domestically generated resources allocated by the government directly to poverty reduction programmes (% of GNI)</td>
<td>1.0 %</td>
<td>2.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.a.1</td>
<td>1.0 %</td>
<td>1.4 %</td>
<td>2.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.a.2</td>
<td>Proportion of total government spending on essential services</td>
<td>8.6 %</td>
<td>*7.9 in 2018</td>
<td>17.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Indicator value</td>
<td>Target value</td>
<td>Source</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round</td>
<td><strong>2.1.1</strong> Prevalence of undernourishment (% of population)</td>
<td>24.5 %</td>
<td>25 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Source: ADB (2022) ADB Key Indicator Database</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2.2</strong> By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons</td>
<td><strong>2.2.1</strong> Prevalence of stunting among children under 5 years of age (% of children under 5)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Source: UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicator Database</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2.2.2</strong> Prevalence of malnutrition among children under 5 years of age, by type (wasting and overweight)</td>
<td><strong>Wasting</strong></td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Source: UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicator Database</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Overweight</strong></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2.2.3</strong> Prevalence of anaemia in women aged 15 to 49 years, by pregnancy status (percentage)</td>
<td><strong>Total (both pregnant and non-pregnant)</strong></td>
<td>27.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Source: UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicator Database</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Pregnant</strong></td>
<td>35.1 %</td>
<td>38 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Source: UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicator Database</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Non-pregnant</strong></td>
<td>27.1 %</td>
<td>29.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Source: UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicator Database</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2.1</strong> The agriculture orientation index for government expenditures</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Source: UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicator Database</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Target

**services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks** in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries

### Indicator

**Total official flows** (official development assistance plus other official flows) to the agriculture sector (Million 2019 US dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Target

**Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility**

### Indicator

**Indicator of food price anomalies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2022</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
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<td>Source</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Target

**By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births**

### Indicator

1. **Maternal mortality** (Deaths per 100 000 live births)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2022</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
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<tr>
<td>Source</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Births attended by skilled health personnel** (% of live births)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
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<td>Source</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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16 They are separate reports produced by year.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator value</th>
<th>Target value</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births</td>
<td>3.2.1 Infant and under-five mortality (Deaths per 1,000 live births)</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total (Infant)</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female (infant)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (infant)</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total (under-five)</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female (under-five)</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (under-five)</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, waterborne diseases and other communicable diseases</td>
<td>3.3.1 Number of new HIV infections, by sex, age and key populations (Per 100,000 population)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (15-49 years)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female (15-49 years)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3.2 Tuberculosis incidence rate (Per 100,000 population)</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3.3 Malaria (deaths, and incidence)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malaria deaths excluding HIV (total, per 100,000 population)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malaria incidence (total, per 1,000 population at risk)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Indicator value</td>
<td>Target value</td>
<td>Source</td>
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<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3.5</td>
<td>Number of people requiring interventions against NTDs (per 1,000 population)</td>
<td>1170</td>
<td>1327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and wellbeing</td>
<td>3.4.1</td>
<td>Mortality rate attributed to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory disease (Probability (%))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17 They are separate reports produced by year.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator value</th>
<th>Target value</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2</td>
<td>Suicide mortality (Per 100,000 population)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and wellbeing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2</td>
<td>Harmful use of alcohol, defined according to the national context as alcohol per capita consumption (aged 15 years and older) within a calendar year in litres of pure alcohol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.1</td>
<td>Death due to road traffic injuries (Per 100,000 population)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.1</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.1</td>
<td>Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15–49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.1</td>
<td>*3.4 % in 2010</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.2</td>
<td>Adolescent birth (per 1,000 women)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.2</td>
<td>10-14 years</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.2</td>
<td>15-19 years</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
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<td>Indicator value</td>
<td>Source</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all</td>
<td></td>
<td>DHS (2016)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.1</td>
<td>Coverage of essential health services</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination</td>
<td>Mortality rate attributed to unintentional poisoning (Per 100,000 population)</td>
<td>UN DESA (2023)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.a</td>
<td>Strengthen the implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in all countries, as appropriate</td>
<td>Age-standardized prevalence of current tobacco use among persons aged 15 years and older (% of population)</td>
<td>GDS et al. (2018)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.a.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Total (15+ years)</td>
<td>24.7 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42.5 %</td>
<td>39.8 %</td>
<td>39.2 %</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (15+ years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72.3 %</td>
<td>68.4 %</td>
<td>67.6 %</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female (15+ years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.7 %</td>
<td>11.2 %</td>
<td>10.8 %</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.b Development assistance and vaccine coverage: Support the research and development of vaccines and medicines for the communicable and non-communicable diseases</td>
<td>3.b.1 Proportion of the target population covered by all vaccines included in their national programme</td>
<td><strong>Target population with access 3 doses vaccination against diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP3)</strong>&lt;br&gt;76 % 90 % 86 % n/a n/a</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicators Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.b.2 Total net official development assistance to medical research and basic health sectors</td>
<td><strong>Target population with access to vaccination against measles (MCV2)</strong>&lt;br&gt;n/a *30 % in 2016 80 % 78 % n/a n/a</td>
<td></td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicators Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total gross disbursement (by recipient, million 2019 US dollars)</strong>&lt;br&gt;14.6 19.6 38.8 n/a n/a</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicators Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total net disbursement (by recipient, million 2019 US dollars)</strong>&lt;br&gt;14.6 19.6 38.8 n/a n/a</td>
<td></td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicators Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.c Substantially increase health financing and the recruitment, development, training and retention of the health workforce in developing countries, especially in least developed countries and small island developing States</td>
<td>3.c.1 Health worker density and distribution (Per 10,000 population)</td>
<td><strong>Dentistry personnel density</strong>&lt;br&gt;n/a 0 (0.08) 0 (0.02) n/a n/a</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicators Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Nursing and midwifery personnel density</strong>&lt;br&gt;14.8 17.6 17.5 n/a n/a</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicators Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Pharmaceutical personnel density</strong>&lt;br&gt;0 (0.08) 2.1 2.1 n/a n/a</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicators Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Physician density</strong>&lt;br&gt;7 7.7 7.6 n/a n/a</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicators Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>International Health Regulations (IHR) capacity and health emergency preparedness (index)</strong>&lt;br&gt;n/a 37 42 60 n/a</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicators Database</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Indicator value</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Completion rate by educational level</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Target value</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completion rate, primary education</td>
<td>71.3 %</td>
<td>75.8 %</td>
<td>77 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completion rate, lower secondary education</td>
<td>56 %</td>
<td>60.7 %</td>
<td>61.9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completion rate, upper secondary education</td>
<td>49.8 %</td>
<td>50.8 %</td>
<td>51.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SDG Indicator Database</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74.1 %</td>
<td>50.2 %</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>70.6 %</td>
<td>48.7 %</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>77.8 %</td>
<td>51.6 %</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total (15-64 years)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*25 % in 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (15-64 years)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*26 % in 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female (15-64 years)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*24 % in 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Inequality indices for education indicators (ratio, total population)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completion rate, primary (adj. bottom/top wealth parity index)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training.
for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completion rate, lower secondary (adj. bottom/top wealth parity index)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*0.37 in 2016</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completion rate, upper secondary (adj. bottom/top wealth parity index)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*0.23 in 2016</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Completion rate, primary (adj. gender parity index)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*1.1 in 2016</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Completion rate, lower secondary (adj. gender parity index)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*1.1 in 2016</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completion rate, upper secondary (adj. gender parity index)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*1.1 in 2016</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Completion rate, primary (adj. location parity index)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*0.67 in 2016</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completion rate, lower secondary (adj. location parity index)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*0.63 in 2016</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completion rate, upper secondary (adj. location parity index)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*0.82 in 2016</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender parity index for participation rate in organized learning (Female-to-male ratio)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>Target</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy</td>
<td>Total (15+ years)</td>
<td>64.4 %</td>
<td>*68 % in 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male (15 + years)</td>
<td>68.7 %</td>
<td>*72 % in 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female (15+ years)</td>
<td>60.2 %</td>
<td>*64 % in 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.a</td>
<td>Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all</td>
<td>Access to basic drinking water – primary</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>68.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Access to basic drinking water – lower secondary</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>68.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Access to basic drinking water – upper secondary</td>
<td>55.7 %</td>
<td>64.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Access to electricity – primary</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>84.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Access to electricity – lower secondary</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>84.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Access to electricity – upper secondary</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>78.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.b</td>
<td>By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of</td>
<td>Volume of official development</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
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<td>Target</td>
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<td>Indicator value</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2020</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries</td>
<td>assistance flows for scholarships (total, million 2019 US dollars)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation</td>
<td>Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>NSD et al. (2010) DHS 2009-2010; GDS et al. (2018) DHS 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total (physical, sexual, or psychological)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>*33.3 % in 2010</td>
<td>*36.8 % in 2016</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>*30.7 % in 2010</td>
<td>*33.1 % in 2016</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>*2 % in 2010</td>
<td>*4.8 % in 2016</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation</td>
<td>Proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married or in a union before age 15</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married or in a union before age 18</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life</td>
<td>Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments</td>
<td>50 %</td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National parliaments</td>
<td>38.5 %</td>
<td>40 %</td>
<td>38.5 %</td>
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<td>Indicator value</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>5.5.2</strong> Proportion of women in managerial positions</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>6.1</strong> By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all</td>
<td><strong>6.1.1</strong> Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services</td>
<td><strong>Drinking water, at least basic services</strong></td>
<td><strong>UN-Water SDG 6 Data Portal (n.d.)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>6.2</strong> By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation</td>
<td><strong>6.2.1</strong> Proportion of population using (a)</td>
<td><strong>Population practicing open defecation - total</strong></td>
<td><strong>0 %</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td>Indicator value</td>
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| and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations | safely managed sanitation services and (b) a handwashing facility with soap and water | **Population practicing open defecation - urban**<br>2.4 % 0 % 0 % n/a n/a<br>**Population practicing open defecation - rural**<br>30.8 % 26.5 % 26.5 % n/a n/a<br>**Population with basic handwashing facilities on premises - total**<br>28 % 28 % 28 % n/a n/a<br>**Population with basic handwashing facilities on premises - urban**<br>43 % 43 % 43 % n/a n/a<br>**Population with basic handwashing facilities on premises - rural**<br>22 % 22 % 22 % n/a n/a | UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicators Database | 100 %
| 6.4 By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity | 6.4.1 Change in water-use efficiency over time (USD/M3)<br>1.17 1.42 n/a n/a n/a | 3.4 | UN Water (n.d.) UN-Water SDG 6 Data Portal | 3.4
| 6.5 By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate | 6.5.1 Degree of integrated water resources management implementation (%)<br>n/a *14 % in 2017 14% n/a n/a | 100 % | UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicators Database | 100 %
| 6.6 By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes | 6.6.1 Change in the extent of water-related ecosystems over time<br>Lakes and rivers permanent water area change<br>-6 % -34.8 % -42.1 % -42% n/a<br>Mangrove total area change<br>-4 % n/a n/a n/a n/a | 0 % | UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicators Database | 0 %
| 6.a By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building | 6.a.1 Amount of water- and sanitation-related<br>16.9 3.2 3.9 n/a n/a | 33.8 | UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicators Database | 33.8
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<tr>
<td>support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related</td>
<td>official development assistance that is part of a government-coordinated</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination,</td>
<td>spending plan (Million 2019 US dollars)</td>
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<td>water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies</td>
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<td>6.b Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in</td>
<td>Local administrative units with established and operational policies and</td>
<td>Countries with procedures in law/policy for participation by service users/communities in planning program: rural drinking-water supply (scale 0 to 10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improving water and sanitation management</td>
<td>procedures for participation of local communities in water and sanitation management</td>
<td>*10 in 2014</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Countries with procedures in law or policy for participation by service users/communities in planning program: water resources planning and management (scale 0 to 10)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*10 in 2017</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Countries with users/communities participating in planning programmes in rural drinking-water supply (scale 0 to 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*2 in 2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1 By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and</td>
<td>Proportion of population with access to electricity</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2020</td>
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<td>modern energy services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67.3 %</td>
<td>90.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>95 %</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>55.7 %</td>
<td>86.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8.5 %</td>
<td>12.5 %</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix</td>
<td>21 %</td>
<td>28.7 %</td>
<td>30.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.7 %</td>
<td>3.9 %</td>
<td>4.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency</td>
<td>18 %</td>
<td>11.7 %</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.1</td>
<td>Energy intensity measured in terms of primary energy and GDP (Megajoules per unit of GDP in 2017 PPP)</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>By 2030, enhance international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency and advanced and cleaner fossil-fuel technology, and promote investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.1</td>
<td>International financial flows to developing countries in support of clean energy research and development and renewable energy production, including in hybrid systems (Million 2018 US dollars)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*1.05 in 2016</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.b</td>
<td>By 2030, expand infrastructure and upgrade technology for supplying modern and sustainable energy services for all in developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in accordance with their respective programmes of support</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Indicator value</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.1</td>
<td>Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita (2015 US dollars. % change per capita per annum)</td>
<td>0.9 %</td>
<td>17.2 %</td>
<td>9.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.1</td>
<td>Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person (2010 US dollars. % change per annum)</td>
<td>0.32 %</td>
<td>15.31 %</td>
<td>-9.88 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.1</td>
<td>Proportion of informal employment in non-agriculture employment, by sex</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*55.1 % in 2013</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>70.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*53.1 % in 2013</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*59.2 % in 2013</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10-Year Framework of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4.2</td>
<td>Domestic material consumption, domestic material consumption per capita, and domestic material consumption per GDP</td>
<td>Domestic material consumption, total (Tons per capita)</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic material consumption intensity (Kg per 1 USD (2010) GDP)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates data for a specific year.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator value</th>
<th>Target value</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2.9 %</td>
<td>ADB (2022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*4.7 % in 2016</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2.9 %</td>
<td>ADB Key Indicator Database; ILO (2023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*7.5 % in 2016</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>6.9 %</td>
<td>ILO STAT Explorer; GDS et al. (2023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>30.5 %</td>
<td>ADB (2022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>30.5 %</td>
<td>ADB Key Indicator Database; ILO (2023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>29.8 %</td>
<td>ILO STAT Explorer; GDS et al. (2023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24 %</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>31.3 %</td>
<td>ILO (2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24 %</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>31.3 %</td>
<td>Timor-Leste Labour Force Surveys 2010-2013-2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production, with developed countries taking the lead

By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator value</th>
<th>Target value</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>8.8.2</td>
<td>Level of national compliance with labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) based on International Labour Organization (ILO) textual sources and national legislation, by sex and migrant status (score 0 (better) to 10 (worse))</td>
<td>0.34 0.34 0.34 n/a n/a</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.10.1</td>
<td>(a) Number of commercial bank branches per 100,000 adults and (b) number of automated teller machines (ATMs) per 100,000 adults</td>
<td>Number of automated teller machines (ATMs)</td>
<td>6.6 8.9 13.5 n/a n/a</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.10.1</td>
<td>Number of commercial bank branches</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 6 5.6 n/a n/a</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.a</td>
<td>8.a.1</td>
<td>Aid for trade, total official flows (disbursements), by recipient (Million 2019 US dollars)</td>
<td>74 78 61 n/a n/a</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.b</td>
<td>8.b.1</td>
<td>Existence of a developed and operationalized national strategy for youth employment, as a distinct strategy or as part of a national employment strategy</td>
<td>n/a n/a 2 2 n/a</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.

8.10.1. Strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions to encourage and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all.

8.a. Increase Aid for Trade support for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, including through the Enhanced Integrated Framework for Trade-related Technical Assistance to Least Developed Countries.

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<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator value</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Passenger and freight volumes, by mode of transport (Million TEU)</td>
<td></td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicator Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>9.2.1 Manufacturing value added as a proportion of GDP and per capita</td>
<td></td>
<td>GDS et al. (2023) Timor-Leste Labour Force Survey 2021; UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicator Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>9.2.2 Manufacturing employment as a proportion of total employment</td>
<td></td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicator Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.a</td>
<td>9.1.2 Total official international support (official development assistance plus other)</td>
<td></td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicator Database</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Target**

9.1 Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human wellbeing, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all.

9.2 Promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and, by 2030, significantly raise industry’s share of employment and gross domestic product, in line with national circumstances, and double its share in least developed countries.

9.a Facilitate sustainable and resilient infrastructure development in developing countries through enhanced financial, technological, and institutional support.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator value</th>
<th>Target value</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>and technical support to African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states</td>
<td>official flows) to infrastructure (Million 2019 US dollars)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicator Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.c</td>
<td>Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020</td>
<td>Proportion of population covered by a mobile network, by technology</td>
<td>Population covered by at least a 2G mobile network</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.c.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality</td>
<td>Labour share of GDP, comprising wages and social protection transfers (% of GDP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.4.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>41.5 %</td>
<td>40.1 %</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well managed migration policies</td>
<td>Population who are refugees, by country of origin (Per 100,000 population)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.7.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.a</td>
<td>Implement the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in accordance with World Trade Organization agreements</td>
<td>Proportion of tariff lines applied to imports from least developed countries and developing countries with zero-tariff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.a.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>57 %</td>
<td>71.4 %</td>
<td>55.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.b</td>
<td>Encourage official development assistance and financial flows, including foreign direct investment, to States where the</td>
<td>Total resource flows for development, by recipient and donor countries and type of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.b.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>238</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Indicator value</td>
<td>Target value</td>
<td>Source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>need is greatest, in particular least developed countries, African countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in accordance with their national plans and programmes</td>
<td>flow (e.g. official development assistance, foreign direct investment and other flows) (Million US dollars)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Indicator value</td>
<td></td>
<td>Source</td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.1 By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums</td>
<td>Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*42 % in 2014 *33.9 % in 2014 33.9 % n/a n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.5 By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations</td>
<td>Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deaths and missing persons attributed to disasters (per 100,000 population) 6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Directly affected persons attributed to disasters (per 100,000 population)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Population affected by disaster (number)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Direct economic loss in relation to global GDP, damage to critical infrastructure and number of disruptions to basic services, attributed to disasters (% of GDP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Target 11.6
By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator value</th>
<th>Target value</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.6.2</td>
<td>Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter in cities (population weighted) (Micrograms per m3)</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Target 12.2
By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator value</th>
<th>Target value</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.2.2</td>
<td>Domestic material consumption, domestic material consumption per capita, and domestic material consumption per GDP</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic material consumption, total (Tons per capita)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic material– Biomass (Kg per 1 USD (2010) GDP)</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic material– Fossil fuel (Kg per 1 USD (2010) GDP)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic material– Metal ores (Kg per 1 USD (2010) GDP)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic material– Non-metallic minerals (Kg per 1 USD (2010) GDP)</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic material consumption intensity (Kg per 1 USD (2010) GDP)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Target 12.4
By 2020, achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator value</th>
<th>Target value</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.4.1</td>
<td>Number of parties to international multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous waste, and other chemicals that meet their commitments and obligations in transmitting information as required</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Indicator value</td>
<td>Target value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.a</td>
<td>Support developing countries to strengthen their scientific and technological capacity to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production</td>
<td>Amount of support to developing countries on research and development for sustainable consumption and production and environmentally sound technologies (Kilowatts per capita)</td>
<td>2015: 1, 2019: 1.1, 2020: 1.1, 2021: 1.1, 2022: n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.b</td>
<td>Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products</td>
<td>Number of sustainable tourism strategies or policies and implemented action plans with agreed monitoring and evaluation tools</td>
<td>2015: 0, 2019: 0, 2020: 0, 2022: n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.c</td>
<td>Rationalize inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption by removing market distortions, in accordance with national circumstances, including by restructuring taxation and phasing out those harmful subsidies, where they exist, to reflect their environmental impacts, taking fully into account the specific needs and conditions of developing countries and minimizing the possible adverse impacts on their development in a</td>
<td>Amount of fossil-fuel subsidies per unit of GDP (production and consumption) and as a proportion of total national expenditure on fossil fuels (% of GDP)</td>
<td>2015: 2.1, 2019: 4.7, 2020: 2.8, 2022: n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Indicator value</td>
<td>Target value</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deaths and missing persons attributed to disasters (per 100,000 population)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Directly affected persons attributed to disasters (per 100,000 population)</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population affected by disaster (number)</td>
<td>9,117</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate related hazards and natural disasters in all countries</td>
<td>13.1.1 Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greenhouse gas emissions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greenhouse gas emissions (Kilotons of CO2 equivalent)</td>
<td>6,800</td>
<td>924.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from agriculture (Thousand tons of CO2 equivalent)</td>
<td>1,014.1</td>
<td>5,909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution</td>
<td>14.1.1 Index of coastal eutrophication and floating plastic debris density</td>
<td>1.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas</td>
<td>18.7 %</td>
<td>19.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information</td>
<td>14.5.1 Coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas</td>
<td>18.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Indicator value</td>
<td>Target value</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements</td>
<td><strong>15.1.1</strong> Forest area as a proportion of total land area (% of land area)**&lt;br&gt;<strong>15.1.2</strong> Proportion of important sites for terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity that are covered by protected areas, by ecosystem type</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>15.2</strong> By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally</td>
<td><strong>15.2.1</strong> Progress towards sustainable forest management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>15.4</strong> By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development</td>
<td><strong>15.4.1</strong> Coverage by protected areas of important sites for mountain biodiversity (%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>15.5</strong> Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species</td>
<td><strong>15.5.1</strong> Red List Index</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>15.6</strong> Promote fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and</td>
<td><strong>15.6.1</strong> Number of countries that have adopted legislative, International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA), contracting party (binary)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Important sites for freshwater biodiversity**<br>**0 %**<br>**40.7 %**<br>**45.6 %**<br>**45.6 %**

**Important sites for terrestrial biodiversity**<br>**62.4 %**<br>**62 %**<br>**61.9 %**<br>**n/a**

**Above ground biomass in forest (Tons per hectare)**<br>**150**<br>**150**<br>**150**<br>**n/a**

**Forest area net change rate (%)**<br>**n/a**<br>**n/a**<br>**-0.2 %**<br>**n/a**

**Coverage by protected areas of important sites for mountain biodiversity (%)**<br>**45.4 %**<br>**50.8 %**<br>**50.8 %**<br>**50.8 %**

**Mountain Green Cover Index**<br>**99.5**<br>**n/a**<br>**n/a**<br>**n/a**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator value</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>promote appropriate access to such resources, as internationally agreed</td>
<td>administrative and policy frameworks to ensure fair and equitable sharing of benefits</td>
<td>Reported through Online Reporting System on Compliance of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (binary)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>*0 in 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>By 2020, introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems and control or eradicate the priority species</td>
<td>Proportion of countries adopting relevant national legislation and adequately resourcing the prevention or control of invasive alien species</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Legislation, Regulation, Act related to the prevention of introduction and management of Invasive Alien Species (binary)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>n/a</td>
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<td>*1 in 2016</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.a</td>
<td>Mobilize and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems</td>
<td>Official development assistance and public expenditure on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems (Million 2018 US dollars)</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) targets alignment to Aichi Biodiversity target set out in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity (binary)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>*1 in 2016</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.b</td>
<td>Mobilize significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance such management, including for conservation and reforestation</td>
<td>Official development assistance and public expenditure on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems per Aichi</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Indicator value</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>16.2</strong></td>
<td>Number of victims of human trafficking by sex, age and form of exploitation (Total number of people)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>16.3</strong></td>
<td>Unsentenced detainees as a proportion of overall prison population (% of prison population)</td>
<td>76.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>16.5</strong></td>
<td>Proportion of businesses that had at least one contact with a public official and that paid a bribe to a public</td>
<td>44.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Indicator value</td>
<td>Target value</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.6 Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels</td>
<td>16.6.1 Primary government expenditures as a proportion of original approved budget, by sector (or by budget codes or similar) (%)</td>
<td>2015: 85.1 %</td>
<td>2019: 83.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels</td>
<td>16.7.1 Proportions of positions (by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service, and judiciary) compared to national distributions</td>
<td>Female members of parliaments, ratio over female in national population, lower chamber</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration</td>
<td>16.9.1 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority, by age</td>
<td>2016: *60.4 % in 2016</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.a Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime</td>
<td>16.a.1 Existence of independent national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles</td>
<td>National Human Rights Institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Indicator value</td>
<td>Target value</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Strengthen domestic resource mobilization, including through international support to developing countries, to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection</td>
<td>17.1.1 Government revenue by source – tax revenue (% of GDP)</td>
<td>36 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17.1.2 Domestic budget funded by domestic taxes (%)</td>
<td>38.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources</td>
<td>17.3.1 Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows (% of GDP)</td>
<td>1.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17.3.2 Volume of remittances (in United States dollars) as a proportion of total GDP</td>
<td>3.9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assist developing countries in attaining long term debt sustainability through coordinated policies aimed at fostering debt financing, debt relief and debt restructuring, as appropriate, and address the external debt of highly indebted poor countries to reduce debt distress</td>
<td>17.4.1 Debt service as a proportion of exports of goods and services (% of exports of goods, services and primary income)</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance</td>
<td>17.6.1 Number of science and/or technology cooperation agreements and programmes between</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Indicator value</td>
<td>Target value</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge-sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms, in particular at the United Nations level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism</td>
<td>countries, by type of cooperation (Per 100 population)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>Fully operationalize the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017 and enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology</td>
<td>Proportion of individuals using the Internet</td>
<td>23 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the Sustainable Development Goals, including through North-South, South South and triangular cooperation</td>
<td>Dollar value of financial and technical assistance (including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation) committed to developing countries (Million 2019 US dollars)</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trade**

<p>| 17.1 | Promote a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization, including through the conclusion of negotiations under its Doha Development Agenda | Worldwide weighted average, all products (%) | | |
| 17.10 | | Most-favoured nation, worldwide weighted tariff-average, all products (%) | | |
| | | | 2.5 % | 2.5 % | n/a | n/a | n/a | 0 | UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicators Databases |
| | | Preferential rate, weighted mean, all products (%) | | |
| | | | 2.5 % | 2.5 % | n/a | n/a | n/a | 0 | UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicators Databases |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator value</th>
<th>Target value</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>Average tariffs faced by developing countries, least developed countries and small island developing States (%)</td>
<td>Most-favoured nation, average tariff applied by developed countries, all products</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Preferential rate, average tariff applied by developed countries, all products</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Extent of the use of country-led result framework, by recipient of development cooperation</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicator Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>New interventions drawn from country-led result framework, by recipient of development cooperation</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Result indicators drawn from country-led result framework, by recipient of development cooperation</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Result indicators using government sources/monitoring systems, by recipient of development cooperation</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Systemic issues - Policy and institutional coherence**

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<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator value</th>
<th>Target value</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>Respect each country’s policy space and leadership to establish and implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development</td>
<td>Extent of use of country-owned results frameworks and planning tools by providers of development cooperation (%)</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td>UN DESA (2023) SDG Indicator Database</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Multi-stakeholder partnerships**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator value</th>
<th>Target value</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>Encourage and promote effective public, public private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships</td>
<td><strong>Indicator</strong></td>
<td><strong>Indicator value</strong></td>
<td><strong>Target value</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>Amount of United States dollars committed to (a) public-private partnerships and (b) civil society partnerships</td>
<td>Public-private partnerships for infrastructure, commitment (Million US dollars)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Data, monitoring and accountability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator value</th>
<th>Target value</th>
<th>Source</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to significantly increase the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts</td>
<td><strong>Indicator</strong></td>
<td><strong>Indicator value</strong></td>
<td><strong>Target value</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>National statistical legislation exists and complies with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (binary)</td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator value</th>
<th>Target value</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity building in developing countries</td>
<td>Resources made available to strengthen statistical capacities in developing countries (Million US dollars)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*0.6 in 2016*
Annex 3. Postcards