

**REPORT ON THE UNTL-VU BIENNIAL CONFERENCE HELD IN  
DILI, TIMOR-LESTE 1-2 JULY 2019**

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# **ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

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# INTRODUCTION

Engaging young people in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was the sixth joint biennial conference presented by the National University of Timor Loro Sa'e (UNTL) and Victoria University (VU). It focused on the 17 SDGs set by United Nations General Assembly to overcome global poverty in 2015, and followed on from the 2017 conference that began the process of sharing knowledge of the SDGs.



# THE CONFERENCE

Following on from the 2017 Conference's focus on the SDGs, UNTL Deputy Rector for Cooperation Affairs, Professor Eduardo Aniceto Serrão sought to align the SDGs with the UNTL research staff and students who had been engaged in the National Voluntary Review (NVR) of the achievement of SDGs.

The conference was opened by HE Dulce de Jesus Soares, Minister of Education, Youth and Sport (and a VU Alumni), addressing *How Education is Important to Achieve all of the SDGs, not just SDG 4.*

The progress that the country has made against the SDGs was highlighted, including:

- Poverty (measured as under \$1.90 a day) has reduced from 47% in 2007 to 30% in 2014.
- Health indicators show stunting has dropped by 12% over five years
- Maternal and child mortality rates are greatly reduced
- Timor-Leste is polio-free, and is on track to eliminate malaria
- Hundreds of primary and pre-secondary schools have been built
- Gender parity has been achieved at all levels of education.

In Timor-Leste almost fifty percent of the population is 18 or under, and today's students, with access to the internet and technology, are more connected than ever before. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport is revising the curriculum to get students more involved in the **analysing** and the **doing**, and less on the copying and memorising. Students will be learning about, considering, and helping the country achieve its goals in the SDGs through real world problem-solving in schools and become advocates, teaching their communities.

**"LET US AS THE MINISTRY KNOW WHAT WE CAN DO TO HELP. WE ALL HAVE A PART TO PLAY IN ACHIEVING THE SDGS, AND WE ALL WILL EITHER REAP THE BENEFITS OF A MORE DEVELOPED AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY, OR WE WILL ALL SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES OF FAILING TO DO SO"**  
**– HE DULCE DE JESUS SOARES, MINISTER OF EDUCATION, YOUTH AND SPORT**

The NVR summary report was shared with the conference participants and was presented to the UN in New York after the conference.

# THEMES

This year the conference delved deeper into the themes that are the most relevant to Timorese young people:

THEME 1	THEME 2	THEME 3	THEME 4	THEME 5
<p><b>End hunger and malnutrition and achieve sustainable life on the land</b></p> <p>Encourage youth to share their knowledge learnt in school and university in rural areas to revitalise family farms and address issues such as land degradation.</p> <p>Help create local food markets and promote knowledge of nutritious food preparation using healthy local produce.</p> <p>SDGs 2 &amp; 15</p>	<p><b>Community health including clean water and sanitation</b></p> <p>Promote healthy lifestyles, including a reduction in smoking, drugs, alcohol and traffic accidents, prevention of communicable and non-communicable diseases.</p> <p>Promote community action to address lack of water and sanitation, and knowledge of associated health issues.</p> <p>SDGs 3 &amp; 6</p>	<p><b>Decent work and sustainable cities and communities</b></p> <p>Promote youth enterprises, cooperatives and the solidarity economy to establish sustainable businesses in local marketing, housing, public transport and recycling of rubbish</p> <p>SDGs 8 &amp; 11</p>	<p><b>Responsible production and consumption, climate action and marine life</b></p> <p>Reduce the use of packaging and promote recycling, purchase of local produce, energy efficient lighting and cooking.</p> <p>Raise awareness of the marine environment and livelihoods that can be gained from the seas.</p> <p>SDGs 12, 13 &amp; 14</p>	<p><b>Peace, justice and education for women and girls</b></p> <p>Reduce discrimination against, and intimidation of women and girls in schools and universities.</p> <p>In society promote men against violence education, gender equality and reproductive health knowledge amongst youth.</p> <p>SDGs 4, 5 &amp; 16</p>



# KEY OUTCOMES & BENEFITS

Victoria University and UNTL have had a long, well-regarded collaboration since 1999. Students from Timor-Leste study at VU and VU alumni are represented in influential positions of government, universities, NGOs and the Australian Embassy.

The biennial Conference is a hallmark of the collaboration and has been held every two years since 2009. Many influential people, Timorese academics and students have participated.

The conference focuses on development policy and key issues of Timor-Leste's sustainable development. Through the conference, UNTL and VU have built relationships and engaged with a range of different academics who play a vital role in the facilitation of the conference sessions.

The UNTL-VU conference is unique compared to the formal conferences typical in Dili due to its high level of student participation and the inclusion of diverse ideas.

Timorese students are encouraged to participate actively in the discussions and, in 2019, young people were involved in the speaking program including one plenary session of young speakers exclusively. The conference focused on issues that were relevant to young Timorese people and provided the opportunity for students to participate in open discussion and debate and to learn and respond more knowledgeably to the issues that impact on their daily lives.

**"THE MAIN REASON I ATTENDED THIS CONFERENCE WAS BECAUSE IT RELATED TO YOUTH AND IT REMINDS ME AS A YOUTH TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROCESS THAT'S RUNNING IN THIS COUNTRY, AND TO DEVELOP MY BELOVED COUNTRY WITH THE THINGS I LEARNT HERE."**

**– SERGIO, 17 YEARS OLD**

**270** PARTICIPANTS ON DAY ONE, 240 ON DAY TWO

23% international, 77% Timorese, 55% UNTL students

**65** CONTRIBUTORS

Presenters, Facilitators, Rapporteurs and Youth Ambassadors

**106** SURVEY RESPONSES

33% academics, 56% students and 12% employed

**+** HIGH DEGREE OF POSITIVE FEEDBACK

All session topics were described as 'important' and 'interesting' by respondents

 **GENDER JUSTICE HIGH ON THE AGENDA**

Theme 5 attracted 39% of participants, twice as many people as to the other themes, each of which attracted between 12% to 19% of the participants.



**“WHEN I GO BACK TO MY COMMUNITY, I WILL TELL THEM TO BE MORE PRODUCTIVE AND TO PREVENT THE PROBLEMS THAT THEY FACE SO THEY CAN FOCUS ON THEIR STUDY AND HOW TO ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS AND TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN THE FUTURE.”**  
– VALERIA, 18 YEARS OLD

## CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Conference Recommendations were prepared in collaboration with the theme facilitators.

To progress these recommendations, we encourage the conference facilitators, presenters and participants to engage in the process of sharing, advocating and influencing decision makers to implement them and ensure that the SDGs are well embedded in the education system curricula.

It is important to keep alive the passion with which the issues were debated to further advance Timor-Leste’s efforts to reduce poverty, open new opportunities for young people in agriculture and business, and empower young people with new knowledge to promote sustainable practices. Young people can act as agents of change in their communities, and ensure that women and men receive equal respect and opportunity in education, in the home and in the family.



## CONTACT

Thank you to Dr Ann Wigglesworth, VU Honorary Fellow, for her coordination role in the 2019 UNTL-VU Timor-Leste Conference.

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