
ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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 the 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 attracted over 270 people, the majority of whom were Timorese students.

Five important themes were explored, designed to enable young people to have the knowledge they need to advance the Sustainable Development Goals through actions in their daily lives:

THEME 1: End hunger and malnutrition and achieve sustainable life on the land	SDGs 2 & 15
THEME 2: Community health including clean water and sanitation	SDGs 3 & 6
THEME 3: Decent work and sustainable cities and communities	SDGs 8 & 11
THEME 4: Responsible production and consumption, climate action and marine life	SDGs 12, 13 & 14
THEME 5: Peace, justice and education for women and girls	SDGs 4, 5 & 16

There was a high degree of student participation in the sessions. Participants described the topics as 'important' and 'interesting' and many commented on the high quality of the presentations. The key issues and recommendations identified during this conference are provided below.

For these recommendations to be taken forward, we encourage the facilitators, presenters and participants to engage in the process of sharing, advocating and influencing decision makers to implement them.

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.

The SDGs should be embedded in primary and secondary education, and university curricula.

THEME ONE: END HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION AND ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE LIFE ON THE LAND

Youth as farmers

- Life on the land requires building resilience
- Permaculture and school gardens can provide education that attracts young people to agriculture and can result in successful businesses
- Educated youth need to return to communities to share their knowledge, but students do not want to go home to their rural areas. Young people might need incentives to return to agriculture.

Ending hunger

- To end hunger, policies must be transformed into action
- Need good knowledge-sharing and information at school to improve nutrition
- School kids eat instant noodles and drink soft drinks which have no nutrition. Foods we are eating have many chemicals that cause people to be sick
- We need to use wild and domestic foods from our ancestors, and protein from the sea
- Promote Food Sovereignty = Plant what you eat and eat what you plant.

The Environment

- Climate change requires looking after the planet. The impact of climate changes farming practices
- Marine life is affected by plastic. Plastic rubbish must be properly dispose of so fish do not die
- Need to counteract de-forestation, learn about habitat of animals and inform the government to protect them
- Youth must get involved in planting trees, and work hard to look after the environment.

Recommendations:

1. Successful farmers need education
2. Schools should have a good student kitchen and school garden program to support school feeding
3. Government support needed to strengthen student knowledge of permaculture
4. More focus on environmental and natural science, health and nutrition in the school curriculum
5. Collaborate and share information within the development community through seminars, exhibitions, media and journals
6. Identify the market potential to sell competitively priced local organic produce, for the diversification of production in Timor-Leste
7. Strengthen government policy on school feeding, and providing quality nutritious food to students.
8. Universities should provide environmental education, health and nutrition education for all students, including field research to increase knowledge in sustainable development
9. Educate more young people to learn about land and production (via data, research, library)
10. Encourage students to participate in field work activity (practice and theory).

Promoting a healthy lifestyle and preventing mosquito borne disease

- Educate the community about preventing breeding of mosquitoes
- Need more attention to smoking, drinking and road accidents
- Lack of clean water and sanitation stops girls/women going to school
- Health is in our hands. Government must give more importance to raising awareness in the community and providing facilities.

Recommendations:

1. Include prevention of mosquito breeding in the curriculum
2. Facilitate water flow by unblocking drains and gutters. Add natural predators of mosquito larvae to fish ponds
3. Promote government spraying/fogging program
4. Gain expertise in identifying insecticide resistance in the mosquito population by international collaboration (e.g. Pest and Environmental Adaptation Control Group, the University of Melbourne)
5. To eliminate dengue use a multi-faceted approach. Consider available dengue vaccines and biological control to reduce mosquito population and reduce dengue transmission.

Road accidents

- Road accidents are the 10th major cause of death in Timor-Leste due to drunk drivers; aggressive attitude; speeding; lack of driving qualification; talking on the phone; vehicle overloaded; vehicle modifications
- Addressing road accidents requires Corporate responsibility; Individual responsibility and Government responsibility.

Recommendations:

1. Need more driver training
2. Raise awareness of safe driving at schools and in public health education
3. Impose strict law enforcement and penalties, periodic registration of vehicles and technical inspections.

Tobacco, alcohol and drugs

Factors contributing to abuse of tobacco, alcohol and drugs are:

- Easy access and low prices for tobacco and cigarettes
- Lack of equipment and tools to detect drug trafficking on the national borders
- Lack of information on knowledge on the impacts of drugs
- No seriousness in implementing existing laws and legislations on tobacco control, alcohol and substance use.

Recommendations:

1. Strengthen security presence in the border, train border security personnel
2. Provide appropriate equipment for detecting drug trafficking
3. Education and socialisation on the negative impacts of drugs and narcotics
4. Reinforce laws on import and exports and increase tobacco tax

5. Limit the number of cigarettes purchased by individuals and impose age limit
6. Supervise commercial sales in the school compounds
7. Reduce banners and promotion materials in public places.

Water, sanitation and public health for young people

- Water taps are often left open – need to educate people to utilise water responsibly
- Inadequate water piping and poor water quality
- Sustainable water purification with water filters can clean water and reduce use of plastic bottles
- Inclusive access to toilets for disabled people
- Lack of clean water in schools stops menstruating women going to school
- Lack of awareness of public health among young people particularly reproductive health and family planning resulting in high maternal deaths and child mortality in Timor-Leste.

Recommendations:

1. Education to use water responsibly
2. Need more water storages (reservoirs) and improved water quality
3. Promote less costly water purification system (e.g. water filters) for communities, schools and businesses to reduce need for plastic bottles.
4. Clean water and sanitary facilities should be available in all schools
5. Design sanitary facilities to be accessible to all – inclusive of disability
6. Young people should engage in public health interventions to understand policies and practices for health and reproductive health. For future families, young people need to be aware of health and reproductive health.

THEME THREE – DECENT WORK AND SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

- The government wants to be like Singapore, but we have only 11 years to 2030 (NDP)
- The informal sector is critical to the economy, need research on this, not only on the private sector
The informal economy is not legalised, and does not contribute to GDP, so it is ignored
- The solidarity economy depends on families and networks
- The informal economy and the solidarity economy can facilitate youth into work
- Need skills to do small business, but people can start a business with little capital
- The stereotype of migration is that it is bad. But it gets good incomes, and benefits people and brings capital to set up businesses
- Education is needed to change the mentality of the people. The Ministry of Education should include the SDGs in the curriculum.

Recommendations:

The informal sector makes a big contribution to the economy of Timor-Leste, therefore government should provide good infrastructure and a decent place for small entrepreneurs to run their business or sell their goods.

1. UNTL needs to conduct more research on informal sector and provide training related to financial management and entrepreneurship for small entrepreneurs so they can manage their money well
2. Government need to do integrated development planning before construction to avoid damage to the environment, so sustainable development can be achieved

3. For a sustainable economy, we need to build and generate businesses based on local resources, to establish a sufficiency economy
4. There is a need to establish youth groups to organize themselves to run businesses, access capital and create jobs for themselves and for others
5. Government need to give attention to the digital platforms promoted by youth to generate income since there is a big opportunity for that
6. Negative stereotypes about labour migration need to be overturned
7. Government need to improve the banking system to reduce the cost of transferring money from Timor-Leste's migrant workers overseas and to maximise the benefits to the economy
8. Government should pay attention to all the workers in overseas especially in the UK, because their contributions to the economy of Timor-Leste through family wellbeing is high
9. Partnership between civil society, government, university and community are crucial to create a sustainable economy
10. Young people have to use their knowledge actively in decision making about sustainable development in order to identify their own problems and potential resources
11. Government should focus more on education programs that directly respond to young people's needs like vocational school and polytechnics which can increase skills and prepare participants to be ready to work in any formal sector or informal sector in decent work
12. Ensure decent work for all men and women by 2030
13. The Ministry of Education should include knowledge about the SDGs in the school curriculum.
14. Development without damage to our environment for the sustainability of our cities and communities requires less production of carbon in the cities; good nutrition; and clean water including preserving water systems
15. Government need to develop each village or municipality base on their natural resources to keep the originality of the nature. Promote environment protection
16. Proper recycling of rubbish to be encouraged, including turning organic waste into fertilizer
17. Provide more capacity building/training in the rural areas in for rural people, especially young people, to be able to create their own jobs and avoid hunting for jobs in the city
18. Introduce a legal rights system for land to sustain human economic activity.

THEME FOUR – RESPONSIBLE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION, CLIMATE ACTION AND MARINE LIFE

Marine Life

- Young people must be aware of the importance of marine life – many species are threatened. We need to learn to live depending on the sea
- Fishers and other people in coastal communities don't know how to swim
- Diving instructors training is needed (next year we may have the first Timorese dive master)
- Need to know more about diversity under the sea and marine science.

Recommendations:

1. Provide swimming lessons and diving lessons at the Department of Fisheries and Marine Science at UNTL, and establish national training for swimming instructors
2. Urge national parliament to ratify three listed conventions such as SOLAS (Safety of Life at Sea), STCW (Standard of Training Certification and Watch keeping – rights for Maritime Officers) and MARPOL (Marine Pollution)
3. Establish a lifeguard authority in safeguarding visitors in designated beaches and providing capacity which encompasses ocean stewardship.

Climate Change and Consumer Choices

- Consumers have a right to know about their choices – increase consumer knowledge about the impact of their choices on the environment
- Coastal areas are being mined for oil but there is inadequate local economic development using available marine resources
- In coastal areas build the local economy to enable visitors/tourists to stay
- Turtles are at risk due to non-organic material waste. Use banana leaves instead of plastic to serve/wrap food.

Recommendations:

1. Include knowledge about health and environmental impacts of imported and local products in the curriculum
2. Reduce plastic waste by installing water fountains at universities as a pilot and then extend to public recreational places
3. Ban Styrofoam as a starting point for reducing plastic-based products
4. Promote banana leaves and other organic alternatives which can create a niche for local businesses
5. Improve tax policy in controlling imported food products to enhance local production, while ensuring that consumer needs are affordable
6. Enforce quality control for both local and imported food products that should be effectively administered by relevant government institutions
7. Encourage the government institutions to effectively execute high priority recommendations of the SDGs with transparent and equitable follow-up.

THEME FIVE – PEACE, JUSTICE AND EDUCATION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

Reproductive Health

- Young people speak strongly against early marriage and teenage pregnancy
- There is no sexual education in primary or secondary schools
- Families do not talk about sex
- Sex education is seen as making the young people bad
- Collaboration is lacking on reproductive health between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and the Catholic Church – they cannot agree. Reproductive health knowledge must involve the Catholic Church, elders and young people
- To address the reality that young people are facing Ministry of Education must include Reproductive Health in the curriculum.

Gender Equality

- In spite of women's participation in parliament, gender equality is a problem for girls
- What is gender equality? Boys are offended when we speak of it, but we need to work together not create fear to speak
- Female students are more oppressed than male ones in extended families when they migrate to Dili for education and stay with their extended family for the education purposes
- LGBTQIA+ was not included in the conference
- Lawmakers should analyse well so gender equality is not in conflict with culture
- Journalists should reduce gender discrimination in the media
- Some conference participants still judged women's decency by their clothes and way of dress, showing more gender education is needed

- Male leaders from academic institutions and government in the conference demonstrated their anti-women attitude showing lack of acceptance of gender equality.

Recommendations:

1. Increase knowledge of risks of early marriage and early pregnancy within families and communities
Prevent early marriage through socialization of risks and economic costs, so young people and their parents can make decisions carefully before deciding on early marriage
2. Review implementation of reproductive health in the curriculum. Teachers speak in a closed way as if information is secret and sacred. In-depth training needed to teach the subject so students can understand reproductive health well. Develop the curriculum on preventative action through collaboration of Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health
3. Ensure training in gender and reproductive health is provided in ALL schools
4. To increase reproductive health knowledge in the community, bring together young men and women to discuss how to plan their family before and after marriage. Introduce contraception in trainings, especially training in the church before they get married
5. Provide training in gender equality for all communities in rural areas
6. Gender advocates who promote knowledge of gender rights in the communities must include a focus on the specific issues facing young women and girls
7. Consider LGBTQIA+ people with inclusive strategies needed that 'don't leave anyone behind'
8. Give training about what people can do and cannot do with social media. Include ethical use of social media and technologies in the curriculum
9. Journalists should be informed on gender issues to minimize discrimination against women
10. Raise the Ministry of Education budget to improve facilities and implement gender sensitivity training for teachers
11. Promote Constitutional rights of gender equality within customary practices. Review and analyse Article 2 and 17 of the Constitution, and establish a process to ensure that customary leaders understand their obligation to bring constitutional rights, including gender equality, into customary governance practices at community level
12. Implement the Domestic Violence Law correctly. People who commit the crime of domestic violence must be punished. Nepotism within the Ministry of Justice that favours perpetrators must be stopped so perpetrators of domestic violence and incest do not go free
13. Provide civic education in schools to strengthen understanding of citizen's responsibility
14. Promote inclusion of people living with disability by increased knowledge of disability through information to schools and facilitating access
15. Build dormitories to promote equality of access to education for students from remote areas to stay in Dili at reasonable cost
16. Provide counseling and psychological or social support to students who are victims of domestic violence, sexual violence and early pregnancy, to reduce trauma and increase retention at school.