



A Newsletter on Timor-Leste's 4th National Human Development Report (NHDR) Project

Second Edition

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Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.

An Exciting Trip around the Country Gathering Youth Voices



*A group photo of the Focus Group Discussion participants in Aileu.
Photo: Merve Hosgelen*

Timor-Leste is the youngest nation in Asia Pacific Region with a population characterized as one of the most youthful in the world. Timor-Leste's 4th NHDR is a collaborative project between the Government of Timor-Leste, UNDP and Flinders University, Australia. The report has set its goal as understanding the youth of Timor-Leste and guiding policies to translate the youth potential of this country into a dividend for sustainable development.

Since the beginning of the project in March 2016, one of the major milestones of the NHDR project has been the conduct of a National Youth Well-Being Survey with 800 young people aged between 15 and 34. This survey has shed light into the state of young people's well-being in eight aspects of life. The preliminary results have been disseminated in November 2016 with a wide range of stakeholders and a summary of these findings also featured in the previous NHDR newsletter which can be accessed through UNDP website.

To seek more in-depth information related to some of the survey results and to ensure wider youth participation in the preparation of the NHDR, project team has been reaching out to youth in each municipality to conduct focus group discussions (FGDs) about their challenges, opportunities and aspirations.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with the Youth

With excellent support from the Secretary of State for the Youth and Sports (SSYS), UNDP has been

collaborating with Youth Centers in all municipalities to gather diverse groups of young people in the age group of 15 to 34 to discuss in small groups about issues related to their lives.

The conduct of these Focus Group Discussions has been fully funded by Flinders University, Australia under the collaborative nature of the project.



A group photo of FGD participants in Manufahi. Photo: Merve Hosgelen

Since February 2017, the project team has succeeded to consult with more than 200 youth (nearly equal participation from young women and men) in 10 municipalities.



A group photo with FGD participants in Viqueque. Photo: Merve Hosgelen

In these focus group discussions, which were held in respective Youth Centers within each municipality, the youth were provided with the opportunity to reflect on their lives, voice their aspirations and raise their concerns as individuals and discuss collectively how they perceive their opportunities as youth living in their local area.



Focus Group Discussion in Covalima. Photo: Merve Hosgelen

What were the Focus Group Discussion Topics?

The questions raised during the group discussions explored young people's thoughts on:

- The most important things that make them happy and satisfied in their lives
- A single change that they would like to see in their circumstance or the nation that could significantly improve their life
- Whether they think Timor-Leste is a peaceful society and they feel safe to lead the life that they aspire to
- The circumstances where they may justify using violence
- Their ideal age of marriage and ideal number of children and reasons behind these
- The type of job that they aspire to and the type of training they would like to receive to achieve their desired job

The youth were also asked about their opinion on the reasons behind youth unemployment and the sectors they would like to see growing where they consider more jobs can be created for the youth.



Participants of the Focus Group Discussion in Manufahi. Photo: Merve Hosgelen

Initial Insights Gained from Discussions with the Youth

While the full analysis of the FGDs will be highlighted in the NHDR and will guide the recommended pathways for achieving a youth dividend for sustainable development and peace in Timor-Leste, some of the initial insights gained from the field are highlighted below.

On Peace and Safety



Photo of youth reflecting on their lives. Photo: Merve Hosgelen

The youth were divided in their perceptions about whether Timor-Leste is a peaceful country. Majority of the youth (almost 8 out of 10) think that Timor-Leste is not a peaceful society because there are youth groups fighting one another still and they feel extremely concerned about moving around at night. Both young men and women restrict their activities only to day time. Their concerns are linked with being harassed by young people getting drunk on the streets or being miss-targeted by gangs.

'My safety is of course important to me. I am a human and I only live once. I fear being at the wrong place at the wrong time and being miss-targeted and dying too early'

The youth also raise concerns about political leaders dividing the youth and influencing them in a way that seeds further conflict among each other in certain periods of time such as the elections.

'Leaders of this country easily influence and provoke young people in Timor-Leste. Politicians are good at blaming each other and generating hatred. There is a lot of uneducated youth with nothing to do. Having been influenced they create conflict.'

The youth who found Timor-Leste a peaceful nation on the other hand often compared the situation to the 2006 conflict and stressed the importance of being an independent country. They also thought that the incidents are small scale and do not impact the population at large.

One respondent said *'Timor-Leste has two leaders who have been awarded with Nobel Peace Prize. How could we be not peaceful?'*

On Aspirations

Youths biggest aspiration seemed to be around capacity building for themselves and further training to fulfil their potential and do good for their communities.



One of the participants of Focus Group Discussion in Viqueque. Photo: Merve Hosgelen

'We need to access quality education and reduce the number of uneducated youth such as the youth sitting on the streets. Food is a source of life. We need more employment in agriculture and horticulture to feed our communities. We require practical training to know how to plant cash crops or trees that could generate income and how to market these.'

When the question was asked about a single change that they would like to see in their lives, the answers were very much focused on having peace and stability and a united youth under one nationality as well as having a job and the access to relevant training opportunities to lead a life that gives them the dignity and opportunity to contribute to their communities.

'Most important thing in life is dignity. A person can have dignity by having the skills and a decent job. In the absence of decent jobs, one can easily lose their dignity'

It was interesting to observe that changing their economic condition, having more assets or earning more income was not a burning priority for the youth.

On Marriage and Children

In relation to discussions around forming an ideal family, the youth were often amused by the topic.



*Youth reflecting on their lives during a FGD in Covalima.
Photo: Merve Hosgelen*

Youth wanting marriage at a later age and fewer children were in favor of enjoying life, becoming more mature and learning more about what it takes to get married (also in terms of knowing the local traditions and customs) before they move into this phase of their lives.

Young people willing to have fewer children (e.g. 2-3) were interested in providing them with the opportunity for longer education.

'I want 2 children because more than 2 is a headache. It is a lot of work. I also want to give them more opportunities and allow them to attain higher education.'

Other youth willing to get married around age 25 or below and have 4 or more children were thinking that their economic situation will allow them to do so and they would still be able to treat their children with equal care and opportunities. Some of youth in the latter category also thought it is in god's hands or they do not do any plans.

'6 children will be good because I could sustain them economically and if some of them leave us to go to Dili or overseas then the rest can stay to know about our culture and traditions and help with the family economy.'

On Violence

The discussions around violence revealed that youth justifies violence used by teachers to discipline students, by parents, older brothers or sisters to teach their children or siblings how to behave.

'Teachers use violence to discipline students. Even if they are sometimes unproportioned, teachers are always right in the eyes of the parents.'

'Traditionally it is accepted to beat your sister or brother. Violence within family is often tolerated. People don't go to police even if they are beaten up to death because it is family business.'

The participants also said emotions exacerbated by alcohol can sometimes overrule rational behavior. They said some youth also use being drunk as an excuse for their actions.

'Suppose for example my sister was going out with a guy and she got pregnant. If the guy does not take responsibility, in that case I would use violence.'



*Youth expressing their views during FGD in Baucau.
Photo: Merve Hosgelen*

On Jobs and Training

The youth also discussed why they think there is large unemployment among the youth. There were many reasons they put forward. Some of major ones mentioned are listed below.

- High nepotism and lack of family connections
- Lack of information about the available jobs
- Lack of motivation among youth to access information on vacancies or mentally not being prepared to apply for the available jobs
- Not many job of opportunities
- Lack of training centers for youth and hence unskilled youth
- Criminal record



*Youth expressing their views during FGD in Viqueque.
Photo: Merve Hosgelen*

In general, youth were interested in jobs that serve their family and community such as being a farmer, a teacher or a policeman. Some also mentioned they want to run their business to be their own boss and have flexible time. There was consensus around the need for growth in education, agriculture, tourism and private sector to provide jobs for the youth.

Almost every group raised their interest to have a Youth Training Center in their municipality which could provide youth the skills needed for the local context. They also raised their willingness to attain more language (mainly English and Portuguese), ICT and entrepreneurship training.

The staff of Youth Centers also raised their interest to collaborate with the NHDR team and attain training on designing and conducting Focus Group

Discussions such as these so that they can undertake similar consultations with the youth in their municipality on a regular basis. They stressed the importance of such continuous dialogue as a pre-condition for sustained peace and stability.

Overall, youth were excited about being at the center of the policy dialogue and the potential outcomes of the upcoming report. UNDP is working on establishing an online platform to connect the youth who have been a part of the NHDR consultative process in every municipality so that the dialogue can continue for a better future for young people in Timor-Leste.

The journey of collecting youth voices around Timor-Leste will continue with Manatutu, Oecusse and Lautem municipalities in the next couple of weeks.

Timor-Leste's 4th NHDR is expected to be launched in November 2017. Leading up to the final product, various consultative platforms will be arranged between in May-June 2017. These will validate the main messages of the report and engage stakeholders for a constructive policy dialogue to help unlock youth's potential for sustainable development.



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