



CONCEPT NOTE

RATIONALE

Freshwater is the most important resource for humankind, cutting across all social, economic and environmental activities. It is a condition for all life on our planet, an enabling or limiting factor for any social and technological development, a possible source of welfare or misery, cooperation or conflict. While water is the key driver of economic and social development, it also has a basic function in maintaining the integrity of the natural environment. The social, economic and environmental impact of improved water security will benefit and contribute to a much wider development agenda. To achieve water security, we must protect vulnerable water systems, mitigate the impacts of water-related hazards such as floods and droughts, safeguard access to water functions and services and manage water resources in an integrated and equitable manner.

Sustainable Development Goal 6 seeks to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, in recognition that access to safe water and sanitation - and the sound management of freshwater ecosystems - are essential to human health and to environmental sustainability and economic prosperity.

Prone to water scarcity, Timor-Leste faces issues relating to water quality as well as to sanitation. This is evident from the recently released report of WHO and UNICEF¹ which estimated about 70% of the population in Timor-Leste having access to basic drinking water service and 44% having access to basic sanitation service. Due to lack of data on water quality and safe management of sanitation services, the report does not include data on safely managed water and sanitation. To address drinking water quality issues, since 2009, the MoH and MoPWTC with support from WHO have been working to establish national water quality standards, develop guidelines on water quality monitoring and piloting of water safety plans in four rural and six urban water schemes. The results of the pilots are promising. A continuation strategy for scaling up water safety plans in other water schemes has been finalized. In alignment with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, the Timor-Leste Strategic Development plan 2011-2030 notes that good access to safe drinking water and a proper sanitation system is essential for the health and wellbeing of the people.

¹ Progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene: 2017 update and SDG baselines. 2017 WHO and UNICEF

A 2015 report published by the World Bank² notes that while progress has been made in the water sector in Timor-Leste, much remains to be done, in particular in rural areas where inadequate water supply acts in combination with limited sanitation and hygiene.

Timor-Leste relies for its water supply on a combination of household tap water in urban areas and public taps, wells and springs in rural areas. During the dry season, communities suffer from lack of water for drinking as well as cooking, washing, cleaning and other household uses. Those who cannot afford to purchase water suffer disproportionately. Rural areas are particularly at risk. A significant portion of the rural water supply system does not function efficiently, and some communities must collect water across considerable distances. This may in turn negatively affect education in cases where children have to sacrifice time for school in order to help carry water from one village to another. Health impacts have also been noted - rural clinics have reported that children were found to suffer from skin allergies because lack of clean and good quality of water in their villages.

Sanitation remains an issue of particular concern. According to the World Bank, established targets for access to water and sanitation remain out of reach, in particular for sanitation. With nearly 70% of the country's population living in rural communities, this gap impacts a large proportion of the country's population. If Timor-Leste is to meet its Strategic Development Plan vision for 2030 – which aims for all citizens to have access to clean water and improved sanitation - then current efforts in sanitation, particularly in rural areas, will need to be more intensively supported and scaled up³. While rural areas are particularly affected, lack of proper sanitation also impacts urban communities. A recent study conducted by a team of researchers from Japan team concluded that none of Dili's beaches are safe for swimming because of bacterial contamination, due to the discharge of untreated wastewater.

Timor-Leste's freshwater resources, if managed sustainably and effectively, can meet the water demands of the country's growing population with good quality water. However, water scarcity and poor water quality present major challenges in securing sufficient water of good quality to meet human, environmental, social and economic needs to support Timor-Leste's achievement of the targets under Timor-Leste Strategic Development Plan, SDG6 and the other Sustainable Development Goals. The national consultation is an opportunity to review lessons from water safety planning pilots and discuss plans for scaling it up throughout the country.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE

The main objectives of the dialogue are to:

- Bring UNESCO's international experts and relevant local stakeholders i.e. development partners and government counterparts, together to discuss exchange views, identify priorities and prepare project proposals to strengthen the management of Timor-Leste's

² Water Supply and Sanitation in Timor-Leste Turning Finance into Services for the Future. © 2015 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank

³ Water Supply and Sanitation in Timor-Leste Turning Finance into Services for the Future. © 2015 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank.

freshwater resources and to reduce negative impacts on human well-being and the natural environment;

- Discuss ideas on protection of the Timor-Leste water resources from pollution, enhance and restore water quality, conserve water and use water efficiently;
- Foster increased understanding of the SDG6 and related targets among key actors in Timor-Leste's water sector by strengthening professional networking and promoting active debate on how to address water-related goals and targets through cross-sectoral integration;
- Share results of the 10 pilot water safety plans and discuss institutionalization of water safety plans
- Explore developmental research potential for feasible homegrown solutions related to water quality, quantity and recycling;
- Formalize focused human and institutional capacity building programmes to strengthen the water research capabilities in Timor-Leste.
- To discuss ideas on the development of knowledge networks, virtual centres and centres of excellence to promote research and development related to all aspects of water, drawing on the capacities of UNESCO category-2 centres and water chairs.

BACKGROUND AND KEY AREAS TO BE DISCUSSED IN THE DIALOGUE

Supported by UNESCO Office Jakarta and Malaysian Funds-in-Trust through the AP-FAST project, the dialogue will serve to follow up the June 2017 national Timor-Leste AP-FAST workshop. Under the heading "Accelerating Science and Technology to Foster the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific", AP-FAST seeks to optimize the contributions of science, engineering, technology and innovation towards the implementation of the SDGs in Asia and the Pacific. The dialogue will enable detailed and targeted discussions on SDG6 on water and sanitation. International experts along with local stakeholders will work together to formulate interventions in support of government efforts to improve access to safe drinking water, with particular focus on the most underprivileged groups.

UNESCO'S ROLE

UNESCO works to build the scientific knowledge base to help countries manage their water resources in a sustainable way through the International Hydrological Programme (IHP), through publication of the UN-wide World Water Development Report each year, and through numerous water-related research, training and networking centers and university chairs around the world.

WHO'S ROLE

WHO is the directing and coordinating authority on international health work, and responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends. The WHO Guidelines for Drinking-water Quality recommend Water Safety Plans as the most effective means of consistently ensuring the safety of drinking-water supply. WHO provides technical support in advancing water safety plans.

EXPECTED RESULTS

- Participants contribute by sharing their experiences and providing information on best practice, which will be documented to consolidate the knowledge basis on water and sustainable development in Timor-Leste
- Participants use the dialogue to create enhanced awareness in their respective organizations, use the knowledge to prepare national and institutional strategies, and to implement sectoral and inter-sectoral sustainable development programmes.
- Within the framework of National Water Policy of Timor-Leste, participants draft joint proposals for the development of a national water management plan, for technical studies and development of capacity in Integrated Water Resources Management and river basin management; and on planning and capacity building for wastewater management.

PARTICIPANTS

There will be around 60 participants in this dialogue. All relevant government departments - working in water sector - as well as development partners will be invited.

- International experts
 - Prof. Soontak Lee, Republic of Korea
 - Dr. Tariq Rana, Australia
 - Dr. Olivia Castillo, Philippines
 - Mr. Raza Shah, UNESCO Islamabad Office
 - Mr Nam Raj Khatri, WHO-WASH Consultant, Nepal
- Local Participants

Local participants will be from following departments:

- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
- Water experts from academia
- National Water Directors under Ministry of Public Works
- Development Partners working in water sector
- Ministry of Health