

PAPER PREPARED FOR

**LEARNING FOR ALL  
MINISTERIAL MEETING**

**TIMOR-LESTE**

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MINISTÉRIO DA  
EDUCAÇÃO

## **TIMOR-LESTE COUNTRY PAPER**

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**8 September 2013**

## Country Paper Timor-Leste<sup>1</sup>

Timor-Leste, as everyone is aware, is a country with many challenges to achieving the MDG that states that children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. If we look at our net enrollment data, we see that 94% of children are enrolled in Cycle 1 and 2 (primary level) of basic education. However, that number is very deceiving, as it does not take into account the facts that a) many children enrolled are under-aged or repeating, thus skewing the statistics, and b) many children just stop going to school after a few days, or after one school year ends. These children, for reasons too complicated to detail here, are not considered “drop outs” and are thus not counted. These myriad of circumstances contribute to the real facts that more or less half of children drop out of school by third grade. Even if children stay in school, on average, it would take 11 years for a child to complete the first 6 years of education. If one looks at it in those terms, Timor-Leste has a great deal to do in the next 2 1/2 years to achieve MDG #2.

While we identified many constraints in the 3 preparatory gatherings leading up to the writing of this paper, we selected three that the Ministry of Education will need financial support with in order to achieve desired outcomes by the identified deadline of 3 years. There are many programs that have already been put into place, such as school feeding, that have greatly improved attendance. There are other systematic interventions, such as data collection and analysis, system capacity building, and teacher allocation, that the Ministry feels can be tackled with in-country resources. However, the ones that were identified that we feel that GPE and other donors could best help with are discussed below. *Please note that all cost calculations are based on estimated amounts and therefore indicative. Detailed cost calculations can be provided upon request.*

The **first** constraint is in the area of **quality of learning**. This is the area that we are most focused upon, as it is the most critical in terms of quality education, and also the most detailed. Currently we are using an outdated curriculum, with very few local references. The guidebook is unwieldy and the language obtuse; it is very difficult to implement. There are no teaching and learning materials specifically linked with certain lesson plans; therefore materials that have been distributed in the past remain unused because teachers are unsure how to relate them to the curriculum. Teachers use antiquated methods of teaching, boring students and demotivating them. Children do not learn through doing, instead they memorize facts that they do not understand in order to pass an exam. Children do not learn how to read until 4th grade and up, and their math and analytical skills are abysmal. In some cases, parents do not send their children to school because they do not see any benefit.

We are using a systematic approach to remedy this situation: 1. Reform the current primary curriculum to ensure an international quality and locally relevant curriculum that includes a specific teaching syllabus. From this syllabus all teaching and learning materials will be developed, including those using multi-media. This curriculum development must go hand-in-hand with the accompanying training. The first phase of training will be done in early 2014, which will be a whole-school approach training based in all of our schools, focusing on child-centered pedagogy, student and community participation and inclusivity. This activity will prepare the schools for the new way of teaching that the curriculum will demand. By the middle of 2014 the new curriculum will be finished, and teachers will all get an induction to this new curriculum and its manuals. Most teaching and learning materials should be finalized by the end of 2014. In 2015 the new curriculum will be rolled out, along with distribution of all relevant teaching and learning materials. The school grants program will also be revamped to ensure that students are receiving the renewable supplies that they will need to conduct activities. This curriculum roll-out will be accompanied by support staff in every

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<sup>1</sup> This country paper has resulted from 3 national consultations/workshops: (i) Education Mini-Summit (Dec. 2012); (ii) Joint Action for Education Seminar (Jan. 2013); and (iii) Learning for All workshop (Sep. 2013).

school cluster, to assist the deputy director of the cluster in ensuring that teachers are receiving the guidance needed to properly implement the curriculum.

This initiative should make a huge impact on the quality of learning, as well as the relevance of learning. Children will be assessed continuously, with many less exams, which should help retain them. Teachers should feel more confident about teaching, which will in turn help them to be more effective and patient with the children, helping to build the teacher-student bonds so important to learning. Children will enjoy school, which will encourage them to attend. When children feel that they are learning skills that they can use, both they will be more enthusiastic about going to school, and their parents will feel that school is more useful; thus the probability of them sending their children will be higher. We will invite an independent institution to conduct an EGMA and an EGRA at the end of 2015 – beginning of 2016 to measure if children are indeed learning better with this new curriculum.

Impact: 300,000 children will receive a better education and be more motivated to go to school  
Implementation Calendar and Cost:

1. Curriculum reform: 2.5 million dollars – cost covered by MinEd, with NGO input
2. teaching and learning materials, including multi-media: 20 million dollars – MinEd/donor/GPE collaboration
3. Whole-school approach preparatory training: 2 million dollars – MinEd + donors
4. Initial teacher induction training: 2 million dollars – MinEd/NGO collaboration
5. One year school-based trainings – 6 million dollars - MinEd/donor/NGO/GPE collaboration
6. Evaluation – donor

The **second** constraint is **equity**. While the intervention described above is hoped to encourage many to go back to and/or stay in school, it is acknowledged that there are some children who do not go to school or leave school because of their circumstances. The Ministry currently has an Inclusive Education unit. This traditionally has been viewed as dealing exclusively with physically challenged students. However, there are many vulnerable children that are excluded from attending primary school for a variety of reasons. The Ministry has identified four key issues, and is in the process of creating a specific department within the Basic Education directorate that deals with this issue. The four key areas that will need specific interventions are the following: 1) poverty; 2) language; 3) psychological needs; 4) physical disabilities.

The *economic barriers* to education are perhaps the most difficult to deal with, as they are the largest barriers. Although preschool and basic education is free in Timor-Leste, there are many hidden costs. Children need clothes and shoes. Children are needed to watch siblings while their parents work in the fields, or they need to work in the fields themselves, thus not being able to attend school. If parents are called for an emergency, there is no one to watch the children and so they go along, consequently missing school. The Ministry needs to actively identify children at-risk, as well as those who currently are not in school due to economic constraints. These children will then be provided with what they need – school supplies, shoes and clothing, soap, and in some cases, vouchers for parents so that their children may go to school instead of work. These subsidies would be contingent upon school attendance – each successful trimester completed will result in receiving a part of the yearly subsidy package. It is hoped that this component of this intervention will encourage all those children who do not attend school because of financial constraints to go to school.

The second component of this intervention is *language*. While there are two official languages in Timor-Leste, one is not widely dominated, and the other, while understood by the majority of Timorese, is not the mother tongue of many. The Ministry commenced a project to promote use of mother tongue in early grade learning in 3 language groups; this document proposes to expand this program to other major language groups that are in need. While the logistics of this are being financed already by donor partners, it will be essential that the educational materials are translated

into other languages and disseminated in other areas. According to a study conducted in 2011, 24% of children surveyed stated that they do not understand anything said in the classroom. If this is the case, it is indeed an impediment to children's school attendance.

The third factor to be addressed is the issue of *psychological support*. There are many children that have trouble concentrating in school, or have left school, because of issues that could be helped by psychological support. Domestic violence, child abuse (by families and teachers), neglect, bullying, and teenage pregnancy are all issues that can keep children from coming to school, and that could be dealt with by professional services. Psychologists would be deployed to train teachers and interested community members on how to talk to students with these sorts of problems, and parent-teacher community support groups will be initiated.

The last component of this intervention is *physical challenges*. While the Ministry cannot alleviate their disabilities, the government can train teachers to be aware of how to deal with different needs – vision and hearing problems, mobility challenges, etc. District support people will be installed to help teachers deal with these specific needs, routinely visiting schools where there are children with special physical needs, and training teachers where needed. In the future Timor-Leste plans to expand their facilities for those with special education needs that cannot be taken care of in regular schools – blindness, complete deafness, etc., but this is not something that can be completed by 2015.

Impact: 85.000 children will have their needs met and be able to stay in school.

Cost: Component #1: 4 million – Ministry/donor/GPE collaboration

Component #2: 2 million – Ministry/donor/GPE/NGO collaboration

Component #3: 3.3 million – Ministry/donor/GPE collaboration

Component #4: 3.7 million – Ministry/donor/GPE/NGO collaboration

The **third** constraint identified to achieving universal primary education by 2015 is in the area of **access**. There are many schools that do not have basic necessities – no roof, no floors, no water, no toilet, dilapidated walls. There are also many places where there are 100-150 children in one classroom. School also needs to be in two-three shifts in many places because of space constraints. This limits the amount of hours that children may go to school, and also forces them to go on Saturday, which is traditionally a day where many children do not attend. While the Ministry has a plan to rehabilitate schools that are in need, install water and toilets in those without, and build new classrooms where necessary, this will not happen by the end of 2015. This has been identified by LEG partners especially as a serious problem. By receiving support from GPE and other donors, the Ministry would be able to set a goal that by 2015 all children of Timor-Leste will be able to sit in a safe classroom with no more than 40 students, and that all schools will have access to toilets and water. This access to water is especially important because of hygiene issues. Along with the building of new school buildings is the introduction of school transport. There are some areas where we can identify that instead of building a school building, it will be better to implement a school transport system. This transport system will involve motor vehicles, bicycles and horses. The combination of building classrooms, assuring access to water and safe buildings, and providing transport should ensure that all children in Timor-Leste will have a suitable school building within 20 minutes of their house, and that the route there should be safe, thus ensuring that girls who live further away are given an assurance that they may go to school without being afraid on the way.

Impact: 262.000 primary education students

Cost:

Infrastructure: 43 million – Ministry/donor/GPE/NGO collaboration

Transport: 3,2 million – Ministry/donor/GPE collaboration