



Environment and Natural Resource Management



Timor-Leste

With 75% of the population dependent on subsistence agriculture, Timor-Leste's environment is the lifeline of the country.



Environmental Challenges in Timor-Leste

Much of the terrain in Timor-Leste is steep with only a thin covering of productive soil. Approximately 44% of the country has a slope of 40% or greater, which is not suitable for sustainable cultivation and may require reforestation or crops providing plant cover. To compound this difficult situation, rainfall is infrequent and torrential, often washing away topsoil in flash floods.

To deal with this ongoing problem, some farming communities have developed indigenous forms of soil conservation. However, many farmers, with poor land management techniques, have adopted 'slash and burn' agriculture, which combined with free grazing, seasonal bush burning and uncontrolled fire wood collection, have contributed to deforestation, erosion, diminishing ground water and steady loss of soil cover over time.



In urban centers, pollution is a key environmental issue. There are no effective waste-management systems in place, which could become a major problem in the highly populated areas, and in several coastal areas visited by tourists. Dili has a basic sewerage system and limited collection and disposal of solid waste. However, large piles of rubbish accumulate due to illegal dumping, which further pollutes the groundwater used for drinking by many people.

Natural Resources

Natural resources include minerals, deposits of gold, copper and iron, as well as the oil and natural gas found in the Timor Sea between Timor-Leste and Australia. These rich natural resources can become a blessing or a curse for the current and future generations, therefore, proper management is required.

The promotion of environmental governance is vital to secure the sustainable development of the country and its people as environmental degradation compromises the health and livelihood of future generations.



UNDP and Environment and Natural Resource Management in Timor-Leste

UNDP is working to assist the government in ensuring the environmentally sustainable development of Timor-Leste. The Environment and Natural Resources Management Unit was established in 2003, to help the country address the crucial link between poverty reduction and environmental sustainability.

UNDP Timor-Leste has developed a programme to support the government's efforts on the environment and natural resources management in three main areas;

- Environmental Governance
- Sustainable Rural Energy Development
- Biodiversity Conservation - Land Degradation Management

In line with these programme areas, several projects have been developed, and several are in development. Nevertheless, financial constraints constitute the main barrier for any intention to protect the environment in this young country.

Apart from the above focus areas, UNDP is also providing support to initiatives on natural disaster management through the National Disaster Management Office.

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Project Areas

Strengthening the Environmental Governance Capacity of Timor-Leste

Environmental governance is central in the overall protection, preservation and sustainability of the use of natural resources.

The overall objective of this project is to enhance the capacity of the Government to develop and implement environmental governance structures, including policy formulation, legal regulatory frameworks and a co-ordination mechanism.

As Timor-Leste is in the process of acceding to important multi-lateral environmental agreements, the initial focus is to facilitate this accession process, through assessing the needs and developing the capacity to implement these conventions.

Over the next three years, this UNDP project will endeavor to achieve the following:

1. National Capacity Self Assessment
2. Support Access to Multi-Lateral Environment Agreements (MEAs)
3. Establishment of Coordination mechanism and Strategic Planning support to Ministry of Development and Environment/Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries
4. Policy/Legislation development

All activities are coordinated with the Ministry of Development and Environment.



Land and Biodiversity conservation

Land degradation is the priority for national natural resource management in Timor-Leste. Accordingly, Timor-Leste has acceded to the UN Convention on Desertification and Land Degradation (UNCCD). Through activities in this theme, UNDP will help Timor-Leste address national land degradation priorities and implement the UNCCD.

Through participation in the global UNDP/Global Environment Facility (GEF) Sustainable Land Management (SLM) initiative Timor-Leste has the opportunity to access considerable support to develop capacity for land management.

The key partner in this project is the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF). Other national partners include, the Division of Environment (DoE) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).

Proper management of Timor-Leste's globally significant biodiversity, including forests, Lake Iralalara, and preserved coastal ecosystems, will benefit the people of Timor-Leste as well as contribute to the global environment. In signing various multilateral environment agreements, Timor-Leste will have the opportunity to access global technical and financial support to conserve and utilize biodiversity in a sustainable manner. UNDP will work with GEF and other national and international partners.



Sustainable energy development

This project focuses on isolated communities, who have limited access to electricity, through exploring alternative energy resources aimed at improving quality of life and reducing poverty. A rural energy development policy will be produced as an integral part of this project.

UNDP will initiate the Participatory Rural Energy Development Programme (PREDP) with the following main goals:

- To build capabilities for planning, implementing and managing rural energy systems at local, district/ sub-district and national levels;
- To create a favourable atmosphere for rural energy development and planning by supporting the establishment of an institution and supporting structures at various levels;
- To promote adoption and adaptation of rural energy technologies by local people/ entrepreneurs to enhance income for sustainable livelihoods and environmental sustainability.

For more information, please contact;
Environment and Natural Resource
Management Unit, UNDP Timor-Leste
registry.tp@undp.org