

WORKING TOGETHER TO FIGHT POVERTY

The Millennium Development Goals in our lives

In the year 2000, world leaders agreed that we should all work together to fight income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, and exclusion - while promoting gender equality, education, & environmental sustainability. They agreed on eight global objectives, now known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Every day, ordinary people are involved in development and are working to help Timor-Leste create a better future. In this series, we meet farmers, fishermen, market vendors, tais-weavers, nurses, journalists, local NGO's, and politicians (to name only a few), who are working together to help Timor-Leste achieve its development goals.

THE GOALS

*Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
Achieve universal primary education
Promote gender equality and empower women
Reduce child mortality
Improve maternal health
Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
Ensure environmental sustainability
Develop a global partnership for development*

Paulo Da Costa, Director of local NGO 'Halarae' talks about protecting the environment

Most people in this country rely on subsistence agriculture, so protecting the environment and earning to manage valuable natural resources is very important. A combination of 'slash and burn' agriculture, free animal grazing, seasonal bush burning, and occasional torrential rainfall is contributing to deforestation, erosion, diminishing ground water and a steady loss of soil cover over time.



Paulo Da Costa
Director of 'Halarae'

Paulo Da Costa, director of local environmentally-focused NGO 'Halarae' has been working for over 13 years with communities, government and other partners to develop local solutions to some of these problems. He believes that good management of the land is critical in helping build the economy and reducing poverty in Timor-Leste.

"Every year the environment suffers degradation and erosion, both natural and man-made. It is a big problem and will continue to get worse in the future if we don't address it now. It is estimated that we lose 50 hectares of good farm land every year. Over 20 years, that is 1000 hectares!" He explained. "Timor-Leste is a small country. If we don't stop and reverse this trend, the effects of these losses will be devastating to our whole economy, especially to communities who rely only on farming to live."

Halarae is engaged in many efforts to protect and restore damaged areas. In Manatuto district they are working with communities on reforestation projects to stop erosion and further land degradation. These projects plant native trees and work to restore damage and prevent landslides, which are common in the wet season.

Mr Da Costa believes that to successfully implement projects, NGO's like Halarae need to work with farmers, communities and the government. "From my experience, the key is the people in the community, after all, it is their land", he explains passionately, "To ensure that

people understand why protecting the environment is so important, communities must be involved at all levels; in understanding the problems, then in planning, implementing, and in monitoring and evaluating environmental projects."

In some sub-districts in Manatuto, Halarae is working with farmers and communities to improve land management. "Some times, this means teaching farmers to use new agriculture technology, such as upland farming techniques which allow farmers to maximize the amount of land that they can use to produce crops."



Terraced farming, Soibada, Manatuto

In Soibada, Halarae and their development partners are demonstrating viable soil conservation techniques to provide alternatives to traditional 'slash and burn' agriculture, which can leave plots of land unusable for three years after each crop yield. "Through better farming techniques, we can preserve the soil and produce better crops. Using these new techniques stops farmers having to move their crops each year."

Mr. Da Costa believes that activities such as reforestation and environmentally friendly farming techniques, helps Timor-Leste in many ways. "Looking after the environment doesn't just help farmers grow more crops, it also helps improve peoples health by keeping the air clean and preserves the natural beauty of the land for future tourism possibilities. We need to be careful with our land, it provides us with so much, but we need to take care of it in return."

