

Commitment of Stakeholders to the SDGs in Timor-Leste

Dr. Jerry Courvisanos
Associate Professor of Innovation and Entrepreneurship
Federation Business School, Mt. Helen Campus
Federation University Australia
Ballarat, Victoria, Australia

email: j.courvisanos@federation.edu.au

and

Dr. Ameeta Jain
Senior Lecturer, Department of Finance
Faculty of Business and Law, Burwood Campus
Deakin University
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

email: ammeta.jain@deakin.edu.au

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Executive Summary

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were instigated when all member States at the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 70/1 which adopted the blueprint for peace and posterity of the whole planet Earth called *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. This occurred on 25 September 2015. The Timor-Leste (TL) VI Constitutional Government adopted the same UN resolution two days earlier under Government Resolution N°34/2015 which recommended that it align its planning and budget systems with the SDGs. The Parliament of TL subsequently also passed the same resolution. A Roadmap was developed, setting out a timeline and process for achieving the SDGs by 2030. The then Prime Minister Dr. Rui Maria de Araújo promoted this Roadmap and also established a working group in his department for its implementation.

One of the authors of this report, together with UNTL academic Matias Boavida, reviewed the VI Constitutional Government's effort to implement the Roadmap. This was published as a working paper "Review of the Roadmap for Sustainable Development in Timor-Leste: An Economic Policy Report" (see *Binzagr Institute for Sustainable Prosperity*, Policy Report No. 102, February 2018). From that review, it was clear that the major stakeholders in the Roadmap were all the organisations that operate in TL, and they needed to be examined to see what commitment there was across the country to the SDGs. A project was developed by the two authors of this report which involved interviews relating to SDG commitment with one senior personnel in each selected stakeholder organisation. A total of 26 organisations across four types of stakeholders were interviewed – financial institutions, private and social enterprises, Non-Government Organisations (NGO) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

A preliminary report was prepared for UNDP Timor-Leste in September 2018, in which data from 17 organisations interviewed from December 2017 to February 2018 was described and analysed. Subsequently another nine organisations were interviewed in September 2018. This final report represents data from all 26 interviewed organisations, with a much more considered analysis of the data.

From this report it is clear that stakeholder support for the SDGs across 22 organisations interviewed from all sectors of TL's formal economy was strong. Another four organisations that were very small were not aware of the existence of the SDGs. The strong SDGs stakeholder support was based on robust promotion by the VI Constitutional Government through 2015-2017, until its expiration in July 2017. Yet, these stakeholders were unable to articulate a clear vision for the SDGs themselves, nor the challenges they face in implementing even their own limited SDG aims. Much depends on successive TL governments through to 2030 in developing a strong coordinated holistically effort across all sectors of Timorese society with direct action in support of the SDGs. Only then will stakeholders be able to convert their vague support for SDGs into a strong fight for sustainable development with a unique Timorese civic identity.

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Introduction

This final report provides complete findings and analysis to UNDP Timor-Leste on the nature and extent of commitment by major community and business stakeholders in Timor-Leste (TL) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The project involved interviews relating to this commitment with one senior personnel in each selected stakeholder organisation.

On the 25 September 2015, Resolution A/RES/70/1 was passed in the United Nations (UN) by all its member States. The *Agenda* adopted is 17 broad goals (or SDGs) that encompass all aspects of sustainable development. See Appendix A for details of the 17 SDGs. This agreed *Agenda* specifies 169 targets grounded within the 17 SDGs, and which each country is required to form policies in respect to these targets with specific indicators developed to measure progress in achieving the overall goals.

The VI Constitutional Government adopted the same UN resolution two days earlier on the 23 September under Government Resolution N°34/2015 which recommended that it align its planning and budget systems with the SDGs. Then on the 18 November 2015, the Parliament of TL passed Resolution PN N° 19/2015. Consequently, the Government decreed that budget and planning needs to be “harmonized” with the SDGs when operating the existing 2011-2030 Strategic Development Plan (SDP). The SDP on p. 10 states how the plan “...provides a framework for identifying and assessing priorities and a guide to implementing recommended strategies and actions.” The VI Constitutional Government of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, led by the then Prime Minister, Dr. Rui Maria de Araújo, developed a “Roadmap” for achieving the SDGs by 2030 and formed a working group to implement this Roadmap, chaired by the Prime Minister’s Office. See Appendix B for a brief outline of the Roadmap as specified in 2016.

This final report is in context of the major policy agenda by the TL Government to implement the SDGs. The report aims to firstly, assess to what extent community and business stakeholders in TL know about the SDGs and their government’s policy and Roadmap for achieving the SDGs by 2030. Secondly, it asks these stakeholders the nature of their commitment (if any) to the SDGs and how it relates to the government’s Roadmap.

A multi-stakeholder perspective on SDGs in TL was the aim, with a total of 26 interviews conducted with one senior personnel in each organisation. This final report adds another nine interviews which were conducted subsequent to the initial 17 interviews depicted in the September preliminary report. The 26 stakeholder interviews were across a wide array of organisations based in the country; made up of seven financial institutions (two banks, two microfinance institutions and three credit unions), 11 business enterprises (eight private and four social), six non-government organisations (NGOs: two international and four indigenous) and two Civil Society Organisations (CSOs: both indigenous). For background and baseline commitment to the SDGs, two senior personnel within two government departments that specifically address the SDGs were also interviewed. The report examines the 26 stakeholders that are external to government departments, with context from two department officials central to the government policy implementation of the SDGs. The interviews followed a semi-structured approach which permitted comparison of responses and a thematic analysis using NVivo. See Appendix C for the interview schedule for the 26 stakeholder organisations. The schedule was slightly adapted for the government department officials.

The first 17 interviews were conducted in Tetum between December 2017 and February 2018 by a Timorese research assistant from UNTL. The translations were also carried out by this assistant and verified by a senior academic colleague at UNTL who has a PhD from an Australian university. The remaining nine interviews were conducted and recorded in English between 24 September and 10 October 2018 by one of the authors who was visiting Timor-Leste on another academic activity. All interviews were transcribed for the NVivo thematic analysis task to be conducted.

Themes and Patterns

Five themes were derived from the interview data. The themes are listed below with the numbers in brackets following representing the questions in the Appendix C schedule from which the data for that particular theme was extracted:

1. Context of SDGs (Q3).
2. Commitment to SDGs, and which in particular (Qs 1, 2, 4 and 5).
3. Actions to show commitment to SDGs (Qs 7 and 8).
4. Challenges to achieving specified commitment (Q9).
5. Own organisation's evaluation on working towards their own identified SDGs (Q10).

Each of these five themes are reported on below based on patterns emerging from the interview data.

Context of SDGs

The VI Constitutional Government tried to publicise its commitment to the SDGs using mass media including television, and information sessions for businesses and other stakeholders from the time of adoption of the SDGs until the end of its term in July 2017. From the government official interviewed who was involved in the implementation of the SDGs from the start, the following emerged:

SDGs are not part of government. SDGs is universal, civil societies also have role to play. At the beginning when we adopted them, we talked to civil societies, NGOs, INGOs [International NGOs] that we are working with to reach the SDGs... We encouraged them to align their works with the objectives of SDGs. The Prime Minister [Dr. Riu] in his speeches, he encouraged the private sector to be able to help fund the programs that we aimed to reach. Private sector is important to help implementing the SDGs.

Success of the government getting the SDGs message across is evident as many of the interviewees recognised the role of Dr. Rui in promoting the SDGs; one stated:

We first learnt about it at the end 2016. It was promoted by our former Prime Minister Dr. Rui Maria Araújo. He was really active that time. There are various goals in the SDGs that have been adopted by our government. This was how we learnt about it.

Another interviewee stated: "Yes, we knew about our government's SDGs commitment. Government has put it into their planning. We learnt about it through media and other information circulated in the public." While a bank interviewee stated: "We knew that the government has adopted the SDGs. As the bank, we do our part and we also have our own role to play in order to support the government adoption of the SDGs."

All 17 organisations first interviewed had heard about the SDGs at the time of the interview although two admitted to "not paying attention" to them. Only 5/17 organisations had first heard about SDGs in 2015, the year when SDGs were established (three enterprises, one each

NGO and CSO). Another five heard in 2016 (one enterprise, two NGOs and one CSO) and one in 2017 (NGO). Six were not able to specify when they first heard about the SDGs (five financial institutions and one enterprise). Six organisations had heard about the SDGs from the Prime Minister or the government (one financial institution, four enterprises and one NGO), three from television coverage or other sources of news (two financial institutions and one NGO) and one directly from the UN (CSO). The other seven were unable to identify the source of their information (three financial institutions, one enterprise, two NGOs and one CSO). There was vagueness in their responses: “We learnt about this from the news and some meeting with government members...” and “we have not heard any clear information on the SDGs”.

Of the remaining nine interviews, four did not know or ever heard of the SDGs, nor of the government’s commitment to them. These were four very small organisations; two social enterprises, one private enterprise, and one credit union. At the other end of the spectrum, two significant local NGOs working in the sustainable agriculture space were very aware of the SDGs, and promoted them themselves. The remaining three private firms that operated over vastly different industry sectors – tourism, export-import, coffee – were small-to-medium size and the manager interviewed for all three was personally aware and committed to the SDGs. One of these three managers only arrived in TL after the SDGs signing; was generally very aware of sustainable development as a teacher of sustainability, but not the UN’s commitment or TL’s signing.

Two interviewees particularly noted the contradiction for TL’s government between its promotion of the SDGs and its long-term funding commitment to the SDP. As the interviewee from one social enterprise stated:

I couldn’t really tell when we first learnt about it. On the other hand, we also have the Strategic Development Plan, these two things sometimes confuse me. We do conduct our own research to find out what are the priorities sectors for the government, so we can align our plans with the priorities.

More specifically an interviewee from one financial institution was critical:

In our case, there is no equality and equity in the development process. Development tends to focus in the city only and [the rest are] left behind – that potential root or resources of the majority of the people who sustain their life. Most of the people are involved in agriculture... [yet] we do not really pay attention to the agriculture sector, but only focusing on big/mega projects and big industry. I think these SDGs were established based on these experiences that when you develop, you have to ensure the balance...The government has to make sure that we invest in the agriculture sector to enable our farmers to produce more and be able to sell their product to the market and have access to the market. It is very important to make industry out of agriculture, as most of our population depends on the agricultural sector.

Commitment to SDGs

The stakeholders that were aware of the SDGs stated that overall these were important for the inclusive development of TL, but showed great differences in their identification of which specific goals (out of the 17) were relevant to their organisations (see Appendix D). Having identified a set of SDGs as relevant, they were asked how they commit to them. Asked to nominate as many SDGs as they recognised as being relevant, one SDG emerged as the most nominated from 11 of the 26 organisations: SDG8 Good Jobs and Growth (notably from five enterprises and four financial institutions). Two other SDGs were equally second most nominated (10/26): SDG1 No Poverty (particularly from four financial institutions); SDG2 No Hunger (four enterprises). The next most nominated SDGs were SDG4 Quality Education,

SDG11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, and SDG15 Life on Land; all equal with seven nominations.

On the low nominated side (only 2/26, both financial institutions) was SDG10 Reduced Inequalities, which is interesting given that finances are a significant aspect of inequality. Then next lowest is SDG3 Good Health (3/26) made up of two financial institutions and one enterprise. In a similar vein, for SDG6 Clean Water (nominated by 5/26), a bank interviewee indicated the bank was supporting the private sector in “playing an active role” in supplying quality water. Each financial institution nominated many SDGs, many more than by the other three organisational types; yet tended to allocate responsibility for these SDGs to other organisations who they ‘supported’ through finance.

Relevance by organisational types displayed differences, with three financial institutions identifying SDG4 (Education), but only one stated relevance to SDG15 (Land); whereas three NGOs equally identified both these two SDGs. As next most nominated (6/26) were equally SDG5 Gender Equality, SDG12 Responsible Consumption, SDG13 Climate Action, and SDG14 Life below Water. Notably, four financial institutions dominated SDG5, and three financial institutions led SDG12; whereas three enterprises led SDG14, and three NGOs led SDG13. This exhibits significant organisational divergence in nominations across the board.

Qualitatively, commitment to relevance also shows organisational divergence. For SDG5 Gender Equality, a financial institution was strong on this issue: “We provide loans to women in rural areas, for them to plant vegetables, start small kiosk, livestock and sell it to the market. This helps to improve their well-being and support their family rather than just depend on their husband.” Three of four nominations to this SDG are financial institutions. In contrast, SDG13 Climate Action (6/26 nominated) was only nominated by one financial institution.

In respect to SDG7 Renewable Energy, only five nominated it, but one bank was highly critical of the government’s position (even though the power stations were set up prior to the 2015 SDG commitment):

So far we have some proposals to work on this idea [renewable energy] but when we approach the government, some people in the government think that we do not need it as we have a surplus of energy at this moment. The reason for them to think that way is because we have these [polluting diesel] power stations in Hera and Betano. However, for me I think this is ridiculous, most of the countries are now moving to the clean energy, and we are stuck here.

For SDG11 Sustainable Cities and Communities (7/26 nominations), the lack of commitment by government to this SDG is indicated by one interviewee:

Even though the land law has been approved by the Parliament and promulgated by the President, it is still not working. I have talked to the people from Ministry of Justice and they said that they need additional 20 laws to complete in order to implement the land law. It is so complicated.

This demonstrates that even though the government has good intentions, it is not able to implement its plans because of existing legislative environment and lack of trained personnel. Another two SDGs were also lowly ranked at 4/26 (SDGs 16 & 17); both being seen from the government’s Roadmap as longer term broad social goals.

Generally, there remained some confusion in the minds of some of the stakeholders interviewed about the distinction between the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were concluded in 2015), and the SDGs which began in 2015. For example, one microfinance

interviewee used the terms MDGs and SDGs interchangeably; another interviewee said that they have been working on these “goals” since 2002. Yet another one stated “We first knew about the MDGs and now we have SDGs. Another interviewee confused sustainable development generally, with the specific UN SDGs agenda: “Yeah, well when in my former life I was a teacher and taught at [secondary] school, there I taught a unit on sustainability, so we were aware of the development goal.”

There was varied responses to the reasons why organisations perceived that the SDGs were important to the organisation, community at large and the country. One of NGOs stated the SDGs were important because the government and the UN said they were. The majority of organisations were of the opinion that the SDGs were important as they focussed on “holistic development” with environmental protection and addressing the scourge of climate change: 4/7 financial institutions, 6/11 enterprises, 4/6 NGOs and 2/2 CSOs. For example, one organisation stated that: “Environment is very important. It is easy for us to destroy the ecosystem and habitat in nature, but it is very difficult to recover it again.”

Relating this SDGs agenda to TL’s own dilemma, one interviewee was very perceptive in recognising the need for the country to be a fossil fuel exporter, and thus depending on the rest of the world continuing its carbon emissions:

It [the SDGs commitment] is important because it talks about the environment. When you see capitalism treat environment as a commodity, they [businesses] can produce money at expense of ecology. Today people talk about economic growth in Timor, it is focused on oil. We have money because we have oil, but when oil is gone will we still have economic growth? Nobody wants to talk about it, but we want to talk about it. I think economic growth should not be dependent on natural resources, because we are depending on natural resources. One day it will vanish and then economy will also vanish. So now how can we build an economy in the basis of nature, harmony between the human, the economic and environment?

This dilemma was further extended to the overwhelming major economic activity undertaken by the population of TL: “...climate change impacts on agriculture production is very serious, as most of our farmers depend on agricultural product for their main source of income and food for the family.” Further on this, an NGO interviewee suggested an alternative model of development based on sustainability:

Yes, we think this is very important as we are trying to find a model for development that is sustainable and to protect our environment. SDGs aim to find a model for development that will protect our environment and people, and to reduce the social gap. I believe, this will lead to social justice.

The task of achieving eventual social justice and peace through a model of sustainable development was given specificity by one microfinance interviewee who recognised the need for TL to become:

...sustainable in the area of education, infrastructure, economic, health, and others in general. This is a way to ensure the well-being of our community members in order to contribute to peace and development at the country level in a sustainable ways.

However, this aim was noted by a bank interviewee as problematic as the nation is still greatly underdeveloped:

...you can still see most houses are in poor condition, the roofs are still the same, made out of grass and other traditional materials. Most of the people are still living in the same condition year after year. Economically there is no significant improvement in their life compared to the money that has been spent; which is their money [as people of Timor].

On the practical application of the SDGs from relevance to commitment, from those organisations that recognised the SDGs, it was not clear as to why they are relevant and important (i.e. passive awareness of the SDGs) for 4/6 financial institutions, 2/9 enterprises

and 1/6 NGOs. These organisations recognised that the SDGs are relevant to TL, but when interviewed they were unsure how to practically commit and implement them. For example, the interviewee from the one NGO in this category stated:

But, for me, it needs to be demonstrated how often we use them, talking about them, referencing and advocating the commitment to achieve SDGs. I am very honest with you this is where we have a bit of a gap. So, on one hand, yes, it is very important, but when you approached me [for this interview], I look around for some examples where I could demonstrate the importance of SDGs, yet I could not find recent practical examples of where for instance I have my staff referencing SDGs in the meeting or how they use the SDGs to guide some of our work when we do the revision to the program strategic planning.

From this practical perspective, both CSOs specified clear commitments. The interviewee from one of the CSOs explained this practical application well:

We live there with the community, we send out the message and we act and produce positive messages. We live there, we build our campaign for ecology. This is as our commitment to furthering the goal number 16 we have nominated.

One NGO interviewee expressed a cynical view that the SDGs were only important because the TL Government said they were, saying: “SDGs [are] important because we are a member of the United Nations (UN) and UN has set out these goals and [thus] adopted by our government.”

Actions to Show Commitment to SDGs

Each interviewed organisation had a different perspective on how to demonstrate commitment to the SDGs which they recognised as relevant. None of the organisations had the wherewithal to allocate funds for SDG promotion or compliance. Nonetheless, one of the private enterprises demonstrated commitment by employing only local people in their infrastructure development and maintenance projects to engender a sense ownership by the community. Another private enterprise demonstrated commitment by nominating a department within the organisation to be manage the company’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Also, donations of substantial funds for development were made by two of the private businesses into community centres, blood donation camps, schools, free internet at university, and to an orphanage. One of the financial institutions declared that they had a program to ensure a “gender balance in accessing financial services...and to encouraging financial inclusion.”

More than half (17/26) of the interviewed organisations stated that had been working on goals similar to the SDGs long before the SDGs were formalised, or being aware of the existence of the SDGs (3/7 financial institutions, 8/11 enterprises, 4/6 NGOs, and both CSOs). Whilst it is difficult to believe that all 17 organisations work purely in an altruistic fashion in support of sustainable development, it is clear that in the context of an impoverished society; any activity that supports employment generation, poverty reduction, basic education and health, gender inclusion, and ecological focus is providing tacit support to the SDGs or their predecessor, the MDGs.

More specifically, 3/7 financial institutions and 5/11 enterprises were of the opinion that the SDGs would help improve the education and health of the country. For example: “In my opinion, education is the main key for our country to ensure its development for a better future. However, these objectives need to adapt to the Timorese culture and context”. However, another recognised the enormity of this SDG development agenda as it relates to education and health: “Let us say about education, the children in rural areas must walk for so many hours to reach their school, with very limited facilities to support their education...[also, the SDGs can help reduce the] high mortality of mothers and children.”

Advocacy to the government on specific SDGs was seen as important by 9/26 organisations. One CSO interviewee stated it lobbies the government to “...sell out our plastic to Indonesia for recycling or to buy a recycling machine” in an effort to reduce plastic pollution in the environment. A financial institution and an NGO acted as conduits for SDG information flow between their clients, political parties, government, academics and cooperatives, as well as disseminating information. A social enterprise lobbies the government and foreign support agencies for funds to support their efforts in providing employment and reducing poverty.

The commonest explicit way of demonstrating their commitment to SDGs was by supporting education in some form (15/26). Most of these educational activities were specific or related to the major purpose of the organisation. One each of CSO, financial institution, and private enterprise, as well as two NGOs educate their own members about how to protect the environment. As an example, one NGO stated: “...we always emphasise to our staff, policy of our organisation to keep focus on the several aspects because we have the ethical care to land, care to the people, and fair share.” More broadly outside its own organisation, a financial institution provides funds for training of teachers in 52 primary schools to impart financial literacy to children. Another financial institution provides training and capacity building for new businesses. A third financial institution and a private company both provide scholarships for local students to study abroad. A different NGO ran a leadership course of 3-6 months duration with 85 participants each term with an emphasis on environmental protection. A private business has developed a local encyclopaedia and provides free internet for community centres and to most universities in TL. A social business provided local farmers with training on quality management and improvement for their coffee production. Another private business is planning to open a centre of entrepreneurship to train young people. In the context of a small country with limited resources, this above list of actions are an impressive commitment.

Actions directly aimed at reducing unemployment, poverty, inequality, and promoting gender equality were conducted by two social enterprises interviewed. This was being done by supporting coffee farmers on the plantations to produce better quality crops and obtain better price for their produce through infrastructure spending and providing the knowledge base required to grow superior coffee beans; thus obtaining a better return on investment. Further, three financial institutions stated that they supported green projects with loans.

Overall, there was no uniformity in the stakeholders’ understanding or approach to the SDGs. What is missing is a coordinated effort to combine holistically efforts across sectors and with direct government support. Sustainable development requires action that is coherently developed, and thus convey recognition to the whole population of the SDGs and any achievement towards them.

Challenges to SDG Adoption

Specific challenges to adoption of the SDGs, as nominated by the interviewees across the four organisational sectors can be seen in Appendix E. Despite commitment by the TL Government to the SDGs, two categories of challenges nominated are State-based and total 21/26. One is the lack of legal framework or security (9/26). As a bank interviewee noted: “One of the challenges that the bank is facing in order to give out more loans is the absence of laws and regulations from the government.” This transforms into security issues as evidenced by: “There is no strong security system in place that reaches our [organisation’s] coverage to ensure the safety of our staff, especially female staff.” The other is inappropriate or lack of government support for the implementation of SDGs (12/26). The reasons for this implementation problem

appears to be the lack of translation of ideas into reality across the whole population, which is probably very difficult at the best of times. For example:

There is still a lot to be done from all the stakeholders such as government and policies makers. Also others need to do something more rather than just talking at yet another seminar, workshops, meetings here and there, but with no actions. I think personally, we have enough studies and analysis; you just need to read them and take action. We have hired good consultants and advisers that provide good recommendations, but if you do not read them, think through it, then there will be no actions. For me I think there is a need for revolution. It is time for action rather than just talking and talking.

Further, there was concern that the "...Government of Timor-Leste should have long-term planning in place and it must be followed up by each new government. The new government cannot just come and change things as they wish." More of a challenge was seen by the comment that: "People in rural areas are left out and just watch the so called development that does not benefit our people." Another view was that: "We have no clarity in the government at this moment, so we must wait [for] creative and comprehensive planning, I think our government does not have it yet and this sometimes make it very difficult to deal with government."

Stalemate through 2017-19 in governance across President, Executive and Parliament has exacerbated the lack of government legal framework and support that is crucial for stakeholder organisations to carry out their normal functions, while achieving their own SDG aims. As one private enterprise owner noted:

The budget is being reduced, and now where they would put in their priority is still unsure and going to the government now and saying they are willing to be involved to this project [is uncertain]; also working through the democracy, working through who makes decision making - that also is rather difficult.

The lack of non-financial resources is the most nominated challenge by 14/26 organisations. This reflects the poor state of basic infrastructure and institutional support, which leads to "...high dependency on external funds" and "...we think all the goals are important but we have limited resources to focus on all, so we just nominated three goals". Specifically, lack of skilled workforce was a significant contributor to this challenge, with one private enterprise owner optimistically stating that he was "...hopefully they [local population] will get those skills and understand that and in the future will be relied on local labour for both installation and maintenance system that we install."

Linked to lack of skilled workforce is the general low level of education, particularly in the rural areas. This challenge was another strongly nominated by stakeholders (9/26), with a typical response being:

They are the people that have no access to education, very few go to high school, very few go to university even almost none go to university in the case of some families. Women get married in their early age [thus not educated].

Because of this, one credit union says that: "We send out some young people to study abroad and come back to help...our people".

Lack of community support (7/26) is the next strongest nominated challenge. This relates to the fact that many village communities still live according to ancestral traditions, thus refusing to adapt to changes required in order to implement the SDGs. One enterprise that works in the infrastructure space notes that: "We try to convince them to move closer to some area that have access to basic services but they do not want to." Another example is when one private firm gives workers gloves for food processing "but they throw them [away]". Having gloves is

critical as “...most people living out the village that don’t have good sanitation for toilets and bathrooms”, which results in a nomination for poor water quality and sanitation (4/26). Yet, attempts to make village people aware of environmental health issues does not cut through. Another private enterprise owner explains this lack of awareness as:

...you got to have a fairly solid education base of people that understand what the environment is here for, a lot of them because they are in the context of poverty, they are trying to get by day by day living for the kids and getting food.

Other concerns included difficulty in access to finance/loans (6/26), gender inequality (“...women in Timor are educated but it’s difficult to speak out because of the culture”; 2/26), and little or no consumer protection or control of product quality (2/26). It was heartening that only 2/26 cited corruption and businesses not paying taxes as barriers to SDG implementation.

A context challenge mentioned by many that faces all stakeholders and the government is the geographic spread of population through the rural areas across a mountainous landscape, plus the remoteness of villages. This makes it very difficult to support the SDGs across the country where most people live. This was not listed in Appendix E, as it is a situational awareness challenge faced by all who want to implement the SDGs

Evaluation of Success of SDGs Implementation by Organisations

There were seven organisations with well-defined criteria for the assessment of their success at SDG implementation (four enterprises, two NGOs and one each of CSOs and financial institution). These seven stated that they had an annual plan towards which they worked and benchmarked their success at the end of the year. One used subjective criteria such as improved connectivity with its own stakeholders, and improved (though undefined) financial outcomes. Another, a financial institution, considered that they were successful if their clients were successful and if the number of their bad debts reduced. One interviewee from a financial institutions stated:

We make sure that if our members are doing well in using their loan money. We do not just give away the loan, but we go there and check directly if they really do what they plan to do. Since our society is small, we know our members and their neighbours. So, we teach them to take responsibility for their actions. If they want to do business, we will make sure they have the license from the government for doing business. We support and provide information to our members that do business.

All the other organisations could not specify how they would evaluate their success, instead stating merely that they were working towards success. In this context, one private enterprise stood out. The owner of this small business was not at all aware of the existence of the SDGs, and so the formal interview ended there and then. However, informally a discussion was held subsequently with the interviewer which revealed the owner had a strong indigenous and cultural commitment to the natural ecosystem and the social Timorese community generally. Such was his commitment that he wanted to create a circular-style (closing the loop) economic operation of the business and instil this operation with the local workers he employed. This link between ancestral traditions and adaptation to modern sustainable development is a critical clue to the way TL can progress in addressing the SDGs, and it comes from someone without any recognition formally of the UN’s SDGs.

Conclusion

Stakeholder support for the SDGs across 22 organisations interviewed from all sectors of TL's formal economy was strongly positive as identified in this report. Another four organisations (two micro-businesses and one each of credit union and social enterprise) that were very small were not aware of the existence of the SDGs. This strong SDGs stakeholder support is based on robust promotion by many organs of the VI Constitutional Government, led passionately by the former PM Dr. Rui Maria de Araújo. However, the commitment to the SDGs by these organisations varied, with focus on the shorter term goals as identified by that government's Roadmap. There also some strong criticisms of TL governments in terms of their ability to deliver on these goals given many institutional, political, legal and economic problems. Ability of these organisations to take action was highly limited due to the lack of uniformity in the stakeholders' understanding or approach to the SDGs. Having recognised recent TL governments' difficulties (and sometimes stalemate) in forming any viable policy-driving mechanisms, consequences emerge. These come from the absence by government of any coordinated effort to combine holistically across all sectors of Timorese society with strong committed direct government action and support towards these SDGs.

The stakeholders' own inability to articulate clear vision for the SDGs themselves, and the challenges they face in implementing even their own limited SDG aims, indicates huge challenges going forward for achieving the SDGs by 2030. Few had well-defined criteria for evaluating success in their nominated SDGs, while others had only vague notions of what the SDGs are, and what they entail.

The reality in TL is that what unites the country – from bottom to top, west to east, female and male – is a 'common civic identity' exemplified in TL in many ways, but particularly the self-determination ballot in 1999. It was also exemplified by one small enterprise that linked sustainable development to indigenous knowledge that underpins this Timorese 'civic identity', without that entrepreneur being aware of the SDGs' existence. Current and future governments, if they want to turn Dr. Rui's vision into reality, must lead in the implementation of the SDGs, not only by promotion and vague 'Roadmaps', but also real action in funding and executing these SDGs. The stakeholders in this report have set out clearly the need for the government to lead given its initial promotion of the SDGs. It is clear from the stakeholders' perspectives in this report that the SDGs challenge is the next fight in Timor-Leste's independence. For independence is a pyrrhic victory for the people, if they cannot sustain a living economically, socially and ecologically.

The one critical implication from the evidence collected and described in this report is the need to reject the alternative, which is one in which the SDGs challenge is considered too abstract and hard, thus simply defending the existing unsustainable development position which focuses purely on massive expenditure for big development projects of gas extraction and mass tourism. As evident from this report, exhibiting strong SDG action by government is a pathway with which the TL community (and many of its stakeholders) can identify as the next fight for civic identity. In this way, TL has the potential to successfully transition to sustainable development with the SDGs as its guiding framework. This is in contrast to many other countries – even advanced economies like Australia and the USA with vested interests in fossil fuels – that find it very difficult to manage such a transition in any coherent and holistic manner.

Appendix A: The 17 SDGs

- Goal 1. **No Poverty:** End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- Goal 2. **Zero Hunger:** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- Goal 3. **Good Health and Well-being:** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- Goal 4. **Quality Education:** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Goal 5. **Gender Equality:** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Goal 6. **Clean Water and Sanitation:** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- Goal 7. **Affordable and Clean Energy:** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- Goal 8. **Decent Work and Economic Growth:** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- Goal 9. **Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure:** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- Goal 10. **Reduced Inequalities:** Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Goal 11. **Sustainable Cities and Communities:** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Goal 12. **Responsible Consumption and Production:** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- Goal 13. **Climate Action:** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- Goal 14. **Life below Water:** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- Goal 15. **Life on Land:** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
- Goal 16. **Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions:** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- Goal 17. **Partnerships for the Goals:** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Source: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform. Retrieved 13 May 2018 from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

Appendix B: The Roadmap

On the 10 August 2016 at Caicoli Campus of UNTL the Prime Minister, His Excellency Dr. Rui Maria de Araújo (PM) articulated the roadmap for the SDGs and how they are prioritised in the context of the existing 2011-2030 Strategic Development Plan (SDP). As stated in this speech (and repeated many times by the PM during late 2016) the roadmap consists of:

1. Short-term 2011-2015: Human development goals (SDGs N° 2, 4, 9; with 5, 3, 6)
2. Medium-term 2016-2020: Economic development goals (SDGs N° 8, 10, 11, 12)
3. Long-term 2021-2030: Environment protection goals (SDGs N° 7, 13, 14, 15)
4. Ultimately, we want to eliminate poverty, strengthen the basis of our economy and coexist in harmony with our environment.
5. Achieving all these goals will necessarily result in poverty elimination, Goal 1.
6. Achieving these goals will also ensure peace and stability, creating a positive feedback that will strengthen the foundations of our development. Education and good health leads to productive workforce, stronger institutions, and economic growth, which then reduces the risks of conflict and instability, creating the conditions for further improvement in human development, economic development, and so on. Ultimately, when we have a well-educated and healthy population, when we have strong economic foundations and growth, we will be more effective in our measures to protect our environment and arrest climate change trends.
7. However, this does not mean that we will wait until that day in that distance period to focus on other goals, on the goals for our planet. This is the plan for the government as a whole, the joint effort between whole of government. Individually, each of our line ministries also have their own priorities, aligned with the SDGs, which I will present to you later.
8. Then again, as we are currently looking into revising our SDP, this roadmap may change. But we can be certain that the goals for the short-term, the human development goals, will stay more or less the same.

Source: de Araújo, Rui Maria (Dr.) (2016), The Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Timor-Leste, Speech at Caicoli Campus, Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e, 10 August Dili, Timor-Leste.

At the g7+ global conference on 21-23 May 2017, the TL Government said in its press release that it is was “launching” the roadmap and presented a slightly nuanced version of the 2016 roadmap. The essential new aspects in this 2017 version compared to 2016 version, are:

- (i) The three specified time periods still appear in the explainer, but not on the infographic version. The latter only has the 2030 end date.
- (ii) The infographic roadmap shows a linear approach with “People” first, “Prosperity” second and “Planet” third, on the way to 2030 (the three “Ps”).
- (iii) SDG #5 “Gender Equality” comes out of “Short-term” and is placed as a cross-cutting goal across all goals over the three “Ps”.
- (iv) SDG #16 “Peace and Justice and Strong Institutions” is no longer the ultimate goal but another cross-cutting goal across all goals over the three “Ps”.
- (v) SDG #17 “Partnerships for the Goals”, which was completely missing in the 2016 version, is yet another cross-cutting goal across all goals over the three “Ps”.

Source: Pereira, A. (2017), “Government Launches Roadmap for Implementation of 2030 Agenda” Media Press Release, Dili: Government of Timor-Leste, 22 May.

Appendix C: The Interview Schedule

1. Does your organisation know anything about the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda?
2. Does your organisation regard the SDGs as important? Why or why not?
3. When did your organisation first learn about the TL Government's SDG commitment, and how?
4. In your own opinion, which of the 17 SDGs are relevant to your organisation and why? (Show a 17 SDGs chart)
5. Is your organisation committed to furthering the relevant SDGs you nominated? What motivated your organisation to commit or why has it not committed?

If the organisation has not committed, proceed to only one more question:

6. Can you see any possibility of your organisation committing to the nominated relevant SDGs in the future? Why or why not?

If the organisation has committed, proceed to the next four questions:

7. In what way has your organisation committed to the nominated relevant SDGs? (Allocated funds to it? Placed your employees in the community? Donated to an SDG related organisation? Or any other way)
8. Over what period of time has your organisation supported the nominated SDGs?
9. What are the challenges your organisation faces in supporting these goals? (e.g. resources, do your staff understand them, are managers committed to following them through)
10. How would you evaluate the success of your organisation's commitment?

Appendix D: Stated Relevance to Specific SDGs

	Financial institutions (n=7)	Social and private enterprises (n=11)	NGOs (n=6)	CSOs (n=2)	Total (n=26)
SDG1	4	3	3	0	10
SDG2	3	4	3	0	10
SDG3	2	1	0	0	3
SDG4	3	1	3	0	7
SDG5	4	2	0	0	6
SDG6	2	3	0	0	5
SDG7	2	2	0	1	6
SDG8	4	5	2	0	11
SDG9	2	2	1	0	5
SDG10	2	0	0	0	2
SDG11	3	3	0	1	7
SDG12	3	2	0	1	6
SDG13	1	1	2	1	6
SDG14	1	3	1	1	6
SDG15	1	2	3	1	7
SDG16	3	0	0	1	4
SDG17	1	2	1	0	4

Appendix E: Specific Challenges to Adoption of SDGs

CHALLENGE	Financial institutions (n=7)	Social and private enterprises (n=11)	NGOs (n=6)	CSOs (n=2)	Total (n=26)
Lack of legal framework or security	4	3	2	0	9
Inappropriate or lack of government support	4	5	2	1	12
Lack of resources including lack of skilled workforce (finance not included)	4	5	4	1	14
Difficulty in access to finance/Low number of loans/default loans	2	2	2	0	6
Lack of education in rural population	3	3	2	1	9
Corruption or businesses not paying taxes	1	1	0	0	2
Gender inequality	0	1	1	0	2
Lack of community support	1	3	2	1	7
Lack of consumer protection/quality control of products	1	1	0	0	2
Clean water and sanitation	0	3	1	0	4