

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Timor-Leste

An investment opportunity for private and public donors

unicef 
for every child

The opportunity

Everyone has the human right to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation. This holds true in stability and in crisis, in urban and rural contexts, in community and institutional domains and in every country around the world. When children are deprived of accessible, available and quality water and sanitation, it negatively impacts their health, nutrition, education and every other aspect of their lives.

Safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) plays a key role in public health and in promoting the well-being and dignity of children – it is at the core of disease prevention and control. Water-related diseases that lead to malnutrition and other health problems are easily preventable by providing access to water and sanitation facilities.

Interventions addressing water supply and sanitation are cost-effective. Research shows that for every US\$1 spent on access to clean water and basic sanitation in the East Asia and Pacific region, the return is, on average, US\$3.6. This return on investment includes economic gains from time spent on productive activities, social benefits due to reduced deaths and premature mortality, as well as monetary savings from improved health.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6: Clean water and sanitation

UNICEF's water, sanitation and hygiene programme contributes to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 6 – clean water and sanitation. Access to water, sanitation and hygiene is a human right. Water is essential not only to health, but also to poverty reduction, food security, peace and human rights, ecosystems and education. Nevertheless, countries face growing challenges linked to water scarcity, water pollution, degraded water-related ecosystems and cooperation over transboundary water basins.

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS

The challenges

In Timor-Leste, 80 per cent of the rural population has access to at least basic water, while in urban settings it reaches 96 per cent. However, basic-level water only assures that the water is from an improved source with a maximum 30 minutes' collection time. The country is unable to report on its safe water coverage due to a lack of data and assurance on water availability and quality.

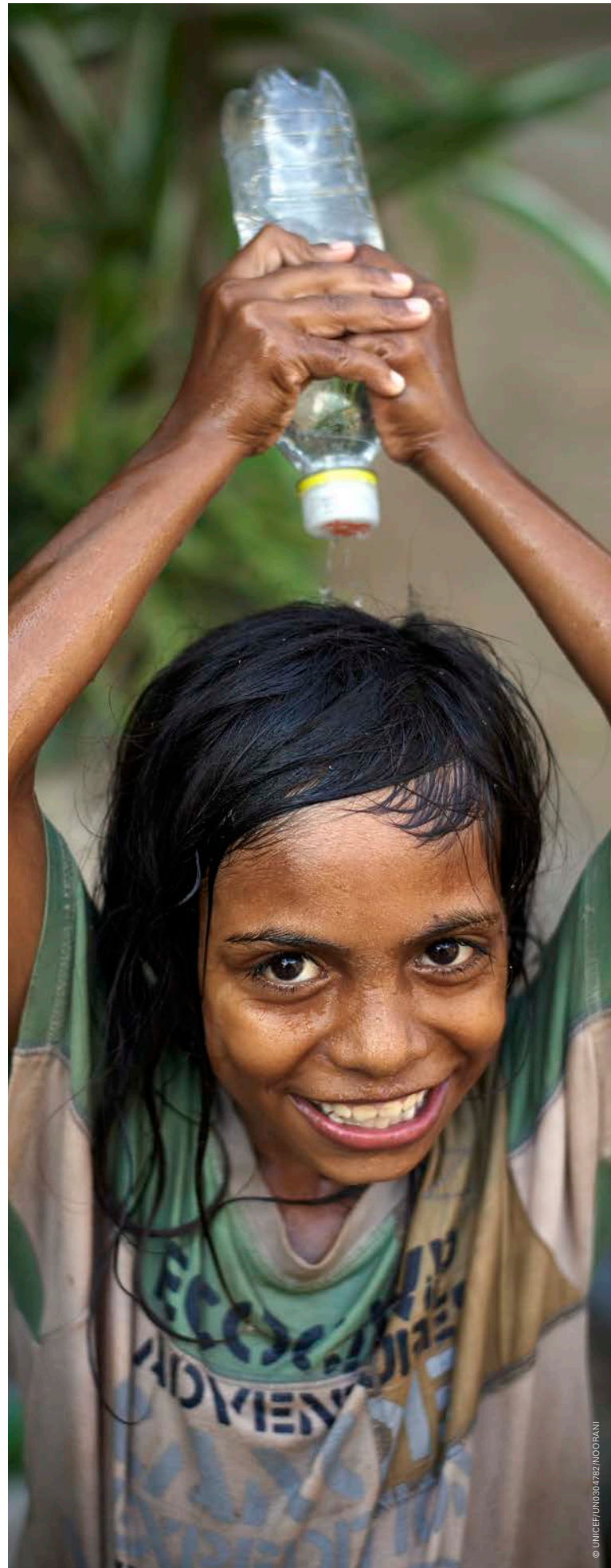
In addition, 17 per cent of the rural population still uses unimproved and surface water, with 2 per cent of households having limited water where more than 30 minutes are spent in fetching it from improved sources. This adds substantial pressure on women, adolescent girls and children, both boys and girls, who remain responsible for collecting water.

Sanitation also shows rural-urban disparity, but at a much more severe scale. Only 49 per cent of rural households have access to basic sanitation, compared to 74 per cent in urban settings. Of rural households, 27 per cent still practice open defecation while none do in urban settings.

Healthy hygiene and sanitation practices are significantly lacking, with only 27 per cent of rural households appropriately using hand-washing facilities. This coverage for urban setting is 47 per cent, once again showing a rural-urban disparity. According to the latest data, most people had not washed their hands at critical times, especially after defecating (72 per cent), after changing a baby's nappy (94 per cent), or before breastfeeding or feeding a child (94 per cent).

Lack of safe water, sanitation and hygiene have severe effects on the health of children. In 2016, 11 per cent of children aged 0–59 months had diarrhoea in the two weeks prior to the Demographic Health Survey. The persistently high prevalence of diarrhoea indicates that the disease burden is an important driver of malnutrition in Timor-Leste.

The practice of defecating in the open – such as in fields or bushes or by bodies of water – can be devastating for public health. Exposed faecal matter contaminates food, water and the environment, and can spread serious diseases, such as diarrhoea, cholera and hepatitis. Coupled with poor hygiene practices, exposure to faecal matter remains a leading cause of infant and child mortality, morbidity, undernutrition and stunting, and can negatively impact a child's cognitive development.



The solutions

UNICEF will drive change in eight priority municipalities so that children and their families have access to basic and climate-resilient water and sanitation services, and children and their families are aware of best practices in hygiene and WASH facility management and are living in a clean and safe environment.

UNICEF's water, sanitation and hygiene programme – in line with the government's plan to achieve safe water and sanitation by 2030 – will support basic WASH services in communities as well as in schools and health centres. This will include reaching open-defecation-free status in three UNICEF-supported municipalities, initiating pilot projects for migrating from open defecation to basic sanitation, community empowerment on rural water system care and maintenance, building climate resilience in the rural water sector, and upgrading WASH facilities in critical institutions and at critical public places in support of infection prevention and control.

UNICEF will also facilitate quality improvements by initiating discussions on water safety plans and improving the country's capacity on water quality verification to achieve safely managed water. Moreover, innovative sanitation solutions will be developed with the objectives of water conservation and on-site safe disposal of human excreta.

UNICEF will continue strengthening the national WASH sector capacity, particularly that of the newly created National Water and Sanitation Authority and the Environmental Health Branch of the Ministry of Health. This is expected to result in strong national monitoring, quality assurance and data management and coordination.

Impact

By 2025, working with partners in the public and private sectors, UNICEF in Timor-Leste will contribute to the achievement of these key results:



70 per cent of the Timorese population has **access to basic sanitation facilities** (currently 57 per cent)



100 per cent of the population has **access to basic water sources** (currently 85 per cent)



50 per cent of the population has the knowledge of **hand washing with soap**



How to help

UNICEF’s work to improve access to water and sanitation and promote hygiene practices requires a budget of US\$2.5 million for 2022–2025. Of this amount, UNICEF has committed US\$1 million from its resources. Now, UNICEF is seeking partners from both the private and the public sector to financially support its water, sanitation and hygiene programme with a total amount of US\$1.5 million. Donors can contribute in two ways:

- 1. Contribute to thematic funds for social inclusion earmarked to Timor-Leste** – This type of funding targets a specific goal area of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, such as WASH, while enabling the Country Office to direct the investments to activities that are most needed within this thematic area. This gives UNICEF’s experts the flexibility to focus on interventions that will have the most impact in accelerating results for children.
- 2. Contribute to specific activities** – If you are interested in contributing to specific solutions, UNICEF is ready to partner with you. UNICEF has developed the following budget for its water, sanitation and hygiene work for 2022–2025 and can provide more details on any of the interventions listed below.

SOLUTIONS	FUNDING GAP (US\$) 2022–2025*
1. Rural, community-managed water services made sustainable	300,000
2. Open-defecation-free status achieved and migrated to basic level sanitation	300,000
3. Positive social norms and hygiene practices promoted, and demand for quality WASH services improved	150,000
4. Climate resilience and emergency preparedness in WASH sector improved	300,000
5. WASH in health-care facilities complying with national standards	150,000
6. WASH sector data management improved	200,000
7. WASH sector challenges provided with innovative and field-tested solutions	100,000

*Detailed budgets for each solution are available.

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Strategies deployed under each solution include:

- **Service delivery:** Procurement and distribution of supplies and equipment, logistics, transportation, warehousing, infrastructure building, direct assistance, cash grants, monitoring and innovations
- **Capacity development:** Development of materials, training aids, information, education and communication materials, workshops, social mobilization and community empowerment
- **Institution building:** Development of plans/micro-plans, institutional mechanisms and tools, guidelines, protocols and standards, coordination, oversight strengthening, management information systems, resourcing and budgeting
- **Evidence generation:** Situation analysis, research, studies, surveys, evaluation, assessments, generation of profiles, knowledge management and innovative approaches
- **Policy dialogue and advocacy:** Strategy and policy formulation, convening meetings, organizing workshops, study tours, South-South cooperation, partnership building and media outreach



Clean water flows to school in rural Timor-Leste for the first time in 10 years

Eskola Basic Filial is a rural school with 211 students – 99 girls and 112 boys. It sits on a plateau, offering stunning views of the beaches and crystal-clear waters of the ocean in Baucau Municipality, east of the capital Dili. However, for close to a decade, the school had difficulties accessing water.

Students and teachers had to use their lunch break to walk to a communal water pipe a kilometre away, and then carry heavy buckets of water along the rocky paths back to the school. The water was used for hand washing, cleaning the school, and even stopping dust from blowing around during the dry season.

But that has now changed. An innovative funding scheme by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, supported by UNICEF and the Global Partnership for Education, is bringing water to rural schools such as Eskola Basic Filial in Timor-Leste and helping to keep students safe from COVID-19.

Under the initiative, selected schools are provided a maximum of US\$1,000 to help them improve access to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and promote a safe and secure environment for learning, including preventing the spread of COVID-19 and other diseases. To date, 74 schools have benefited from the scheme in all municipalities.

Initially, people thought it would require highly sophisticated equipment and support from engineers to install plumbing. However, a team effort by parents, school staff and community members has helped ensure the school now has clean running water. They purchased plumbing materials, dug a channel to divert water and installed and connected the pipeline to the main water source, a water tank and hand-washing and other facilities.

“I am extremely happy we have water, and more importantly, can use the break to play, catch up with friends, and not have to worry about having to get water for use in the school,” says Ines, a 12-year-old child at the school.

We hope you are inspired to join us and take a leading role in improving access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene practices for all Timorese children. If you have any questions or would like more details, please contact:

Bilal Durrani
Country Representative
UNICEF Timor-Leste
bazdurrani@unicef.org

Rukshan Ratnam
Communication Specialist
UNICEF Timor-Leste
rratnam@unicef.org

www.unicef.org

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