



# ***EARLY WARNING AND EARLY RESPONSE SYSTEM***

***POLICY BRIEF:  
ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY IN EDUCATION***



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In 2008, BELUN, in cooperation with Columbia University's Center for International Conflict Resolution (CICR), established the Early Warning and Response System (EWER) in Timor-Leste. EWER is designed to increase early responses to conflict and prevent the escalation of violence at the national and community level.

The EWER system is generously supported by the Government of Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs through the Conflict Resolution Unit.

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BELUN asserts that it is the sole author of this report and that the ideas, opinions and commentary contained within are not intended to reflect or represent those of the Government of Ireland.

Cover photo by Andrew Marriott, Farol, Dili District, 14 May 2010



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### *Executive Summary*

Since the re-establishment of Timorese independence, the Ministry of Education, along with its development partners, has worked to build a functioning education system within a very challenging context. Numbers of qualified teachers in Timor-Leste remain critically limited, school facilities have been repeatedly damaged and looted, and significant policy changes have had to be implemented regarding curriculum content and language of instruction.

EWER conflict monitoring has revealed growing concern about the quality of education and the equity of its provision; concerns which may, in turn, fuel perceptions of disenfranchisement. Further research shows that frustration at navigating a system that suffers many deficiencies and inconsistencies is not only discouraging students from pursuing further education but a large proportion of students are struggling to meet the minimum standards required to complete their basic schooling.

Although there has been some progress, particularly in the area of rehabilitation of school buildings, obstacles remain. Perhaps the greatest of these is in the realm of curriculum development. While there have been attempts to finalize a coherent curriculum, it remains the case that many schools are left to fashion their own, using texts and manuals remaining from the period of Indonesian administration or subsequent, incomplete, Government efforts.

Additionally, it remains the case that teachers are relatively untrained, many receiving only short, in-service courses. Many are effectively volunteers, and those contracted by the Ministry are often paid irregularly. With levels of Portuguese fluency generally low, and varying across the country, language of instruction is also a source of frustration, slowing uptake of primary teaching and so making testing and retention in upper grades challenging. Moreover, teachers are rarely trained in the skills needed to undertake teaching of languages.

Education past the nationally guaranteed pre-secondary level is extremely difficult for the majority of Timorese students to obtain and fund. Many apply to universities and technical colleges in Indonesia, but even those able to secure a place face obstacles. Some are forced to return without graduating as their families are unable to continue bearing the cost. Others find themselves poorly prepared for the expected level of scholarship. Declining use of Bahasa Indonesia in Timorese education will also, over time, make this option even less tenable.

Competition for the limited number of scholarships is understandably fierce. Students who have been taught within the state education system rarely meet the required standards of linguistic and academic proficiency. With such opportunities advertized predominantly in urban areas and using media broadly inaccessible to more socioeconomically disadvantaged members of the community, many feel isolated from the application processes. This has led to perceptions of a systemic bias in favor of the children of Dili-based elites.

Practices already in use among some private schools in Timor-Leste, if introduced more widely, may improve learning outcomes and begin to address misgivings about the system. These include more extensive teacher training, retaining Indonesian as an optional taught language, and initial primary teaching in local languages. It is hoped that current processes to agree and implement a national curriculum at both primary and secondary levels and to produce contextually relevant teaching materials will also render substantial benefits. The efficiency of such efforts will, however, depend on coordination across Government and on reliable procurement and distribution networks. With the potential of a new generation of Timorese youth at stake, such educational measures must be considered no less than imperative.

## ***Introduction***

In 2008, BELUN, a local NGO headquartered in Dili, established the Early Warning and Early Response System (EWER). This program was designed to contribute to human security and specifically to aid in preventing the escalation of violence in Timor-Leste. This system has been developed by, and is implemented in partnership with, Columbia University's Center for International Conflict Resolution (CICR). In using the system, BELUN is able to prepare actionable research and recommendations for use by the Timorese Government and development partners, as well as communities themselves, in responding to emergent conflict.

This is the third policy brief under the EWER system, and it investigates perceptions of equality of access to education in Timor-Leste. The topic was chosen due to recent monitoring data that suggested a growing tension over this issue – in particular, a widespread belief that socioeconomic status was the main determinant of whether someone received a satisfactory education. Accordingly, BELUN staff have conducted research across urban and rural locations and analyzed findings in light of broader conflict dynamics.

## ***Methodology***

BELUN and CICR recognize the complexity of issues surrounding education and education policy and do not wish to simplify the challenges or reinforce perceptions that may not consider all relevant factors. In the interest of securing maximum cooperation from all parties, BELUN provided all participants with an introduction to BELUN and the EWER system and explained the purpose of the research. Initial interviews focused on confirming incidences of conflict that had been reported to EWER monitors in various communities. Engagement and cooperation with Government officials was also sought from the outset.

Between March and June 2010, BELUN began interviewing directors of primary and secondary schools, officials at pertinent government ministries, religious leaders, student groups, parents, and NGOs involved in the development of the Timorese educational system. The complete list of interviewees is available from BELUN on request, though some names have not been included due to individual participants' requests for confidentiality. Qualitative approaches were used in collecting and analyzing data, with participants asked to reflect on their own experiences and perceptions and how locally-observed phenomena might contribute to conflict. Such techniques were considered the most appropriate means of capturing those factors with the potential to influence construction of future social conditions.

## ***Sector-wide Challenges***

Education is a right guaranteed by the Timorese Constitution. The context of post-independence Timor-Leste has, however, posed challenges to the practical enjoyment of this right. Formal schooling is provided as a function of Government for effectively nine years. Secondary education (elsewhere Grades 10-12 for 16-18 year olds) is not compulsory. 25% of teachers are believed to have left the system since 2000 and the events of 2006 caused further upset to the development of state-sponsored schooling. Efforts are continuing to improve access to, and quality of, education, but despite many advances there is still a long way to go, given that only 12% of students are presently estimated to make it to their secondary graduation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Timor-Leste Youth Development and the Labor Market: Summary of Findings and Options" World Bank, East Asia and Pacific Region, Human Development Department, 13 Oct. 2007.

Of the many and complex factors producing this troubling outcome, perhaps the most obvious is language of instruction. Although Timor-Leste is technically a multilingual state, the seeming pre-eminence, within Government, of Portuguese continues in many classrooms. Though a new law in 2008 mandated Tetum and Portuguese as co-educational languages, many teachers and school directors may yet be unaware of the shift in official policy. With national estimates of fluency suggesting that, at most, 20% of the population understands Portuguese, schools are often drawing on Bahasa Indonesia, Tetum and other local languages.

A standardized curriculum, reflecting post-independence priorities and context, has proved difficult both to agree and disseminate. Though teaching content at the primary level has recently been finalized, BELUN research has found that some schools have not received notification of this. Many of the textbooks and manuals delivered to classrooms have moved with teachers, leading to gaps in resourcing. Although a secondary schools curriculum was previously distributed, an updated version is, at the time of writing, still under development, with donors and development partners helping produce new, more relevant teaching material.

Timor-Leste also faces a dearth of well-trained teachers. Many of those who worked in the sector under Indonesian occupation are believed to have fled during the conflict surrounding independence, and a further proportion have either retired or not returned to work following the upheaval of 2006. Most of those taken on to fill these vacancies had little or no previous teaching experience. In the public system, new hires received an initial three-month course of training that was conducted in Portuguese, a language in which most were not proficient.

Private primary and secondary schools, run mostly by the Catholic Church and other religious denominations, produce the majority of students who proceed to further education. Private schools tend to be more pragmatic in their approach to the language of instruction, provide a more extensive regimen of training for their teachers, and utilize a problem-solving approach to teaching that differs markedly from the 'rote learning' method preferred in public schools.

Timorese students typically face both academic and financial obstacles to further study. Some take English or Portuguese classes in order to increase their chances of finding a job or obtaining a scholarship for tertiary study in Timor-Leste or in Portugal, the Philippines, America, etc. This is not an option open to more socioeconomically disadvantaged students, however, who commonly seek more traditional livelihoods in their home districts or venture to Dili to find work. The manner of advertising scholarships – notices in newspapers, on the radio and television, and on the Internet – is not always effective in reaching rural students.

Broader advertisement could not, however, guarantee that the entire student population would have both the means to get to Dili to apply for, and the competitive edge needed to obtain, a scholarship. Though such opportunities are few, their local prestige is considerable. Perceived inequities, especially across the rural/urban divide, in apportioning such benefits, foster much resentment and jealousy among that proportion of the population that cannot afford the investment of time and money required to visit the capital to search out available funds.

Whilst no evidence of actual corruption or nepotism was found by BELUN in its investigation of these processes, there is certainly advantage to be gained through familial and personal connections on a more practical level. Offers of accommodation and transport in Dili throughout the applications period likely provide an indirect advantage. Due to cultural norms related to propriety, this is, notably, more difficult for young women to access, especially where no family connections exist.

Efforts to better meet the learning needs of Timorese students will have far-reaching and profound effects on the country as a whole. Present EWER data shows that students in rural areas believe themselves to be discriminated against, to the benefit of urban dwellers, in terms of equality of access to quality education. This is increasing levels of tension brought about by social insecurity and social jealousy. Whilst this tension has not reached the level of coordinated protest, some within the system have expressed to BELUN their concern for this possibility. Given the extent to which the population at large is engaged with this sector, there is all the more impetus for reform, both to avoid conflict and to produce longer-term benefits.

### ***Conditions in Primary Schools***

Social tensions arising from dissatisfaction with education policy are most likely to be voiced in respect of a job-seeking population, or those pursuing higher education. Accordingly, this brief focuses principally on the state of secondary schooling, and on the challenges faced by graduating students. An investigation of the social impact of education policy would, however, be incomplete without consideration of the extent to which early childhood learning prepares students for later challenges.

Primary schools suffer from the same problems with infrastructure and administration as are experienced elsewhere in the system. These will be dealt with in the following section. More particularly, though a primary level curriculum has recently been agreed by Government and its implementing partners, distribution of materials in line with this framework was, at the time of writing, incomplete.

Primary school teachers have widely relied on alternative source materials. Many have used *Lafaek* magazine, produced by the NGO Care International in partnership with the Ministry of Education, which has provided a useful tool for lessons in the natural and social sciences. *Lafaek* was originally intended as a monthly supplement to a more permanent curriculum; yet, for many rural primary schools, it became the main teaching tool for several vital topics. Indeed, in various subject areas, *Lafaek* arguably contains the only material produced to reflect a specifically Timorese context and does so increasingly in both Portuguese and Tetum.

Where teachers have been able to draw on other resources, these have typically been either Indonesian texts corresponding to that country's 1994 curriculum, left after the withdrawal of occupying forces, or they were Portuguese texts distributed during one of the previous attempts to produce a standard, nationwide curriculum. In both cases, teachers face difficulties in conveying to students useful and comprehensible lessons, given the differences in socio-political context and in language.

In the course of BELUN's research, secondary school directors have complained that shortfalls within the primary education system have resulted in masses of students entering their institutions with little to no understanding of the basics in the natural sciences and math. Social sciences, in particular, have been neglected, since the Indonesian textbooks relied upon by many educators focused on a social and political framework no longer shared by Timor-Leste. Whether working from Indonesian or Portuguese texts, teachers have often attempted working translations into Tetum or other local languages. Though these practical efforts are commendable, without fluency in the originating languages, the educational benefit of lessons produced in this way is likely significantly diminished. Accordingly, it is hoped that distribution of the new primary curriculum, and associated materials, is extended across the country in full, and that teachers are appropriately supported through its implementation.

## *Conditions in Secondary Schools*

### *Infrastructure*

Government, and its implementing partners, have made significant progress in rebuilding and rehabilitating the country's educational infrastructure. Given the scale of damage, however, much work remains to be done. Administration is a function yet to be properly incorporated in efforts at renewal. Public and private schools alike have pointed out that there is little to no space available for the work of administrators and faculty outside the classroom. Furthermore, administrative costs are yet to be fully included in government education budgets, resulting in the families of students being called upon to contribute to running costs.

School directors report that there is no system in place for the continued rehabilitation and maintenance of school facilities. This is of particular concern given the prevailing sense of community ownership over school property, and the unrestrained grazing of domestic and farm animals. For example, housing units built during Indonesian times for resident teachers at the public secondary school in Vila Nova Baucau have been put to commercial and residential use, with little imminent likelihood of their being turned over to educational purposes. In most communities, schools are simply considered public space.

In the past, community members have made away with desks, chairs, cabinets, and other property without which schools cannot maintain an environment conducive to educating children. Still today, secondary schools report that they lack the requisite number of tables, chairs, and desks for administrative staff, teachers, and students. Space itself remains a challenge. In Palaban (Oecussi) and Ossu (Viqueque), public secondary schools noted that while the number of students enrolled in those institutions continues to increase every year, there has been no funding to build new classrooms.

Overcrowding is affecting private schools as well, with one Catholic school in Aileu, for example, complaining to BELUN researchers that it has far more students than desks and chairs. In many schools, teachers must resort to teaching several grade levels in the same classroom due to their school's inability to find separate teaching areas. Although some educators note that the Government has been able to dramatically reduce class sizes since independence, overcrowding is still a concern.

Due to evolving procurement and distribution procedures, compounded by the difficulty of practically servicing a diffuse and largely rural population, the Ministry of Education has found it difficult to attend promptly to the needs of all of its schools across the districts. As a result, secondary schools often lack essential materials of all kinds. In Lospalos and Baucau, for instance, schools were without examination papers during the mandated testing period, and were without ink and other office supplies at other times of the year. Road conditions and distance from urban centers also affect students in remote areas, who often have difficulty in attending school regularly as transport assistance can rarely be provided.

The few schools that have had computers donated by NGOs have reported that when the computers break, they have no staff to fix them, and even if suitably trained personnel were available locally, they would not be able to afford their fees. Similarly, teachers report that when electricity is generally available during the day, often they themselves are forced to pay the bill as the school administration has not been allotted enough money. The technical school in Oecussi advised during research that without access to mains power, it relies on a small generator for its essential needs. It is not enough, however, to power all the school's computers, and administration suffers as a result.

In addition, school directors have remarked on the absence of laboratory facilities and adequately stocked libraries in their schools. They feel that students are at an especial disadvantage in regard to the study of the natural sciences, as instruction in such subjects is restricted to lessons on theory without applied experiments. Infrastructure is, as this suggests, directly linked to the ability of schools to provide a well-rounded education.

### *Curriculum and the Language of Instruction*

The final draft of a comprehensive secondary curriculum, the product of months of work by the Ministry of Education, along with various United Nations agencies and Lusophone universities, is expected to be finalized in August 2010, at which point it will be translated into both Tetum and English. It will then need to be approved by the Council of Ministers, whereafter the curriculum will be distributed throughout the country. Once this political sign-off has occurred, textbooks and teacher's guides will have to be developed and/or purchased. The World Bank has offered to assist the Ministry of Education to produce textbooks specific to the Timorese context, though such outputs will be some time in coming.

The lack of a formal curriculum over the last decade has forced instructors to use materials that have, in many cases, proved to be sub-standard. The public secondary school in Maliana, for example, has textbooks and lessons from Brazil that it has long used notwithstanding that they contain a number of errors – formulae in the physics texts, among other things, being demonstrably false.

In the absence of supporting texts, schools have often simply avoided teaching subjects in the social sciences, like economics, geography, history, and civics. Colégio São José reports that its teachers have been giving instruction in social studies solely on the basis of their own understanding, steering clear of contentious social issues that might cause disquiet in the classroom or among students' families. In the curriculum currently being finalized, the Government is understood to have mandated inclusion of subjects such as national history, civics, and political process. Education on these topics is directly linked to the strengthening of Timorese democracy.

The lack of a standardized curriculum has also had implications in terms of administering the national examinations. Schools have reported that answers on the examinations do not match the information taught in class from supplied textbooks, causing many students to fail. In addition, many students are reported to have failed simply because they were not able to learn in the Portuguese language. It is telling that at Colégio São José, where the first two years of instruction there are conducted in Tetum, and teachers were provided extensive training, students did noticeably better than the national average in their examinations.

The use of Portuguese as the language of instruction exacerbates the difficult conditions students already find in the classroom, both students and teachers report. As mentioned previously, most students and teachers do not have the fluency required to impart and receive instruction in Portuguese; yet, in most cases where the curriculum in use is still predominantly Indonesian, teachers will sometimes translate, as best they can based on their level of proficiency, the lessons into Portuguese for their students, thereafter conducting classes in a mix of Portuguese, Indonesian, and Tetum.

In institutions like Conis Secondary School in Lospalos, teachers use a Portuguese curriculum with accompanying texts; however, the lessons have been translated into Tetum by staff. These translations, though, are rudimentary, with much detail, nuance, and practical application lost in the process. Many community members interviewed in the course of this research expressed their

frustration and disbelief that teachers should be required to teach in a language they themselves do not fully understand.

Because of the Government objective that every student should be able to speak Portuguese, the language is taught in every school nationwide; however, in practice, because teachers themselves typically have a low level of fluency, it remains the case that most secondary school students graduate with a knowledge of Portuguese that does not enable even basic conversation. Initially, much Portuguese support was provided at the primary level, arguably allowing proficiency to plateau during later schooling, hindering teaching of more complex content. Though teachers of Portuguese acknowledge they have received training, they claim it has not been sufficient to allow them to pass along any substantial benefit to their students.

Given the strain of learning Portuguese, students report that they feel the time would be better used learning Bahasa Indonesia or English – the former because Indonesia is for many the most attractive place to pursue tertiary and vocational education, the latter because it is seen as offering access to employment within the international community in Timor-Leste. With each new cohort of students the knowledge of Indonesian wanes, and admission to vocational and university study in that country becomes more difficult. Unless Timorese universities and other educational institutions are able to develop quickly enough to accommodate those students and to offer a viable alternative, levels of dissatisfaction and frustration will rise.

#### *Teachers' Pay and Training*

Teachers and school directors interviewed for this research advised that Government disbursements for salary and other purposes often arrived late. Teachers on contract (as opposed to permanent hires) are reportedly paid every three to four months, on average. Because teachers are not paid at predictable intervals, they report that, in order to support their families, they must give priority to working other, paying jobs rather than commit all of their time and attention to their students. Additionally, since there is no clear system for promoting and retaining teachers, educators state that they feel very little incentive to remain in the school system.

Because most teachers had no relevant experience before being hired, the Government has attempted to provide training with the help of international educators. Unfortunately, as most of these training sessions are conducted in Portuguese, teachers have related to EWER staff that they unfortunately gained little to no practical value from them. Many teachers admit to not receiving any training courses whatsoever; yet, even when conducted in Portuguese, they still very much want to attend these trainings in the hope that they will be able to glean something, at least, to take back to their students and so enrich their learning experience.

Many teachers claimed favoritism by ministry officials in selecting who gets to go on these Government-funded training courses, some of which now involve international travel. Many also allege that those with better connections are still paid regularly while away on training, whereas those without connections receive reduced pay or none at all. Whether or not this is the case (BELUN uncovered no such bias), such perceptions underscore the eagerness of many teachers to secure further training opportunities and greater job security.

### *Scholarships for University and Vocational Training*

For the average Timorese student, the financing needed to secure entry to a university or vocational school is prohibitively high, whether in Indonesia or Timor-Leste. Accordingly, scholarships are highly sought after, and have the ability to change lives. For most students in rural areas, though, there is no way to receive notice that scholarships are even available. The effect of this urban-rural divide on educational opportunities should not be underestimated.

Many students in rural areas related to BELUN researchers how difficult it is for them to learn of potential scholarships. The fact that electricity does not run at certain periods of the day prevents many students from using the Internet (where available), radio, and television to scout for scholarship advertisements. Since these are the primary media through which government, aid agencies, and others publicize available funds, rural students may be unreasonably precluded from continuing their education. According to the agricultural school in Fuloro, for example, because there is no mechanism whereby the Ministry of Education regularly notifies schools of scholarship opportunities, that institution simply received no news at all this past academic year regarding funds for which its students could have applied.

Students whose families have the means to send them to Dili to search out and apply for scholarships typically fare much better in competition for funding than those from less affluent backgrounds. There is, accordingly, resentment among many students who feel that the well-off are more easily able to obtain scholarships through nepotism, favoritism, and/or family connections. BELUN, however, found no evidence of improper dealings in the course of its investigation.

Rather, those with access to better educational facilities throughout their primary and secondary schooling are naturally more likely to be competitive when applying for scholarships. Similarly, those living alongside and more commonly interacting with the international community are more likely to learn some of the languages (whether Portuguese or English) that may later help in securing scholarship opportunities.

For its part, the Ministry's scholarship office has worked actively to streamline the process by which students can apply for funds. Whilst there are currently many sources of funding, each advertising separately and requiring different modes of application, it is the Ministry's intention to consolidate offers for scholarships from across Government, and from donors and organizations into a kind of central clearinghouse so that students know exactly where they must go in order to search and apply for funds. In future, it is hoped that a single, simplified application will see students considered for all relevant funding opportunities. In the mean time, application processes remain challenging for nearly all students, since scholarship funders generally require that applications be made in Portuguese, Indonesian or English.

Language issues affect the scholarship process in a fundamental way. Government sources advise that in 2008, the Ministry of Education secured for students one hundred scholarships for study in Portugal and the Philippines, two hundred places overall; however, in the case of the Portuguese scholarships, only five of the approximately one thousand applicants passed the language proficiency exam. Eighty-eight students were then selected to receive free language training, paid for mostly by the Portuguese Embassy, and allowed to retake the exam; even then, only fifty-two passed the re-administered test and qualified for admission. Reports from the Philippines indicate that the students admitted to that program are having an especially difficult time due to their tenuous grasp of English as used in an academic setting.

Similarly, Ministry officials advised BELUN that when their office obtained from India ten scholarships for qualified Timorese students to attend university in that country, only five applicants were able to pass the English proficiency exam. In the case of the Portuguese and Filipino scholarships, the more concerning statistic may be that of all the secondary students in Timor-Leste, only two thousand applicants had even initially qualified to take the language proficiency exams by first meeting the Ministry's minimum grade point average requirement.

These examples may be considered as posing an argument for the continued teaching of Bahasa Indonesia, and perhaps other foreign languages, as optional subjects in order to allow students a variety of opportunities to continue their education past secondary school. Whether or not this approach is taken, attention must also be paid to the domestic tertiary education sector, which research participants report is not meeting present demand in terms of either quality or accessibility.

### ***Life after Graduation***

Based on applications for enrolment in vocational and language school, as well as for university scholarships, the demand among Timorese youth for continuing education is high. With places limited, and processes complex, frustration often turns to anger. BELUN research, both through its monitor network and more focused investigation, has confirmed the potential of this issue, with its promise of a better life and its tendency to promote competition, to contribute substantially to community tensions.

This is not to say that opportunities do not exist. Four universities are taking students, offering a range of courses, with law and international relations among the most popular. In Dili, there are numerous training centers offering courses in, among other things, English, Portuguese, office administration, mechanical engineering, carpentry, plumbing, hospitality, information technology and music.

In Baucau, Universidade Marista Baucau hosts a training center with a variety of courses funded and/or administered by AusAID, World Vision, the Red Cross, and others. It remains the case, however, that in rural areas, opportunities for education after secondary school are fewer than in cities. Even for students in Dili and other district centers, the training opportunities available are restricted to those with independent means or those lucky enough to obtain a scholarship.

Many students have related that they find a productive outlet, and relief from the demoralizing exercise of trying to find a job after graduation, in friendly sports competitions and youth programs established by NGOs and religious groups. With such a crowded employment market, many youth remain jobless and some turn their frustration to less socially-acceptable ends. Whilst the flow of young people from rural to urban areas shows no sign of stopping, some such individuals will eventually return to their original communities and continue the family tradition of subsistence agriculture. Many, however, may languish in Dili while continuing to seek out limited opportunities and the other benefits of city life.

The introduction of foreign media and competing social norms has, together with public expectation of a post-independence dividend, created aspirations that are now turning to disappointment. In the longer term, a coordinated Government strategy across the education sector will be key to avoiding this widespread frustration escalating into unrest.

## *Recommendations*

Nearly all participants in this research felt that although there have, since independence, been significant improvements to both the quality of instruction and access to education, the pace of development in this sector has slowed considerably. There is, however, optimism that progress will be swifter once the Government releases an agreed secondary curriculum. BELUN recognizes that curriculum development is a difficult task, especially given the necessity in Timor-Leste of bringing together various cultures, languages, and religions. A good education is, however, vital to ensuring that the current generation is able to contribute its full potential to the socioeconomic advancement of Timor-Leste. Securing this future for Timorese youth will require a constructive collaboration between Government, civil society and international partners. To this end, BELUN offers the following recommendations.

### *To the Government*

- At the time of writing, the revised national secondary curriculum was understood to be nearing finalization. A continued emphasis on this important document will ensure both a higher quality of instruction and a more consistent approach across the country.
- Given previous issues encountered in distributing information to schools, especially in rural and remote communities, care must be taken to ensure that materials are provided to all relevant parties. The distance involved, and the typically poor road conditions, are undoubtedly an obstacle to service provision. Accordingly, some further logistical planning and reconsideration of delivery networks may be needed.
- Though the finalization of the national primary curriculum stands as a considerable achievement, BELUN research indicates that distribution (and training of staff in its use) remains incomplete. Accordingly, any review of delivery networks may wish to add a follow-up function to ensure total coverage at both primary and secondary levels.
- Teachers in the public system have proven themselves resourceful and adaptable, providing instruction often without appropriate texts and with minimal professional support. Demand for training opportunities, however, reflects recognition among educators that more extensive training is needed. In order to avoid disruption to the school year, a staggered series of courses (utilizing semester breaks where possible) and the use of substitute teachers may merit consideration.
- Participants in this research have listed language as one of the principal barriers to effective communication within the education sector. This not only affects the uptake of lessons by students, but also the effectiveness of training provided to teachers. Whilst BELUN realizes that much specialist assistance in this sector originates from Lusophone countries, care must be taken to ensure that local realities of language use are taken into account, and that the value of such support is not lost in translation. Also, teachers may benefit not only from fluency, but also multilingual teaching techniques.
- Levels of dissatisfaction within the education system are not restricted to current students and graduates. Teachers, too, are expressing concerns about their place and range of opportunities. As discussions toward a Strategic Plan for the sector commence later this year, the possibility of a clearer career path, and more consistent supply of salary and benefits may warrant inclusion.

- The reality of Timor-Leste's present employment market privileges fluency in various foreign languages. Similarly, many opportunities for continuing education are conditional on the ability to learn effectively in Bahasa Indonesia, Portuguese or English. While the domestic tertiary sector is still developing, and jobs are few, the teaching of these languages (as an optional component of secondary schooling) may equip students more fully for life after graduation.

*To the Government and Development Partners*

- During the process of drafting the new secondary curriculum, the Ministry of Education has worked closely with UNICEF and other agencies in the sector to facilitate consultation with teachers and secure their input. Though the document is now close to being agreed at the political level, it has not yet been tested in practice. Accordingly, Government and its partners may wish to continue these dialogues with teachers in order to make necessary adjustments and refine the curriculum over time.
- A new curriculum will need new materials to support it. The Government has rightly stressed the importance of texts that reflect a Timorese context. Timely production of such documents will benefit from international support. The World Bank's stated intention to assist creation of a new unit within the Ministry of Education to this end is promising, but need not represent the full extent of international collaboration.
- Many international donors have been generous with their expertise in language training, but participant reports suggest efficacy may be limited. Whether training designed to promote teaching of Portuguese as a subject, or training conducted in the Portuguese language, a level of fluency is needed to ensure the transmission of ideas. This fluency does not appear presently to exist within the education sector, and could productively be addressed in order to improve gains from teacher training.
- Scholarships are offered not only by Government, but also by a range of international actors. Methods of application vary, placing a substantial burden on students seeking funding to continue their education. Rural students, in particular, are disadvantaged by the predominantly urban networks by which such opportunities are advertised. The proposal by the Ministry of Education of a central clearinghouse for scholarships is accordingly to be supported, alongside extended channels of communication.

*To Civil Society*

- With Government funds for the rehabilitation and extension of educational facilities limited, many schools continue to experience shortfalls in supplies. Many claim that their infrastructure simply does not provide a complete educational experience for their students. This presents an opportunity for civil society, whether locally or internationally, to offer material support and/or expertise. Libraries, for example, are regularly under-stocked, and without purpose-built laboratories, science teaching is restricted to theory, without benefit of practical demonstration.

*To BELUN*

- BELUN will continue to monitor this issue and provide up-to-date information to partners in the field. Opportunities for constructive and collaborative dialogue with Government, perhaps by way of a conference, will be considered in advance of the Ministry's Strategic Planning exercise scheduled to be conducted later this year.

## ***Conclusion***

In discussions over high unemployment and social unrest in Timor-Leste, there has been a consistent focus on jobs. Jobs are needed not only to instill a sense of individual self-worth, but also to provide a livelihood that can raise a family out of poverty. It is undeniably a considerable task to build the requisite infrastructure, both material and human, to create jobs and to equip a conflict-affected populace to perform them well. Such progress cuts across many sectors, but education is clearly central to the endeavor. The benefits to be gained by further investment and reform in this sector are likely to be felt not only in rising standards of living, but also in decreased community tensions.