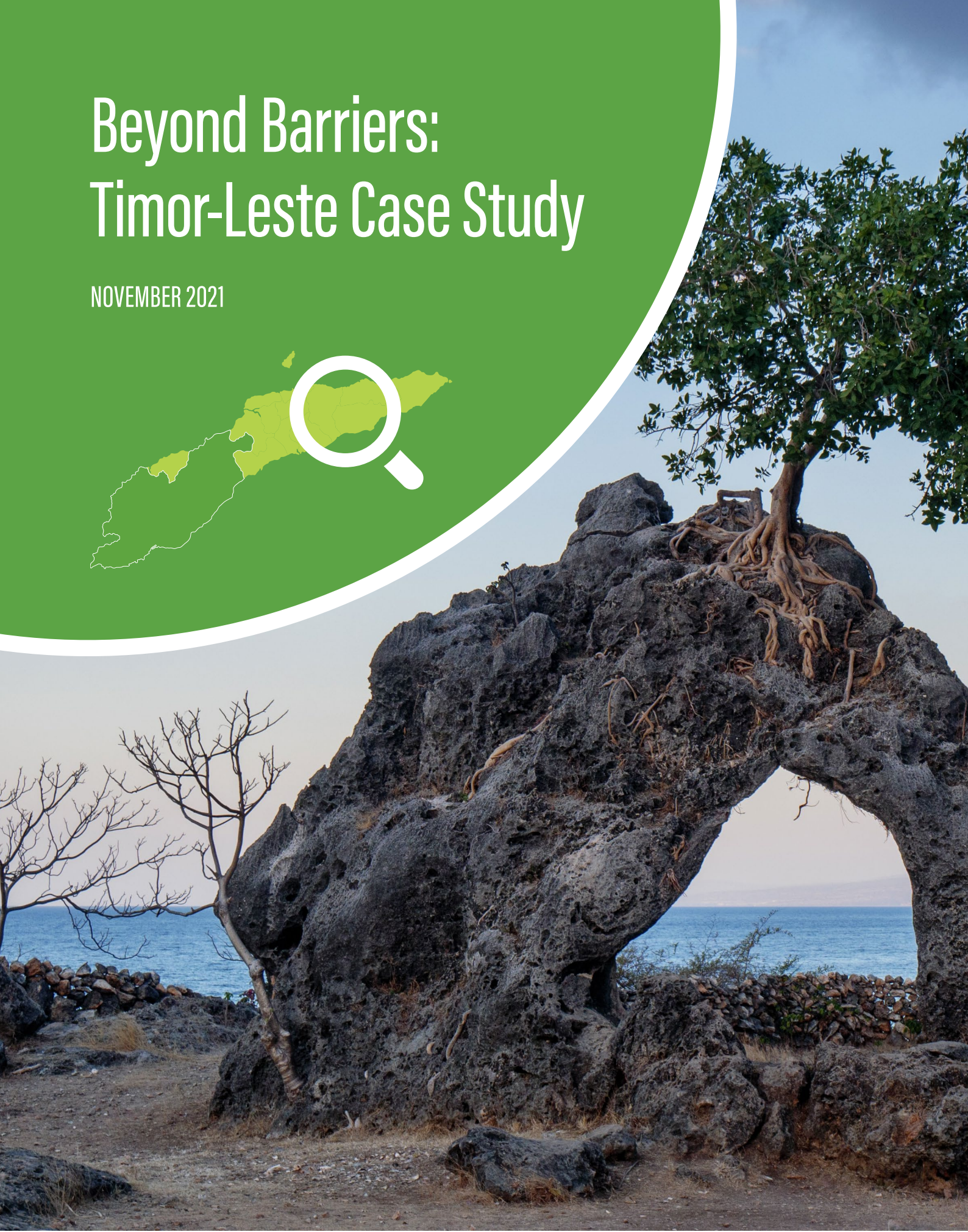
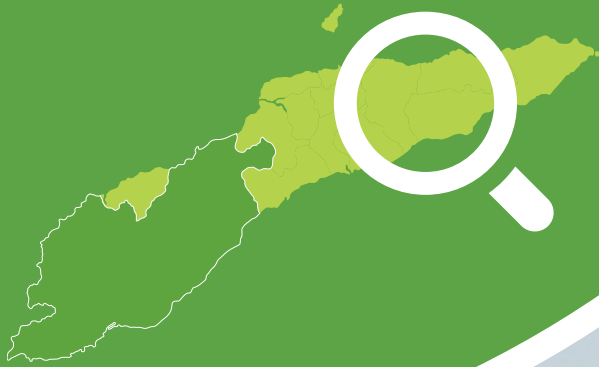


# Beyond Barriers: Timor-Leste Case Study

NOVEMBER 2021



HUMANITARIAN  
ADVISORY GROUP



AHP

Australian Humanitarian Partnership

World Vision



# Acknowledgements

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## About the research

This project is exploring opportunities for integration of climate change adaptation (CCA) and disaster risk reduction (DRR) programming, focusing on local practice and implications at the community level, while recognising that these are often shaped by national and regional policy frameworks. It seeks to capture local evidence of best practice and identify ways to strengthen and build on these models.

Phase 1 involves case studies across the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) Disaster Ready program, including Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea (PNG). Phase 2 will extend data collection outside of AHP programming to validate findings using a wider regional dataset, including case studies in Tonga and Kiribati. This data is being collected through desk review,<sup>1</sup> key informant interviews at the global, regional and national levels, and community focus group discussions in case study countries. Recommendations from this work will inform future AHP programming and supplement ongoing discussions at the national and regional level in the Pacific.

The research is being undertaken by Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) and supported by World Vision Australia through the AHP Disaster READY and Partnership and Performance Funds 2. These funding streams are managed by Alinea Whitelum on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

## About Humanitarian Advisory Group

Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) was founded in 2012 to elevate the profile of humanitarian action in Asia and the Pacific. Set up as a social enterprise, HAG provides a unique space for thinking, research, technical advice and training that contributes to excellence in humanitarian practice. As an ethically driven business, we combine humanitarian passion with entrepreneurial agility to think and do things differently.

## About Disaster READY

The Disaster READY initiative is part of the AHP, a five-year (2017–22), \$50 million partnership between DFAT and Australian NGOs to improve humanitarian response. Disaster READY was designed to strengthen disaster preparedness and management across the Pacific and Timor-Leste.

Disaster READY serves to strengthen local humanitarian capability in Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, PNG and Timor-Leste so that communities are better prepared for and able to manage and respond to rapid and slow-onset disasters. This includes ensuring that the rights and needs of women, people with disabilities, youth and children's are being upheld and met in disaster preparedness and response at all levels. Additionally, that government, NGOs, the private sector and communities coordinate more effectively for inclusive disaster preparedness and response and national NGOs and churches have more influence and capacity in the country humanitarian system.

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<sup>1</sup> A literature review from this research was published in July 2020, see: [Beyond Barriers: Integrating Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation in the Pacific](#).

# Acronyms

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AHP	Australian Humanitarian Partnership
CCA	Climate Change Adaptation
CCWG	Climate Change Working Group
CIGD	Commission For Disaster Management
DFA	Development Finance Assessment
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DMC	Disaster Management Committee
DOC	Disaster Operation Centre
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HAG	Humanitarian Advisory Group
GoTL	Government of Timor-Leste
INFF	Integrated National Financing Framework
KII	Key Informant Interview
MDMC	Municipality Disaster Management Committees
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NDCC	National Directorate for Climate Change
NDDRM	National Directorate for Disaster Risk Management
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PDMC	Post-Administrative Disaster Management Committees
PNG	Papua New Guinea
RHTO	Ra'es Hadomi Timor Oan
SDMC	Suco Disaster Management Committees
SSCP	Secretary of State for Civil Protection
SSE	Secretary of State for the Environment
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme

# Introduction

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Timor-Leste faces significant risk from the changing climate. It ranks 20th on the World Risk Index 2020 due to its high exposure, vulnerability and low coping capacity.<sup>2</sup> The country officially achieved independence in 2002; as such, the Government of Timor-Leste (GoTL) is continuing to develop its institutional capacity in managing disasters and the impacts of a changing climate. National policies and governance structures for disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change have developed separately; however, the GoTL is currently drafting new plans to better integrate the two fields. While there is much work being done nationally, this is yet to consistently translate to the local level. This case study explores Timor-Leste's progress in integration of DRR and CCA, identifying key themes and opportunities for stakeholders to advance approaches that reduce risk and enhance resilience in communities in Timor-Leste.

## Purpose of the case study

This case study was conducted to understand country-specific approaches to CCA and DRR integration and inform approaches to strengthening community-level outcomes. The study focused on Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) programming in Timor-Leste, though its results are intended for a wider range of stakeholders.

This case study will complement six other country case studies and additional Pacific-wide datasets. Findings across the entire dataset will be presented in a final report that responds to the overarching questions below.

1. What are the existing challenges and opportunities in the implementation of integrated DRR and CCA programming?
2. How can AHP programs strengthen the integration of DRR and CCA at the community level in case study countries?

## Definitions

**Disaster risk reduction (DRR):** Disaster risk reduction is aimed at preventing new and reducing existing disaster risk and managing residual risk, all of which contribute to strengthening resilience and therefore to the achievement of sustainable development.<sup>3</sup>

**Climate change adaptation (CCA):** The process of adjustment to actual or expected climate change and its effects. In human systems, adaptation seeks to moderate or avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities. In some natural systems, human intervention may facilitate adjustment to expected climate and its effects.<sup>4</sup>

**Integration:** In this report, 'integration' refers to the integration of DRR and CCA, meaning, the combination of interventions that address CCA and DRR with the intention of improving humanitarian and development outcomes for at-risk and crisis-affected populations.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [World Risk Report 2020](#)

<sup>3</sup> [IPCC 2019 Glossary](#)

<sup>4</sup> [IPCC 2019 Glossary](#)

<sup>5</sup> This is a working definition adapted from the Global Nutrition Cluster and will be explored further and refined in this research. Available at [https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/icnwg\\_developing\\_an\\_integrated\\_response\\_approach\\_gfsc\\_20191128.pdf](https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/icnwg_developing_an_integrated_response_approach_gfsc_20191128.pdf)

# Methodology



Data collection in each country was led by national researchers, overseen by a senior researcher based in Suva, Fiji and supported by HAG, World Vision Australia and AHP agencies and partners. The research used a mixed methods approach, including desk review of 20+ documents, key informant interviews (KIIs) with eight critical stakeholders and community focus group discussions (FGDs) in five communities with 74 representatives (including men, women, children, elders and people with disabilities). National researchers contextualised research tools for each country.

## Limitations

**COVID-19 context and restrictions:** COVID-19 restrictions hindered field travel in Timor-Leste, as well as the ability to interview some stakeholders due to competing priorities.

**Representativeness:** Eight stakeholders participated in in-depth KIIs, and 74 people took part in five FGDs. These methods elicited a range of perspectives, but the small number of participants relative to the population of Timor-Leste means the generalisability of the results is uncertain and they should be interpreted cautiously.

**Applicability of findings:** This study was intended to present findings and opportunities that are relevant not only to AHP agencies, but other agencies operating in Timor-Leste. However, research participants focused on AHP agencies and programs, therefore the results may not be fully applicable to other agencies.

## Structure of this report

This report presents a brief snapshot of findings from data collection in three main sections.

- i. The first section provides an **overview of the disaster and climate context** in Timor-Leste.
- ii. The second section provides an **overview of policy and practices** that influence DRR and CCA interventions and approaches.
- iii. The third section presents the **key findings and opportunities for stakeholders** in Timor-Leste.

# Section 1: Setting the scene – the disaster and climate context in Timor-Leste

This section provides a brief overview of Timor-Leste's climate and disaster risk and the institutional arrangements that structure climate and disaster risk reduction efforts.

## Climate and disaster risk profile

Timor-Leste is comprised of the eastern half of the island of Timor and three nearby islands, and is surrounded by the islands of Indonesia. The country is located near one of the most active tectonic plate boundaries in the world, leaving it exposed to frequent earthquakes and related damage. The country also faces tsunamis, cyclones, heavy rainfall, landslides and drought. These significant natural hazards combine with limited infrastructure and weak social safety net programs, leaving the population particularly at risk.<sup>6</sup>

Below are some of the existing and forecast contextual challenges facing Timor-Leste:



Climatic change is likely to create a hotter, drier climate, causing potential for harsher and longer drought conditions, heavier rainfall, and increased flooding and landslide hazards.<sup>7</sup>



Flash floods and landslides are the most frequent hazards in the country, disrupting land transport systems and road infrastructure.<sup>8</sup>



In the last decade, El Nino and La Nina have caused erratic and insufficient rain, unpredictable flooding and prolonged drought, threatening agriculture and increasing food insecurity.<sup>9</sup>



Food security and loss of livelihood is a significant concern, because 70% of the population relies on climate-sensitive agriculture as its main source of income.<sup>10</sup>



Sea level has risen by an average of 9mm per year since 1993 and the temperature has increased by an average of 0.16°C per decade since 1950.<sup>11</sup>



Projected changes in rainfall patterns and saltwater intrusion threaten water resources.<sup>12</sup>



In April 2021, Timor-Leste was hit by the worst floods in recent history, affecting all 13 municipalities and causing widespread damage and displacement.<sup>13</sup>

6 USAID, 2017, [Climate Risk Profile: Timor-Leste Fact Sheet](#)

7 CFE-DMHA, 2019, [Timor-Leste Disaster Management Reference Handbook](#)

8 World Bank, 2015, Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste: Building Disaster/Climate Resilience in Timor-Leste, [Natural Hazard Risk Assessment: Synthesis Report](#)

9 COP23, Timor-Leste, <https://cop23.com.fj/timor-leste/>

10 USAID, 2017, Climate Risk Profile: Timor-Leste Fact Sheet

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 AHP, 2021, [Floods – Timor-Leste](#)



Photo by Leo Belarmino

### Box 1: Spotlight on Faturilau village

One of the communities visited for this research was Faturilau Village, an isolated village in the Administrative Post of Lequidoe, Municipality of Aileu. Residents have poor access to electricity, clean water and basic infrastructure. Community members reported facing natural hazards almost every year, including landslides, soil erosion, storms and flooding, which destroy community housing, force evacuations, and damage infrastructure, agriculture and livestock. FGD participants described poor access to information and support related to DRR and CCA in the past, but increasing support from AHP agencies and local NGOs over the past two years.<sup>14</sup>

## Overview of governance

Timor-Leste gained its formal independence from Indonesia in May 2002. The United Nations (UN) maintained a large role in the establishment of the country and the set-up of its governance arrangements until the end of the UN mission in 2012. Timor-Leste received considerable international assistance for reconstruction and development after independence, but it has been argued that the often overpowering and uncontextualised international approach has resulted in some ongoing challenges in institutional development.<sup>15</sup>

The GoTL views disaster risk management (DRM) as a priority and is working to strengthen its capacity in this area.<sup>16</sup> Governance for disaster and climate change currently remain separate and siloed, but there is evidence of increased efforts towards integration and strengthened government leadership in recent policy and plans, as well as those currently in draft form (see section 2).

<sup>14</sup> FGD 1

<sup>15</sup> Engel, 2015, '[Lessons to be learned: International interventions in Timor-Leste](#),' Development Pathways; Davey and Svoboda, 2013, '[The search for common ground: Police, protection and coordination in Timor-Leste](#),' HPG Working Paper.

<sup>16</sup> Cook, Suresh, Nair and Foo, 2019, Integrating disaster governance in Timor-Leste: Opportunities and challenges, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 35.

# Key governing bodies

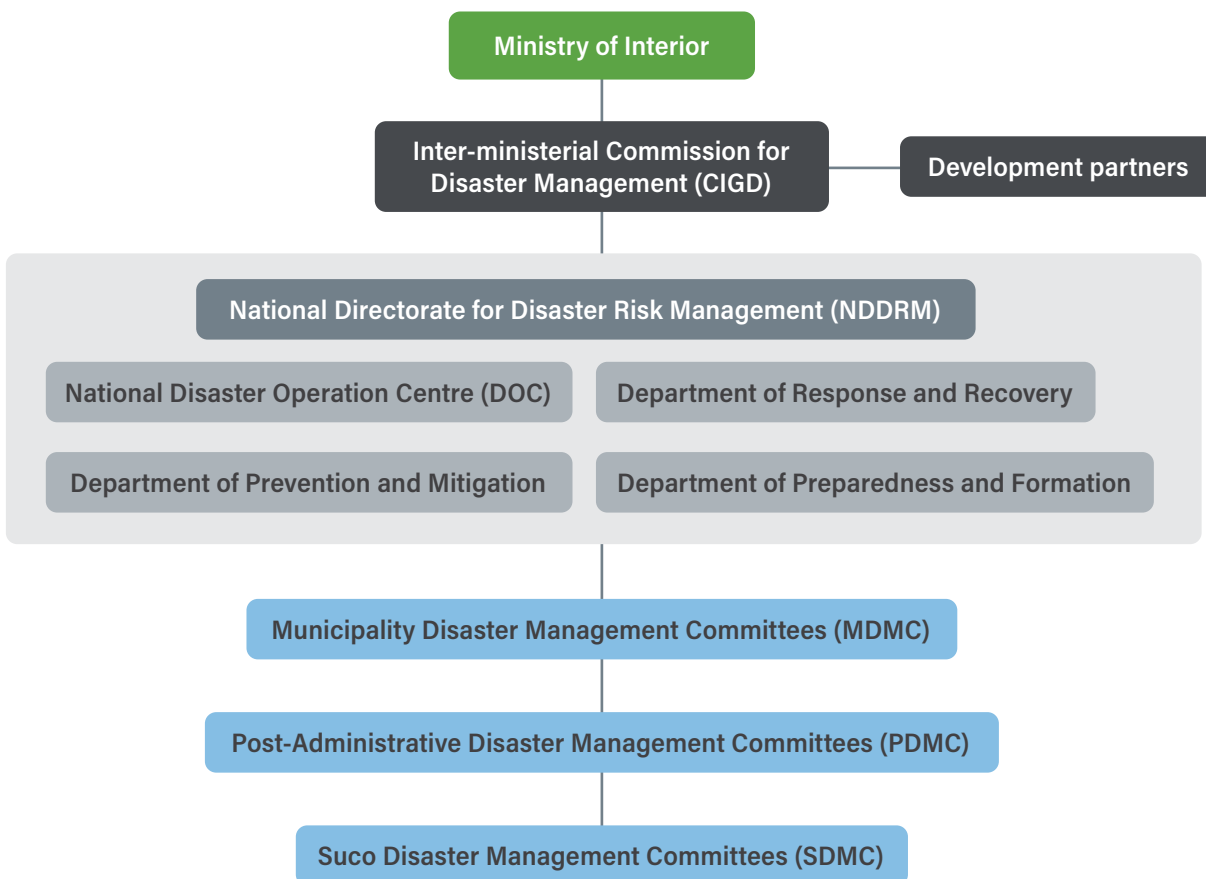
In Timor-Leste, ministerial responsibility for disaster management and DRR is currently separate to the responsibility for climate change.

## Disaster management

At a national level, disaster management is governed by the Secretary of State for Civil Protection (SSCP), under the Ministry of Interior, and supported by the Inter-ministerial Commission for Disaster Management (CIGD) and the National Directorate for Disaster Risk Management (NDDRM). Disaster Management Committees (DMCs) exist at all levels of government.

- The SSCP is responsible for coordination, preparation and response to emergencies.
- The CIGD is responsible for reviewing national DRR policy and strategic development.
- The NDDRM provides DRM coordination and technical support to the GoTL and community. It is comprised of the Disaster Operations Centre, Departments of Preparedness and Formation, Prevention and Mitigation, Response and Recovery and DMCs at municipality, post-administrative and village/suco level.<sup>17</sup>

Figure A: Disaster Management Governance in Timor-Leste



<sup>17</sup> CFE-DMHA, 2019, Timor-Leste Disaster Management Reference Handbook.





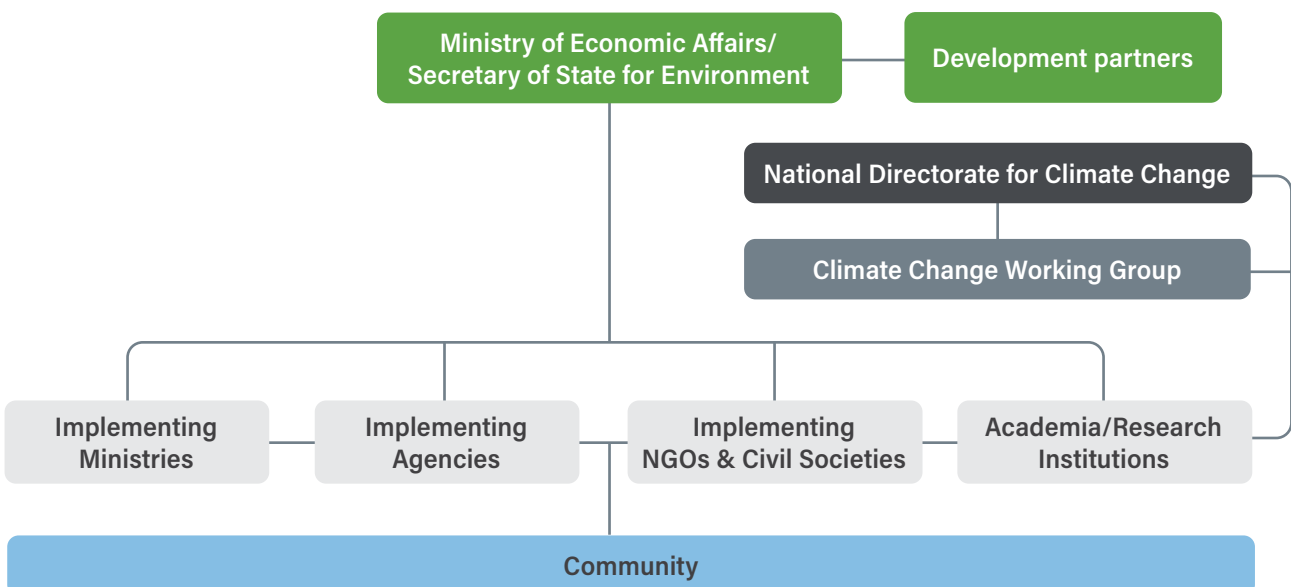
Photo by Leo Belarmino

## Climate change

At the national level, climate change strategy and activities are governed by the Secretary of State for the Environment (SSE), under the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and supported by the National Directorate for Climate Change (NDCC) and the Climate Change Working Group (CCWG).

- The SSE is the high-level operational body that oversees climate change policy.
- The NDCC is the technical coordinating body for CCA activities and strategies.
- The CCWG was established in 2017 to support the NDCC as the primary mechanism for coordination and consultation with stakeholders in implementing CCA policy and programming.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure B: Climate Change Governance in Timor-Leste**



Source: Timor-Leste's National Adaptation Plan, 2021

<sup>18</sup> Secretary of State for Environment, Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, 2021, [Timor-Leste's National Adaptation Plan: Addressing climate risks and building climate resilience](#).

# DRR and CCA coordination mechanisms

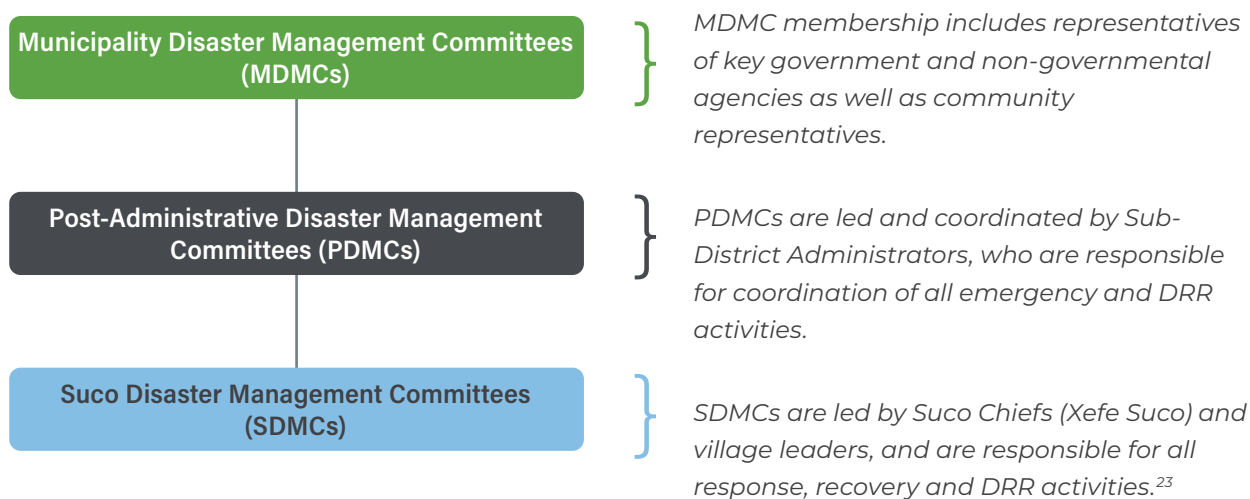
## National level

At the national level, the NDDRM is responsible for the coordination of DRR activities and the NDCC is responsible for the coordination of CCA, supported by the CCWG. The recently submitted National Adaptation Plan (NAP) emphasises the importance of coordination and collaboration between the NDCC and the NDDRM, but the mechanism is thus far unclear.<sup>19</sup> However, there is evidence of increasing collaboration at the national level (see Box 2).<sup>20</sup>

## Sub-national level

Responsibility for DRM is largely decentralised in Timor-Leste.<sup>21</sup> The DMCs at the municipality, post-administrative and suco levels play a key role in coordination of DRR activities. It is not clear to what extent these bodies are mandated to coordinate with and/or consider climate adaptation activities; however, there is evidence that some DMCs also coordinate CCA activities.<sup>22</sup> Alternatively, CCA is coordinated by the CCWG.

**Figure C: Sub-national disaster management structures**



### Box 2: Effective stakeholder coordination

Every three months, the GoTL organises a meeting to bring together stakeholders working in DRR to share plans, strategies and progress of activities implemented across the districts. It brings together stakeholders across government, international, national and local organisations. The forum is meant to share lessons learned, explore challenges faced in the communities and support collaborative decision-making to improve the quality of programming.<sup>24</sup> The forum has also been reported to discuss issues related to climate change and CCA programming.<sup>25</sup> Consulted stakeholders have claimed that this forum has been generally effective in strengthening coordination across DRR and CCA activities.<sup>26</sup>

19 SSE, 2021, Timor-Leste's National Adaptation Plan

20 Interviews 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8

21 Cook et al., 2019, Integrating Disaster Risk Governance in Timor-Leste.

22 Interviews 7, 8

23 DRM policy 2008

24 Interviews 1, 2, 6, 7

25 Interview 8

26 Interviews 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8

# Section 2: Lay of the land – Policy and practice in Timor-Leste

This section highlights relevant policies and funding arrangements relevant to disaster management, DRR and climate change in Timor-Leste. This provides the context in which implementing agencies operate. This section also provides a brief overview of AHP programming in the country.

## Snapshot of key policies, plans and frameworks for DRR and CCA

Policies for disaster management and DRR sit separately from climate change in Timor-Leste. The GoTL is currently updating policies for both DRM and climate change, which is anticipated to facilitate better integration across strategies and governance structures. Timor-Leste is a signatory to both the UNFCCC Paris Agreement and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The progress made by the FRDP as document that brings together these two seminal frameworks under one approach remains noteworthy for Timor-Leste, despite not being as directly relevant as countries in the Pacific region.

This graphic provides a high-level snapshot of the key policies, plans and frameworks for DRR and CCA in Timor-Leste, including relevant policies at the international level that influence national policy instruments.

Figure D: Key policies, plans and frameworks for DRR and CCA





Photo by Leo Belarmino

The GoTL is currently in the final stages of developing a National Climate Change Policy, expected to be approved before the end of 2021. The government also recently submitted a National Adaptation Plan (NAP) to UNFCCC in 2021. A core objective of the NAP is to facilitate integration of CCA across all sectors, including DRR – prioritising ‘community-level integration of DRR and CCA’ and ‘strengthening national capacities for climate change responsive disaster risk reduction.’<sup>27</sup> The NAP also confirms plans for the update of the new National Policy for Disaster Risk Management that will integrate the Sendai Framework alongside climate considerations, which is currently sitting in draft form with the NDDRM.<sup>28</sup> This demonstrates that the GoTL is moving towards a more integrated strategy, but this is yet to be realised or reflected from a practical implementation standpoint (see Box 3).

### Box 3: Policy to practice?

Stakeholder interviews revealed little awareness of the GoTL’s new policies (see Key Finding 1 in section 3 below). While several respondents indicated that government policy is important in the design of their programs, this was generally in reference to the National Disaster Risk Management Policy of 2008.<sup>29</sup> The draft update to the National DRM policy was acknowledged, but not yet operationalised.<sup>30</sup> There was no acknowledgment of the NAP or the draft National Climate Change Policy among stakeholders. One respondent acknowledged the current lack of integrated plans and policies as a key barrier to integrated programming at the community level.<sup>31</sup>

27 SSE, 2021, Timor-Leste’s National Adaptation Plan.

28 Ibid.

29 Interview 1, 4, 5

30 Interviews 2, 3, 4, 6, 8

31 Interview 4

## Relevant funding arrangements

Timor-Leste receives climate change and disaster risk funding from both multilateral and bilateral sources, as well as through the GoTL's domestic budget.

The draft National Climate Change Policy is expected to significantly improve access to multilateral and bilateral sources of climate finance. A Special Committee for Climate Finance will be established to serve as the mechanism for government coordination with the Green Climate Fund and to provide oversight of Timor-Leste's broader climate finance portfolio. The Committee will include permanent seats for the Ministries of Environment, Finance and Foreign Affairs, with opportunity for other Ministries to participate depending on the issue being considered.<sup>32</sup> While the Ministry of Interior (responsible for DRR) does not hold a permanent seat, there is opportunity for coordination of funding through this body.

In 2019, the GoTL commissioned a development finance assessment (DFA) to identify opportunities to improve the funding landscape and mobilise investments to achieve goals set out in the National Sustainable Development Plan. Key recommendations included strengthening the framework for sustainable, inclusive investment and to establish an integrated financing strategy with clear institutional responsibilities. There is currently no lead institution or formalised system for coordination of development financing across sectors.<sup>33</sup> Interviews with key stakeholders revealed some confusion around funding channels for DRR and CCA (see Box 4).

### Box 4: Integrating financing

Interview data highlights conflicting understanding among stakeholders about funding sources for DRR and CCA. Some respondents indicated that the GoTL provides minimal funding for DRR and CCA activities,<sup>34</sup> while others indicated that the GoTL is the main source of funding.<sup>35</sup> Stakeholders explained challenges around submitting proposals for funding to the municipal government, which falls under the Ministry of State Administration, while DRR is the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior and CCA is the responsibility of the Ministry of Economic Affairs; this makes approval of government funding difficult.<sup>36</sup> The absence of an integrated mechanism that is accessible at the municipality and suco level presents challenges for stakeholders working across diverse domestic and international funding sources.

In July 2020, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) kicked off a project to support the GoTL to develop an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF). The INFF will integrate financing strategy for development, DRR and climate change. It is expected to be completed in 2022.<sup>37</sup> This is expected to assist greatly in channelling funding for integrated programming.

32 GCF, 2019, [Country Programme: Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste](#).

33 Lucas, 2019, Development Finance Assessment in support of the achievement of the Strategic Development Plan and Sustainable Development Goals in Timor-Leste, Government of Timor-Leste and UNDP.

34 Interviews 1, 3, 8

35 Interview 6

36 Interview 8

37 UNDP, 2021, [Integrated National Financing Framework \(INFF\) and Financial Diversification in Timor-Leste](#).

## AHP Disaster READY in Timor-Leste

Disaster READY in Timor-Leste is implemented by a consortium of five lead Australian NGOs and a diverse range of local partners delivering risk reduction, adaptation and emergency response programming across the country. At the community level, Disaster READY focuses on inclusive community-based DRM to ensure that people with disabilities, women and children are involved in disaster planning and that their needs are being met. Activities include community-based hazard mapping, the development of action plans, analysing local knowledge and data on weather predictions, and support for local early warning systems. Activities are designed to increase local resilience to hazard priorities in Timor-Leste, such as drought and floods, with particular focus on health and livelihoods, among others.<sup>38</sup>

The map below shows an overview of communities visited for this research that have been receiving assistance through Disaster READY.

**Figure E: Communities visited that receive assistance through AHP Disaster READY**



<sup>38</sup> Adapted from AHP, [Disaster READY Timor-Leste](#)

Photo by Ester Wijihastuti on Unsplash

# Section 3: Integration in action – Findings and Opportunities



**Finding 1: Recent efforts toward integration at the policy level are not yet reflected in integrated programming at the community level.**

Timor-Leste has made significant progress in a short time with respect to establishing governance mechanisms, institutions and policies. Recent efforts to update both national DRM and climate change policies demonstrate willingness to create an integrated policy landscape; however, they are yet to translate to a consistent understanding of or approach to integration at the community level.

**Timor-Leste does not have an integrated policy. Most NGOs do complementary work to the government, however most financing is from external agencies and mainly focused on DRR. (National actor)<sup>39</sup>**

As discussed in section 2, there is little evidence that implementing agencies are fully aware of or understand new government policy relating to DRR or climate change.<sup>40</sup> However, almost all respondents indicated that government policy is important to enable integrated approaches to take effect in communities.<sup>41</sup>

**The policy frameworks are important to approach communities because overall implementation of any projects would be related to the policy framework available. (INGO actor)<sup>42</sup>**

Evidence from elsewhere suggests that operationalising draft plans and policies will help to facilitate more consistent integrated programming (see Box 5).

## **Box 5: Learning from further afield**

Countries in the Pacific region have made significant progress towards integrated frameworks at the national level. For example, in Vanuatu, plans and policies for DRR and CCA have been integrated and are overseen by a centralised mechanism, the purpose of which is to *“act as Vanuatu’s supreme policy making and advisory body for all disaster risk reduction and climate change programs, projects, initiatives and activities.”*<sup>43</sup> This centralised mechanism was created to overcome identified challenges and promote efficiency, coordination, best use of resources and stronger governance. It has facilitated more consistently integrated programming at the community level.<sup>44</sup>

In Timor-Leste, the recently submitted NAP emphasises the importance of integrating DRR and CCA activities; however, it is not yet clear how governance structures will shift. An integrated governing body in Timor-Leste could help overcome persistent challenges around coordination, information sharing and funding uncertainties, and provide a clear standard for integrated programming at the community level.

39 Interview 1

40 Interviews 1, 2, 4, 5

41 Interviews 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

42 Interview 8

43 Government of Vanuatu, [National Advisory Board on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction](#)

44 HAG and World Vision, 2021, [Beyond Barriers: Vanuatu case study](#).

The current lack of an integrated approach to understanding and addressing risk and vulnerability at the national level affects how stakeholders address needs and gaps at the suco level in Timor-Leste.

**NGOs are doing complementary interventions according to the government's plan, but this includes projects on how to orient communities on physical disasters that the policy frameworks from the government have not covered. (National actor)<sup>45</sup>**

The current update of national policies presents opportunities for these policies to be more consistently incorporated into plans and practice, including traditional practice, at the district and suco level. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of sharing policies and plans with DMCs at the municipality, post-administrative and suco level.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, to strengthen understanding and raise awareness of government policy at the community level, policies can build on and incorporate traditional law, known as *tara bandu* (see Box 6).

#### **Box 6: Linking policy with cultural tradition – *tara bandu***

One way in which communities can be better connected with national policy is through links with traditional customs. *Tara bandu* are traditional laws governing the management of natural resources. *Tara bandu* mechanisms were revitalised when Timor-Leste gained its independence from Indonesia, and are generally considered useful as community tools to 'conserve and promote the environment and the preservation and sustainable use of natural resources.'<sup>47</sup> All communities visited in Timor-Leste identified *tara bandu* as critical guidance in managing their environment and preparing for disaster.<sup>48</sup>

The new National Climate Change Policy is expected to be directly linked to *tara bandu*, and suggests that this is an important mechanism for facilitating community-led climate change adaptation. The NAP highlights *tara bandu* as a key entry point for strengthening engagement with local communities in resilience efforts in a way which they can understand.<sup>49</sup>



## OPPORTUNITIES

### **Implementing agencies can assist in socialising new government policy**

and work to ensure approaches in communities directly reflect the new policy narrative, and advocate for implementation arrangements that also reflect policy changes.

**All stakeholders in Timor-Leste can learn from progress in other Pacific countries,** and apply learnings and strategies to strengthen integration at the policy level.

**Implementing agencies can advocate** for the integration of emerging policies with *tara bandu*.

45 Interview 4

46 Interviews 6, 7, 8

47 Article 10 [2] of the [Draft Water Resources Law](#), Ministry of Infrastructure 2012

48 FDGs 1, 2, 3, 4

49 SSE, 2021, Timor-Leste's National Adaptation Plan





**Finding 2: Disaster management structures that can be leveraged to support integrated approaches at the community level are not consistently established or well resourced.**

Both communities and implementing agencies affirmed the role of the SDMCs as central vehicles through which integrated support can be channelled. AHP agencies are implementing a range of approaches in support of SDMCs, including providing training, sharing information, supporting risk assessment and ensuring the inclusion of women and people with disabilities, among others, in decision-making.<sup>50</sup> Efforts to strengthen SDMCs have been identified as good practice that can be leveraged and scaled.

**One of the main things is that through this project we can resume the village or Suco DMC – this is the key to do any assessment, planning and implementation of the DRR program, in particular for mitigation and response to some disaster risks in their area. (INGO actor)<sup>51</sup>**

One of the challenges identified in supporting integrated approaches to CCA and DRR through SDMCs is their sustainability. Stakeholders and communities acknowledged the heavy reliance on external support for integrated programming.<sup>52</sup> In some areas, the SDMCs are inactive, which is a significant gap that implementing agencies can help to fill.

**The committee is not effective due to lack of financial support from government ... to reactivate those committees at national to village level. In future it can also be important for the government to provide financial support in order that the villages can include DRR and CCA in the village plans. (National actor)<sup>53</sup>**

The SDMCs are primarily mandated for community DRM. The primacy of DRM has led to DRR being more visible than CCA approaches in the community.<sup>54</sup> The GoTL is increasingly recognising the threat of climate change; this prioritisation can be built on to ensure that climate change is consistently integrated into community-based DRM mechanisms. Stakeholders have highlighted that SDMCs already play an important role in the dissemination of information about disaster and climate change.<sup>55</sup> There is opportunity to strengthen this role and ensure climate considerations are incorporated across all SDMC DRR activities. Figure F, below, provides an overview of a high level model that could enable coordinated and integrated approaches through SDMCs.

50 Interviews 2, 3, 5, 7, 8

51 Interview 3

52 Interviews 1, 3, 8; FGDs 1, 2, 3

53 Interview 4

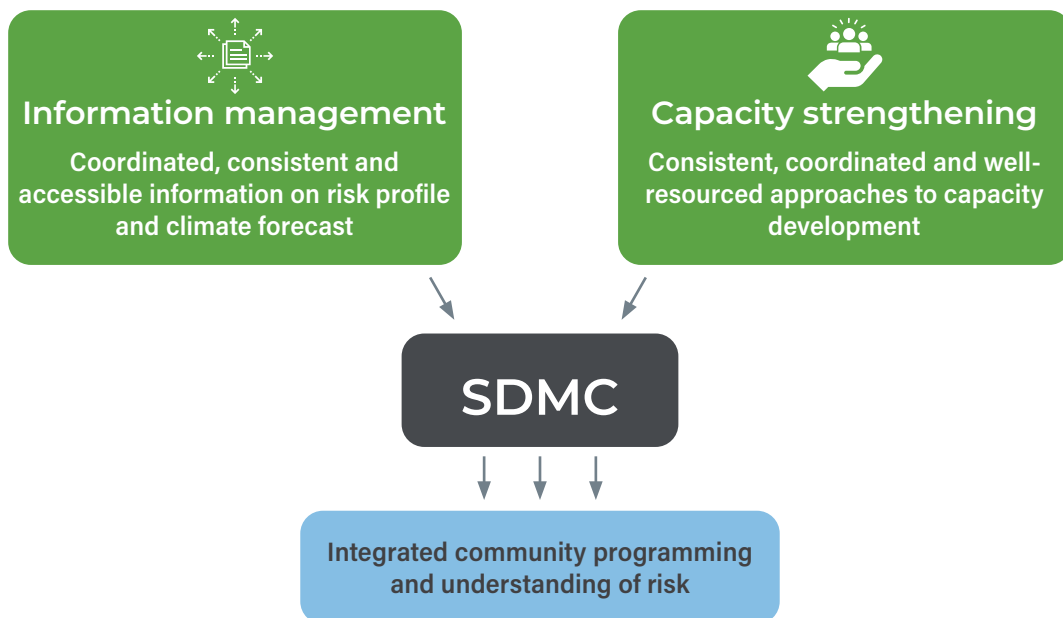
54 Interviews 1, 3, 4

55 Interviews 4, 7; FGD 1



Photo by Ester Wijihastuti on Unsplash

Figure F: Effective support for local structures that support communities



## OPPORTUNITIES

Implementing agencies can identify cohesive approaches to work with SDMCs to operate in an integrated, risk-informed way.

Implementing agencies can identify communities in which SDMCs are no longer active and seek ways to support reactivation of the mechanism.

Implementing agencies can identify options to ensure sustainability/longevity of SDMCs in collaboration with the national government.



### **Finding 3: Quality, accessible climate and disaster risk information that could support more informed decision making does not consistently reach communities.**

One of the clearest priorities emerging from communities is for a strengthened, more coordinated and consistent approach to the provision of information about climate and disaster risk. All communities referenced their need for better and more accessible information from relevant institutions to support them in mitigating and responding appropriately.<sup>56</sup>

**The community's desire is that the government, NGOs and the church come to our village and share information and provide training regarding climate change and natural disasters that impact this place. (Community member)<sup>57</sup>**

Relevant information to inform community actions was seen to be too centralised in Dili, and not reaching the village level consistently.<sup>58</sup> A range of vehicles were referenced as ways to get the right information to the end users, including trainings, films, radio, posters, banners and social media.<sup>59</sup>

**We need more consistent information from relevant institutions. We need information on natural disasters and climate change through training, film, posters, banners and social media. (Community member)<sup>60</sup>**

There is a critical link between coordination amongst agencies and whether and how communities receive appropriate information. Consistent and timely messaging from agencies can complement existing knowledge to support communities to act upon information about short and long-term climate and disaster projections and actions.<sup>61</sup>

**The community has a lack of knowledge on DRR and CCA however they are aware that they face physical risks caused by disaster and climate change in their community. (National actor)<sup>62</sup>**

Many stakeholders expressed the increasing need for accessible early warning systems at the suco level.<sup>63</sup> Implementing agencies have supported this role and information has been shared on Timor-Leste radio and TV programs; however, many communities still lack access to these platforms.<sup>64</sup> Investment is needed to ensure inclusive and accessible information systems reach all communities in Timor-Leste (see Box 7).

56 FGDs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

57 FGD 3

58 Interviews 1, 2, 6; FGDs 1, 3

59 FGDs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; Interviews 2, 6, 7

60 FGD 2

61 Interviews 2, 3, 5, 6

62 Interview 1

63 Interviews 1, 2, 4, 6, 7

64 Interview 6; FGDs 1, 3, 4



Photo by Leo Belarmino

### Box 7: Support for enhanced early warning systems

The Green Climate Fund has recently approved a USD\$21.7 million project to support the establishment of climate information services and multi-hazard early warning systems in Timor-Leste. The project is being led by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and is expected to directly benefit 80% of the population. It is expected to build local capacity to translate weather and climate information into impact-based forecasts and target specific vulnerabilities of diverse groups.<sup>65</sup>

The project was launched in October 2021. As efforts progress, there is opportunity for implementing agencies to support this work and ensure national efforts are reflected and accessible at the community level.

## OPPORTUNITIES

**Implementing agencies should keep abreast of progress being made to create an accessible nationwide early warning system** to inform communities about disasters and provide information on climate variability. Ensure that future programs leverage this progress and link communities with this system.

**Implementing agencies can advocate for and support a coordinated approach** to the creation and dissemination of relevant messaging at the village level.

**Implementing agencies can ensure integrated approaches prioritise sharing of information,** leveraging SDMCs as primary vehicles.

**Implementing agencies can provide targeted training** to raise community awareness and understanding of exposure and risks.

<sup>65</sup> UNEP, 2021, [Major new project to enhance early warning systems for increased climate resilience in Timor-Leste](#), Reliefweb.



## **Finding 4: The central role of government in reducing risk and vulnerability in collaboration with other stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector, is widely recognised.**

Stakeholders, including communities, were clear in their acknowledgement of the central role played by national and sub-national government in reducing risk and increasing resilience to hazards and shocks. Most stakeholders emphasised the need for increased government investment in DRR and CCA.<sup>66</sup>

**Government has [an] important role in DRR and CCA and it is crucial to invest in this area to increase awareness of communities about disasters and how they can mitigate any hazards.**

**(National actor)<sup>67</sup>**

As the GoTL continues to strengthen its institutional capacity, external stakeholders can continue to support it in a way that reflects integrated approaches rather than promoting siloed conceptualisations of DRR and CCA.

**DRR [is] a relatively new area of interest for the Government. The Government has developed clear policies, but most Government staff are not trained in DRR.<sup>68</sup>**

Beyond programming dedicated to disaster and climate risk, communities spoke to the importance of government in providing support to overcome wider resource and access constraints. Some of the biggest constraints identified by communities in understanding and preparing for disaster and climate risk relate to physical access, including public transport, quality of infrastructure and access to communications.<sup>69</sup> Community members spoke about the importance of government in bridging this access gap. Communities also felt that there was an increased role for other actors, including the private sector, to work together to fill these critical gaps.<sup>70</sup>

Community members reflected on gaps in coordination between the government and agencies in supporting shared, integrated objectives. Community members expressed appetite for trainings from the government and the need for increased collaboration between government, NGOs, local churches and community groups to optimise the quality of assistance received.<sup>71</sup>



## **OPPORTUNITIES**

**Implementing agencies can continue to seek ways to support the GoTL to take the lead in reducing risk and increasing the resilience of communities,** through capacity building, provision of resources and advocacy.

**Implementing agencies can leverage support from and coordinate with the private sector** to facilitate access for communities to services and information vital to resilience.

66 Interviews 2, 3, 5, 6, 8; FGDs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

67 Interview 2

68 Interview 3

69 FGDs 1, 3, 4

70 FGDs 1, 2, 3

71 FGDs 1, 2, 3, 4



## **Finding 5: Sound integrated approaches cannot be achieved without empowering diverse and at-risk groups.**

All stakeholders agreed that inclusion of diverse groups is a foundational component of best practice in integrated programming. Participatory programming and inclusive decision-making were consistently highlighted as critical for successful implementation. Stakeholders discussed examples of representatives from women's groups and disabled people's organisations being members of SDMCs, optimising inclusion within critical village structures.<sup>72</sup> This finding in Timor-Leste directly reflects international priorities (see Box 8).

### **Box 8: International priorities reflected in local realities**

The inclusion of diverse groups is a key area of change in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2021–2025), which states:

*"The most excluded/at-risk (women, persons with disabilities, displaced populations, persons dependent on climate-sensitive livelihoods) need to be empowered, through inclusive DRM/CCA and social protection programmes. These need to mainstream gender by addressing the gender-related dimensions of DRM in the context of climate change and promote human rights-based strategies to build resilience to climate-induced slow- and rapid-onset disasters and environmental degradation."<sup>73</sup>*

Whilst inclusion of diverse groups is widely recognised as important, it was also acknowledged that currently there are not sufficient resources across Timor-Leste to ensure their role in reducing their risk to climate change and disasters is respected and elevated.<sup>74</sup>

### **To international agencies and donors – invest more and allocate more funds to the DRR/CCA program for vulnerable people such as people with disability, women, and children in the territory of Timor-Leste.<sup>75</sup> (National actor)**

In partnerships between local actors and AHP agencies, however, there are good examples of inclusive practices that can be leveraged and scaled through an integrated lens (see Box 9). For example, local organisation Ra'es Hadomi Timor Oan (RHTO) works with Oxfam on disability-inclusive DRR, providing training to local authorities on how to ensure people living with disabilities are included in village planning.<sup>76</sup> World Vision has also worked with SDMCs in providing training on including women, people with disabilities and children in disaster risk assessments, action planning, preparing for and responding to disasters.<sup>77</sup> In such examples, there is a need to ensure that the training also reflects projected long-term changes in weather patterns and vulnerability to climate change.

72 Interviews 1, 4, 8

73 United Nations Timor-Leste, 2021, [UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework](#)

74 Interviews 2, 4, 8

75 Interview 2

76 Interview 4

77 AHP, [Disaster READY: People living with disability represented on community disaster management committees – Timor-Leste](#)



Photo by Leo Belarmino

### Box 9: Disaster READY supporting disability inclusion

In June 2021, AHP commissioned a review of disability inclusion in disaster preparedness and response across Disaster READY programs. Timor-Leste was highlighted as a ‘story of change,’ demonstrating significant progress since Disaster READY began in 2017. ANGOs work closely with their key disabled people’s organisation (DPO) partner, RHTO, to develop annual work plans and make specific funding available for disability-inclusive implementation. RHTO receives capacity support from CBM and Oxfam, and in turn, other NGOs seek advice from RHTO during implementation. The review found that the active engagement of RHTO in decision-making is a critical enabler of disability-inclusive disaster preparedness and response.<sup>78</sup>

There is an opportunity to learn from this model in engaging other at-risk groups through key local partners as representatives in decision-making forums. The AHP review does not consider the accessibility of climate information and projections or the adaptability of disability-inclusive DRR plans to climatic shocks. As Timor-Leste continues to move towards a more integrated model, it will be important to expand this good practice in inclusion.

## OPPORTUNITIES

**All stakeholders working with SDMCs** can advocate for representation from diverse and at-risk groups on committees.

**Implementing agencies can advocate for and allocate more resources to support the role of diverse and at-risk groups** in awareness raising, participation and planning of village responses to climate and disaster risk.

<sup>78</sup> AHP, 2021, [Disability Inclusion in Disaster Preparedness and Response](#): An evaluation of disability inclusion in the Disaster READY program in Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste.

## Summary: Snapshot of findings and opportunities

There is significant opportunity to leverage the good practice and progress that is being made in policies and operational practices to enhance community outcomes in Timor-Leste. Within the parameters of available data, this case study presents the below five findings and opportunities for consideration by implementing agencies. Future phases of this research may seek to explore deepening the data set and implementing and assessing recommendations to link evidence to impact.

 FINDINGS	 OPPORTUNITIES
<b>Recent efforts toward integration at the policy level are not yet reflected in integrated programming at the community level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Assist in socialising new government policy and work to ensure approaches in communities directly reflect the new policy narrative, and advocate for implementation arrangements that also reflect policy changes</li> <li>❑ Learn from progress in other Pacific countries, and apply learnings and strategies to strengthen integration at the policy level</li> <li>❑ Advocate for the integration of emerging policies with <i>tara bandu</i></li> </ul>
<b>Disaster management structures that can be leveraged to support integrated approaches at the community level are not consistently established or well resourced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Identify cohesive approaches to work with SDMCs to operate in an integrated, risk-informed way</li> <li>❑ Identify communities in which SDMCs are no longer active and seek ways to support reactivation of the mechanism</li> <li>❑ Identify options to ensure sustainability/longevity of SDMCs in collaboration with the national government</li> </ul>
<b>Quality, accessible climate and disaster risk information that could support more informed decision making does not consistently reach communities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Keep abreast of progress being made to create an accessible nationwide early warning system to inform communities before disasters and provide information on climate variability. Ensure that future programs leverage this progress and link communities with this system</li> <li>❑ Advocate for and support a coordinated approach to the creation and dissemination of relevant messaging at the village level</li> <li>❑ Ensure integrated approaches prioritise sharing of information, leveraging SDMCs as primary vehicles</li> <li>❑ Provide targeted training to raise community awareness and understanding of exposure and risks</li> </ul>
<b>The central role of government in reducing risk and vulnerability in collaboration with other stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector, is widely recognised</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Continue to seek ways to support the GoTL to take the lead in reducing risk and increasing the resilience of communities, through capacity building, provision of resources and advocacy</li> <li>❑ Leverage support from and coordinate with the private sector to facilitate access for communities to services and information vital to resilience</li> </ul>
<b>Sound integrated approaches cannot be achieved without empowering diverse and at-risk groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Advocate for representation from diverse and at-risk groups on SDMC committees</li> <li>❑ Advocate for and allocate more resources to support the role of diverse and at-risk groups in awareness raising, participation and planning of village responses to climate and disaster risk</li> </ul>