



LEAVING NO YOUTH BEHIND IN TIMOR-LESTE

POLICY BRIEF # 1 *YOUNG FEMALE FARMERS*





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Introduction

Young people are key to achieving sustainable development. It is essential that all young people receive equal access to quality education, justice, health services, employment opportunities, chances to participate in society, and to be protected from violence. Through the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 and the approval of the new National Youth Policy in 2016 by the VI Government, Timor-Leste has committed to leave no youth behind.

In support of this national effort, the United Nations (UN) in Timor-Leste and the NGO Belun are, in a collaborative effort, launching a new policy series titled 'Leaving no Youth Behind in Timor-Leste'. The objective of this series is to increase understanding of the situation and vulnerability of some specific youth groups and the particular challenges they face to benefit from the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Each policy brief presents a situation analysis based on quantitative and qualitative data, as well as supporting evidence from studies and reports conducted in Timor-Leste. Findings are presented following the National Youth Policy pillars of youth healthy lifestyle, youth and education, youth employment and employability, youth civic participation and youth and violence and crime. The briefs also offer recommendations to Government, civil society, the private sector and development partners as to how to ensure equal opportunities for these groups in context of the development of

Background

Young women involved in the agriculture sector combine several vulnerabilities due to their age, gender and area of residence. As a result, they often have less access to education, health and economic opportunities. In addition to facing discrimination based on their sex, they are doubly challenged by working in an under-appreciated and under-supported sector. Farming is often seen as an occupation of last resort.

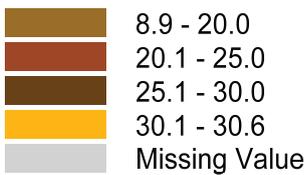
The Government is committed to 'transform agriculture into a profitable business', a key area for diversifying the economy and to create job opportunities for youth (MAF Strategic Plan 2014-2020). The Government of Timor-Leste ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and further committed to improving rural women's lives, by signing the inter-ministerial Maubisse Declaration in October 2015, which aimed to promote rural women's economic empowerment. The National Youth Policy also made rural young people and young women two priority target groups of youth interventions. Finally, the National Action Plan on Gender-based Violence 2017-2021 (NAP GBV) addresses and seeks to reduce the risk Timorese women have of experiencing violence during their lifetimes.

Data is available in Timor-Leste on the situation of women, young people and people involved in farming activities – but is rarely combined to show the reality of young female farmers. The findings presented in this brief are the result of the analysis of the 2015 census, three Focus Group Discussions held in Hera, Suai, and Dili as well as the evidence gathered from various relevant studies and reports.

Findings

In 2015, there were 24,525 young female farmers, or 21% of young women between the ages of 15-24 (ranging from 8% at age 15 to 35% at age 24). There were slightly more female farmers than male farmers: 23,575, or 20% of young men. Female farmers are found in all municipalities, with the highest percentages in Ermera and Manatuto.

Total



Sources: GDS_CensusTL_2015

Behind in education

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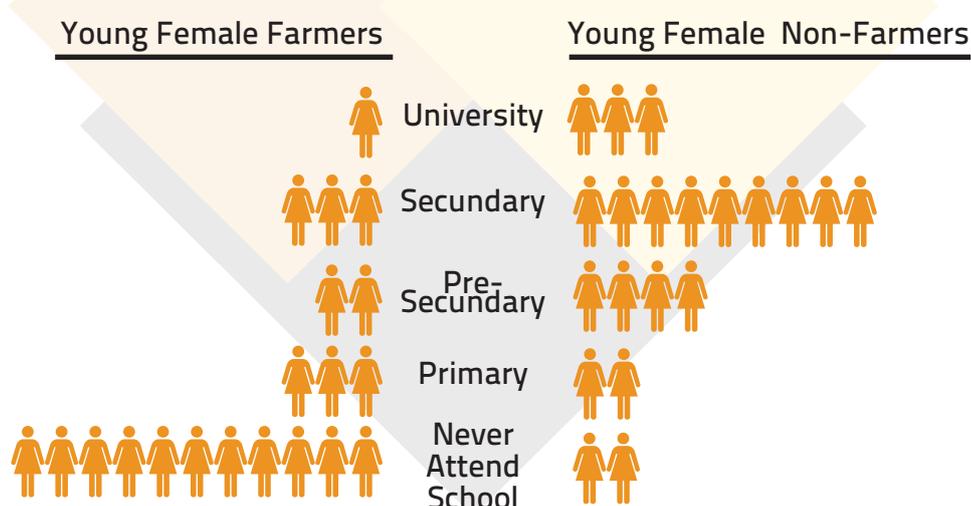
Half (50%) of 15-year-old female farmers could not read in any language compared to 11% of 15-year-old women who were not farmers. By age 24, however, illiteracy rates had dropped to 31% for female farmers, suggesting that women are continuing to learn to read either through their own efforts or possibly technical or informal schooling, attending school in the middle of the day but work in the morning and afternoon.

In general, most farmers do not receive any formal training on how to farm, and most of their skills are based on the experience of their parents and neighbors and what they learned through their own experiences. Some young women who have joined farming co-ops may have received training opportunities from government extension workers or NGOs.

Young people can also study agriculture at University. In 2015, 40% of students at the Agriculture Faculty of the Universidade Nasional de Timor-Leste (UNTL) were women. Some young women were motivated to pursue agricultural studies at UNTL because they see agriculture as an area of possibilities and improvement for Timor-Leste, and they see themselves as facilitators and innovators in this process: 'I am studying so that I can change farming from a traditional system to a modern one'. Most of the university students we spoke to did not want to conduct in-field agricultural work themselves. They were seeking government or professional positions related to agriculture (such as extension officers).

Early parenthood and increased health risks

Young female farmers marry younger, have children at a younger age, and have more children at the age of 24 than non-female farmers, increasing the risk of complications at birth. In 2015, over one-third (35%) of female farmers aged 18 were already married or living with a partner, compared to 8% of non-farming young women. The law in Timor-Leste says that one needs to be 17 to be able to get married (or 16 if the parents consent).



Age of women	Non-farmers	Farmers	Total
Before 15	1%	3%	1%
Before 16	3%	16%	4%
Before 17	4%	25%	7%
Before 18	8%	35%	12%

Forty-two percent of female farmers aged 15-24 had at least one child versus only 12% of non-farmers. In Timor-Leste, teenage mothers (aged 15-19 years) are more likely to die due to pregnancy and delivery related causes compared to mothers aged 20-24 years (1,037 per 100,000 vs. 534 per 100,000). Despite this risk, many more young female farmers give birth before the age of 20, compared to other young women (42% versus 16%). Half (48%) of children born of 15-24 year-olds women are born to young female farmers, even though they only represent 21% of the female population. In addition, young rural women are less likely to give birth in health facilities or with a trained health professional, compared to non-farmers. The distance of health facilities in rural areas may be one of the key reasons. A quarter of farmers (26%) who delivered in health facilities had to travel an hour or more to reach a facility, with limited transportation options compared to the urban areas.

Recent research by UNFPA has highlighted that pregnancies before the age of 20 are often out of marriage, suggesting that many times motherhood and marriage are not intended. Causes of teenage pregnancies were found to be the lack of knowledge on sexual reproductive health, the lack of access to family planning, and gender norms that deprive young women of agency in their relationships.

Young women often drop out of school when they become pregnant and rarely return due to family member attitudes or because they fall pregnant again too soon. Conversely, young women who have already left school are seen as eligible for marriage and thus may enter marriage or begin motherhood from a young age. The National Policy for Inclusive Education (2017) recognizes the vulnerability of this group and seeks to promote the continued attendance, or return to school, and completion of schooling among young mothers.

Young female farmers might also be more vulnerable to domestic violence. Two thirds (59%) of ever-partnered women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a male, according to the Nabilan baseline study. Additionally, women who work for their families are over twice as likely to experience physical violence compared to women who are unemployed.

Discrimination in the agriculture sector

The patriarchal structure of Timorese society imposes strong roles for women and men, that puts men as head of the household and, therefore, the main source of power within the home, while women are responsible for the household tasks, which involves raising children, cooking, taking care of the sick and elderly. There are also strong expectations for women around public cultural events and ceremonies, a segregation of duties that women strongly adhere to as well. Eighty-three percent of Timorese women believe that 'a woman's most important role is to take care of her home and cook for her family'.

Women's household responsibilities have a significant impact on their ability to participate in public decision-making roles and engage in income-generating activities. This limits their access to information and training opportunities. The Seeds of Life End of Program Survey found that women beneficiaries had much less access to information than men. Men receive information from suku extension officers whereas women get it from relatives.

Many young women feel farming falls under their responsibility to their family, and is not their first choice of work. 'It is not true that youth are not interested in studies or improving themselves, but, because of the needs of the household, we must [farm] to reduce the burden on the family', said one of the FGD participants. However, some do choose this path, as it supports them to provide for their family and brings them financial inputs, while allowing a greater flexibility than an office job. One woman said 'money can be earned every day rather than waiting for the end of the month like other forms of employment'.

Most young women in the FGD reported they have equal responsibilities and tasks to their parents or their husbands in tending to the fields. They are involved in land preparation, watering, fertilizing, harvesting, and marketing. Other research shows that women farmers carry out a larger range of agricultural and market functions than men. Women's involvement in food production and processing is more diverse and comprehensive than men's and they are more likely to sell farming produce in a market. However, their contribution is often not recognized and valued. Research by TOMAK found that women's invisible role in agriculture, and the vision that men are the decision maker, impacts on women's ability to participate equitably in agriculture and market institutions, programs, technology, leadership and governance.

Women's under representation is also visible in the Ministry of Agriculture. Between 2015-2017, only 23% of beneficiaries of the Ministry of Agriculture have been women or women-led groups, despite a 35% target. Women are also underrepresented at the Ministry. As of August 2017, only 46 (11%) of the 407 suku extension officers were women. At the senior management level, only four women were appointed as directors (only one in a technical position) and 15 women as department head in 2017. All other senior positions (the Inspector General, Secretary General, six Directors General, 19 National & Regional Directors and 12 Municipal Directors) are men.

Vulnerable employment

Agricultural work can leave women economically vulnerable. Agricultural work is seasonal and dependent on weather and market conditions. These young women are not equipped with modern techniques to respond to the changing environment. Many women spoke of challenges such as insufficient water, lack of access to pesticides or fertilizer or farming equipment, and difficulties transporting their products to market.

Some women also spoke of limited access to the money earned through their agricultural work. For unmarried women contributing to their household work, any money earned from these efforts goes to the family. If they need money they must request it again from their parents. A recent TOMAK report found that often women do not own the land they work. Some women are able to negotiate use of land with the owners. The security of property rights remains a critical determinant in a woman's willingness to engage and increase their time and financial investment in agricultural production compared to non-agricultural based livelihoods.

Agricultural women's group tend to provide greater support to young women, because of the mutual assistance between the women. This can take the form of shared labour, or of borrowing money from the group's collected income, allowing them to start businesses, continue their education, or support their children's educational costs. It also led to training opportunities, supplies, and funds from NGOs and the government. While there are strengths to agricultural co-ops that can help deal with these vulnerabilities, the women also spoke of issues in leadership and management, which could undermine their efficiency.

Recommendations

"The Government must create good policies for youth, for example incentives for young farmers so that they can become strong pillars in the development of the agricultural sector in Timor-Leste." (University student)

1. Implement a multi-sectorial approach to empowering young women farmers

- The Secretariat of the State for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (SEIGIS), MAF and the Prime Minister's office (PMO) revise and implement the Maubisse Declaration, a multi-sectorial approach to empowering rural women.

2. Increase access to and completion of schooling

- Ministry of Education (MOE) guarantees the attendance, return, and successful completion of schools by pregnant girls and young mothers in line with the National Policy for Inclusive Education, and work with family, husbands, and in-laws to support young women to finish schooling.
- Continue providing literacy and life-skills programmes targeted to young women in rural areas and ensure equal opportunities for girls to participate in existing technical and vocational education programmes in line with the National Policy for Inclusive Education.

3. Educate about Sexual and Reproductive Health

- MOE designs and delivers comprehensive sexuality education to youth as part of the standard curriculum, as recommended under the NAP GBV.
- Ministry of Health (MOH) to ensure that there are youth friendly health services in clinics that are respectful of young women's needs.
- MOH programme Saude na Familia prioritizes young female farmers. Because they have many children at a young age, young female farmers need to receive messages about reproductive, maternal, and child health, and by targeting this group a large proportion of children in Timor-Leste will be benefitted.

4. Address domestic violence by implementing the NAP GBV

- The Secretariat of the State for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (SEIGIS) coordinates with key partners to engage communities and local leaders to help change attitudes around GBV.
- SECOMS develops a Code of Conduct around the reporting of GBV stories, conduct annual mandatory training for journalists, and monitor reporting on GBV and gender-sensitive reporting.

5. Improve agricultural and capacity building training opportunities

- The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) and the Secretary of State for Youth and Employment (SSYE) works with the young female farmers to identify adequate modern techniques to help save time and improve production.
- MAF, SEIGIS and Civil Society works jointly to support young female farmers groups, especially in horticulture, providing more security and mutual support to young women farmers.
- MAF, SEIGIS, Ministry of Commerce and Industry and INAP should coordinate to improve financial management, marketing skills, and help them bring their products to the markets.
- MAF and SEIGIS with support from CSOs and private sector should develop and provide entrepreneurship and leadership for young female farmers.

6. Address discrimination within the agriculture sector

- All partners working in Agriculture raise the visibility and public perception of women and girls in the agriculture sector
- MAF ensures equal access for women to government subsidy or rewards programs and continue to work to increase the percentage of beneficiaries who are women or women-led groups in line with the Maubisse Declaration and the National Employment Strategy 2017-2030.
- PMO ensures sex-disaggregated data, gender-sensitive indicators and statistics for gender responsive planning, budgeting and monitoring in relevant line Ministries to ensure women and men equally benefited from the government programme and policy.
- MAF and the civil service commission increases the percentage of women who hold managerial positions at the municipal and national levels so that young women have role models and potential advocates for their concerns.
- UNTL creates mentorship or career lecture program(s) to connect female leaders in the agricultural sector with female students.

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