

Summary of KAP Survey of Volunteering in Timor-Leste



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The Australian Volunteers Program
is an Australian Government initiative.

1. Executive Summary

Overview

The Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPACSS) within Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e (UNTL) has undertaken seminal research into the development and implementation of a Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) research to capture the culture and actions of volunteerism and contribute insights to a nationwide picture of volunteerism in Timor-Leste.

The research focused primarily on youth to inform the development of a National Youth Volunteers Scheme that will be led by the Ministry of Youth and Sport, Art and Culture (MYSAC). The national government were key partners in this project, which was funded by the Australian Volunteers Program.

The findings of this research provides baseline data that government agencies can use to:

- align volunteer programs with national policies
- support volunteerism in strategic ways
- coordinate volunteer service support structures at the local level.

The following report is an abridged summary of the research. For access to the full report, email timorleste@australianvolunteers.com.

Key Findings

The research delivered four key findings:

1. Volunteering is valued for its positive contribution to development.
2. Volunteering opportunities in Dili are varied and supported, however, challenges exist in regards to female participation and further support from government is needed.
3. Volunteers highly value access to skills training and have access to reasonable health and security support services, however, there are limitations in access to transport, logistics and other equipment.
4. Volunteerism in Timor-Leste spans welfare support, development efforts and disaster response.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, UNTL made five recommendations for support mechanisms to be developed:

1. National volunteer scheme that government and the development partners can utilise to support and incentivise volunteering.
2. Youth steering committee on volunteerism in Timor-Leste to advise on national policy for volunteerism in Timor-Leste.
3. National volunteer award scheme to recognise and value the contribution of volunteers.
4. Timor-Leste volunteer agency that gathers data, shares experiences and facilitates networking.
5. Volunteerism database and studies that seek a nationwide picture on types and impacts of volunteerism.

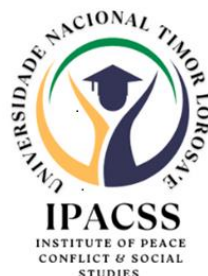


Photo credits: Photo of volunteers digging, copyright Permatil. Photo of volunteer faces, copyright RAENAL.

2. Background

In the two decades following the Restoration of Independence in Timor-Leste, anecdotal evidence suggests that significant levels of volunteerism contributed to community development and nation building. However, currently there is no in-country data on volunteerism in Timor-Leste recorded in the international indices¹.

UNTL - IPACSS has undertaken seminal research into the development and implementation of a KAP survey to capture the culture and actions of volunteerism and contribute insights to a nationwide picture of volunteerism in Timor-Leste. Focused primarily on youth, the research will inform the development of a National Youth Volunteers Scheme to be led by MYSAC,² who were a key partner of this project.

By undertaking a KAP assessment, the research contributes an understanding of attitudes towards volunteer behaviour and management, as well as experiences of volunteerism in Timor-Leste. It seeks to answer questions about the perceptions of volunteers, the usefulness of volunteerism to local community building, and how the government and other agencies support the work of volunteers. These answers will help provide baseline data that government agencies can use to: align volunteer programs with national policies; support volunteerism in strategic ways; and coordinate volunteer service support structures at the local level.

On an international level, the research offers insight into the Timor-Leste context in response to claims by United Nations, such as: 'young people increasingly feel that volunteerism complements formal education in teaching the skills that are required for the job market, such as leadership, teamwork, problem-solving, planning, management, creativity, communication and negotiation.'

3. Purpose

The objectives of the research were:

- To understand the perceptions of volunteers about volunteerism, its value and contribution to development.
- To identify opportunities for volunteerism services, specifically what young people want or need.
- To generate and document evidence and best practice based on the meaning and value of volunteerism.
- To measure various aspects of the practice of volunteerism in Timor-Leste.

As identified in the research brief: 'volunteers and volunteerism provide a way to localise the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in sustaining peace and development.'³ Within this broader context, the KAP research aims to guide advocacy and planning for national volunteering efforts and increase integration of volunteers into peace and development programs.

4. Methodology

Focusing on the geographical area of Dili, UNTL - IPACSS undertook a mixed-methods approach to conducting this research, including both quantitative and qualitative assessment tools. The research focused on Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices framework which aimed to explore the following questions: how do volunteers perceive and understand their work (Knowledge), What do volunteers think is the value of their work? (Attitude), and what do volunteers see as the purpose of their work? (Practices/Behaviours).

¹ See: <https://knowledge.unv.org/country/timorleste>; See also Global Volunteerism Index:

<https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/stats/Lifestyle/Society/Volunteering-and-social-support/Volunteering/Volunteered-your-time>

² National Youth Action Plan Timor-Leste, 2022 (Page 39-40)

³ United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework Timor-Leste 2021-2025

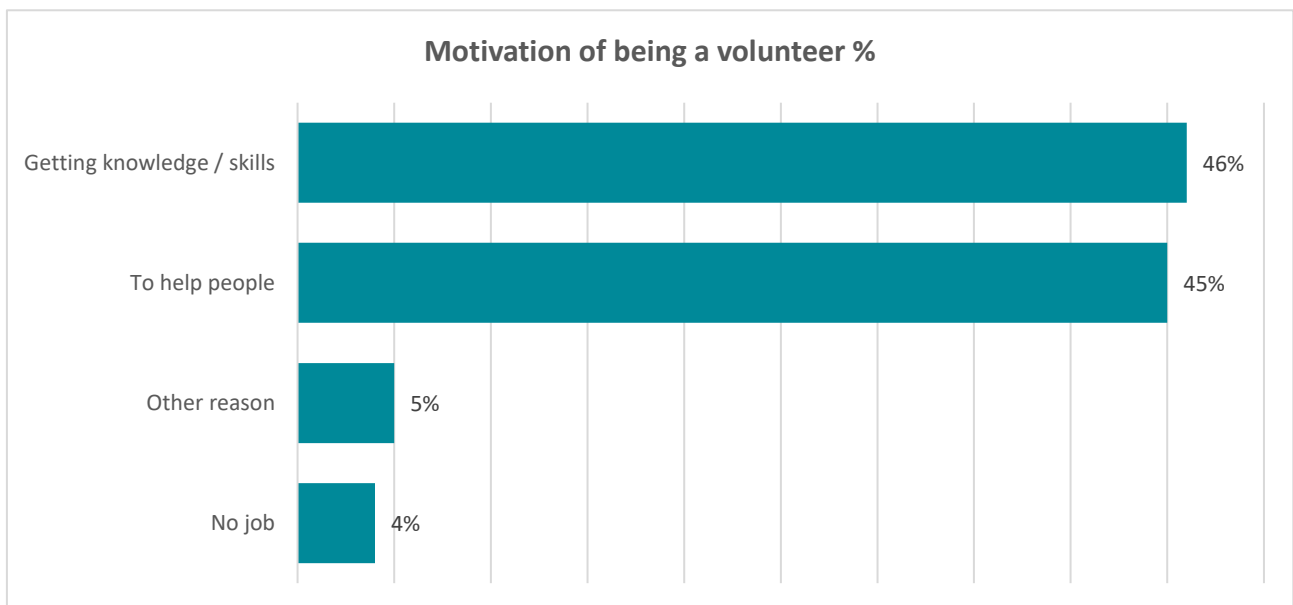
Project inception workshops (training) and meetings were coordinated by UNTL—IPACSS to develop the following study components:

1. Desk review
2. Constructing the research protocols
3. Preparing research questionnaires
4. Training on qualitative and quantitative methods and data collection tools
5. Training on data analysis and transcription techniques
6. Focus group discussion workshops with participants
7. In-depth interviews and case studies
8. Data transcription and analysis

5. Findings

5.1. Perceptions of volunteerism

Nearly all respondents (91%) agreed that volunteering is positive and is carried out: (i) 'for yourself, without obligation' and (ii) to obtain new knowledge and skills.

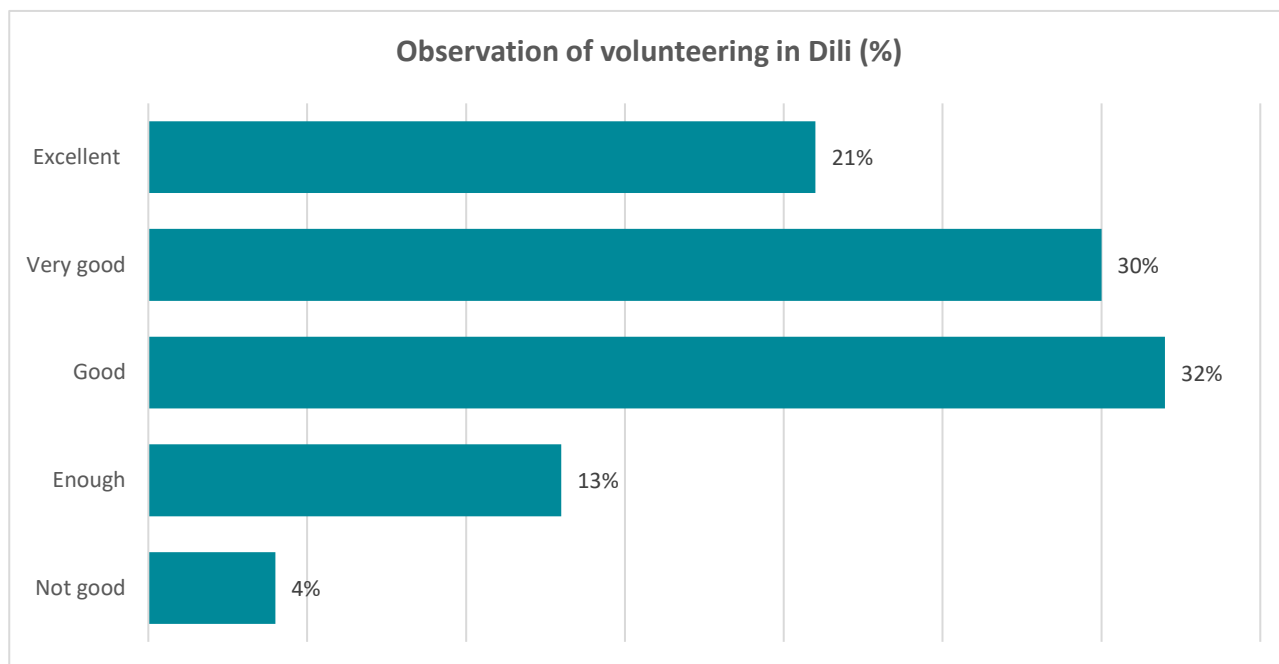


Volunteers' perception of the contribution or impact of volunteering on the community was overwhelmingly positive (94%). Participants emphasised that volunteering: (i) helps the community 'a lot' (34%); (ii) enhances community spirit for working together (33%); and (iii) enables education and skills of the volunteer to support community development (27%)

Qualitative data also identified another motivation for volunteerism as a means of addressing youth unemployment, which was not reflected in the quantitative survey. In a country where youth unemployment, young people see volunteerism as a productive activity and as a means of building new knowledge and skills that will be useful in the workforce.

5.2. Support for volunteering

In general, most participants (83%) agree that volunteering in Dili is 'excellent, very good or good', and is varied and supported because of the concentrated population. Specifically, it was noted that most young people studying in Dili are also volunteers.



In regard to the type of volunteering being conducted the majority of participants seek to volunteer with local leaders and community. Most participants work directly with the community, involve youth and youth leaders in the community, and consult with local leaders and communities when deciding together what they will do.

Almost half of participants (49%) require but do not receive government support to accompany their volunteering activity at all stages of the process. However, 27% of participants receive government support at the beginning and require that support to continue throughout the process.

In emergency situations, some companies and private donations support volunteer efforts, however volunteers still face financial challenges such as transportation and food costs. There are concerns that younger people may not be interested in volunteering as they require some level of compensation to cover costs of transportation.

Concerns about inclusive participation were also raised by participants, particularly in relation to the women. One participant reported that the participation of women in volunteering is lower than the participation of men, which may be due to harmful perceptions of women and their capacity to undertake certain work.

5.3. Conditions of volunteering

Participants highly valued skills training as best practice in contributing to how they see their work and their capacity to carry it out. They also valued language training, regarding it as a 'value' that can be offered to volunteer, as well as safety and first aid training that can assist volunteers to respond to natural disasters and emergencies.

Volunteers reported working with local leaders and national police from the beginning to the end of their projects. The majority of volunteer works (87%) reporting having protection from the community, local leaders and youth council in village locations and were able to report problems immediately and receive help from local authorities. Access to health protections while volunteering, such as first aid, clinics and health services was generally perceived to be 'good.'

The key limitations identified by participants were costs associated with food and transportation and a lack of necessary equipment. These challenges can be overcome through reimbursements and access to computers and other relevant equipment, which will allow greater participation of youth in volunteering projects.

Case study:

Permatil Youth Permaculture Camps.

Up to 300 youth volunteers camp in a village or community for four days, and learn how to implement sustainable land care practices.

Volunteers are provided with a petrol allowance, three meals a day, tents and camping equipment, and access to computers onsite.

Over 5,000 volunteers have been involved in sustainable land transformation throughout Timor-Leste.

5.4. The practice of volunteerism in Timor-Leste

The practice of volunteerism in Timor-Leste spans welfare support, development efforts and disaster response.

The provision of social and economic support was identified by research participants as crucial aspects of community volunteerism, such as the distribution of food and clothes to those in vulnerable situations and providing access to free or more affordable medical treatment through local facilities. Community-based volunteering was identified as another focus to build capacity in regard to social issues, such as digital literacy, education for prevention of early pregnancy, and environmental care.

Volunteers respond to natural disasters, such as flooding and landslides, provide support to water conservation (terrace sharing) and community nurseries (to grow food and trees), and distribute emergency supplies to the community. In the case of flooding in Dili, the majority of volunteers reflected that, as human beings, they could not let the situation just happen and leave people to suffer. In this case, volunteers provided immediate assistance to evacuation efforts, preventing heavy damage, and continued to volunteer in subsequent days by cleaning homes, donating food and clothes, providing first aid and emotional support.

Volunteers also expressed what was perceived to be the reciprocity of the volunteer act, overwhelmingly recognising knowledge as a reward gained from volunteering. It was explained: ‘that even any small action that they did they can learn from that’.



6. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Volunteer National Scheme in Timor-Leste: The development of a national volunteer scheme would serve as a platform that government and development partners to utilise together to support and incentivise volunteer work.

Recommendation 2: National Policy for Volunteerism in Timor-Leste: The research identified a pool of inter-sectorial active and engaged young people who are committed to their 'volunteer' organisations and could be called upon by the government as a 'Youth Steering Committee on Volunteerism in Timor-Leste'.

Recommendation 3: Volunteer Awards: being a volunteer and doing volunteering service requires dedication, persistence and the sense of humanity. For this reason, volunteers would appreciate recognition of their value and contribution through a national award scheme from relevant state institutions and/or from The Office of the President of the Republic.

Recommendation 4: Timor-Leste Volunteer Agency: Like many other countries, the national volunteer sector plays an important role in providing opportunities for young people, fresh graduates, and young experts to use their knowledge within the country and abroad. An agency to record data, share experiences and facilitate networking is recommended. The agency will support the service of national volunteers while also building solidarity, technical ability, communication skills and leadership competence.

Recommendation 5: Database and Studies on Volunteerism in Timor-Leste. Timor-Leste has limited data and studies on volunteers and volunteerism. Investment in nation-wide research, including regional centres and remote locations, is crucial for developing a nationwide picture of volunteerism and its impacts on socio-economic and socio-ecological aspects of society.

Consideration of the term 'volunteering' also needs to be incorporated and best practice guidelines developed to ensure volunteering is not exploitative or used to replace paid employment. While volunteering provides substantial benefits to society, it also provides significant benefits to the volunteers themselves.

7. Gaps and research limitations

There is limited previous research on volunteerism in Timor-Leste as a source of baseline context and data.

- It is clear from this research that a further nationwide study is needed to seek experiences in regional centres and remote communities.
- This research found that 41 percent of the volunteers in this study are 'youth' aged between 15-24 years old.
- There appears to be a lower rate of women's participation in volunteerism compared to men .
- Most national volunteer organisations *have no or limited* comprehensive support system, while the international and bilateral volunteer organisations *do have* a comprehensive support system that provides a benchmark for support: such as travel costs, per diem, safety, protection, security, health insurance, capacity building training, language training etc.
- This research also revealed that attitudes and practices of volunteerism for 'working together' are perceived by some as starting to wane in recent time due to a monetary approach to life that is spurring a 'new' neo-liberal culture where work is equated with money.

8. Acknowledgements

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