

St John of God International Health

Evaluation of Nursing Development Program in Timor-Leste

Final Report Executive Summary

June 2021

Acronyms

DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DONM	Director Nursing and Midwifery
HMP	Health Managers Program
HNGV	Hospital Nacional Guido Valadares
IFC	International Finance Corporation
INS	Instituto Nacional da Saude
MoH	Ministry of Health (Timor-Leste)
MRH	Municipal Referral Hospital
NDP	Nursing Development Program
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SJGIH	St John of God International Health
UHC	Universal Health Care
UNTL	National University of Timor-Leste
WHO	World Health Organisation

Acknowledgements

The evaluation team are deeply grateful to all those who contributed their time and effort, particularly during a very difficult time in Dili and Timor-Leste more broadly as a result of serious flooding in April 2021 and a significant outbreak of COVID-19. These events are having major, if not catastrophic, effects on the lives of many people in Timor-Leste, and the evaluation team would like to express their concern, solidarity and support.

Anthea Ramos and Faviula Monteiro da Silva have been particularly helpful during the evaluation process – their commitment, support and continued attention during the evaluation process have been critical to the team’s ability to undertake the evaluation. The team is most grateful for their efforts and care.

Executive Summary

As a relatively new country, the government and people of Timor-Leste have worked hard since independence to address many development challenges. This includes achieving self-management and building the systems required for the delivery of health services. Timor-Leste seeks to build a well-functioning health system in order to provide health services for its people, most of whom live outside urban centres. Such a health system has many inter-connected elements, which depend on each other and sufficient resources, so that good services can be provided.

Since 2004, St John of God International Health (SJGIH) has worked in partnership with Timor-Leste health institutions: initially the collaboration focused on a pathology laboratory, and since 2010, the focus has been on supporting nurses and midwives, primarily at Hospital Nacional Guido Valadares (HNGV) in Dili. The current program, called the Nursing Development Program (NDP), is undertaken by a team of Timorese and international caregivers and leaders and staff at HNGV, as well as officials from the Ministry of Health and INS. The most recent agreements covering this collaboration are a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Health (signed in 2017) and a Technical Agreement with HNGV (dated 2020).

Since 2017, NDP has implemented activities consistent with the Nursing Development Program Phase 2 Five-Year Plan. The Plan sets the overarching goal as strengthening patient care and includes four objectives. The Program uses a set of approaches which seek to contribute to capacity development of nurses and midwives, and the systems that support their practice. The Program includes a range of activities related to clinical care, nurse and midwife education, quality systems and health management training.

'The time and space given by SJGIH to each nurse and midwife has truly contributed to changes in behaviour and practices.'

The NDP is funded largely by SJGIH in Australia, with additional contributions made from other sources, including annual grants from Santos and a single grant from the Australian Aid Program through Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The annual budget is approximately A\$2.2m. The program is implemented by a team of 21 personnel based in Dili, comprising 15 Timorese and 6 Australian caregivers, with a small leadership team based in Melbourne, Australia.

SJGIH commissioned an evaluation of its program in mid-2021, at the end of a 5-year period. The evaluation involved interviews with 61 Timorese and international personnel with knowledge of and experience with the NDP conducted during May and June 2021. It also considered a range of documents related to the Program. This report describes the evaluation process and its findings. It also includes a set of recommendations to guide future collaboration between SJGIH and Timorese organisations.

The evaluation process covered by this report was undertaken at a time when Timor-Leste faced a major wave of COVID-19. This created substantial difficulties for the people of the country, particularly major disruption to and additional work for personnel responsible for health services. This also resulted in limitations for the data collection process, but the evaluation team were able to

conduct interviews respectfully, safely and collaboratively and they are grateful to interviewees for agreeing to participate in this process.

Overall, the evaluation found that NDP has contributed to strengthening the quality of care provided by nurses and midwives for patients in HNGV. In summary, the evaluation found the following changes which most closely relate to the treatment of patients:

- improvements in infection prevention and control
- increased evidence-based practice
- Improved accountability to patients, including increased compassion and care
- improved medication safety

The evaluation found that a range of NDP achievements contributed to these positive changes, including:

- creation of a leadership/management structure which better recognises the responsibilities of different levels of nurses and provides a potential career structure
- stronger nurse and midwife education system, including development of a core competency training package, an orientation program for graduate nurses and a health managers program
- movement towards professional identity and a values-based approach
- introduction of hospital standards, including audits and surveys related to international accreditation, the creation of a hospital-wide committee focused on quality and the development and widespread use of a code of conduct
- deepened collaboration within the hospital and with other organisations responsible for health care service provision.

'We can see people coming to work, wearing uniforms, feeling pride, organising a Values Day by themselves, and feeling impressively confident to take on COVID roles.'

Achieving positive changes has not been easy. The Program is ambitious and works in complex and dynamic contexts and undertakes a wide range of activities. Most activities are mutually-supported and inter-related, recognising that a health system has many inter-connected elements and that capacity development is a complex and largely unpredictable process. The program team is particularly responsive to 'where the energy is' and shifting local priorities, which means plans are appropriately flexible, while remaining focused on the high-level outcomes related to patient care.

The NDP team has used a mix of different approaches. They have emphasised the importance of learning along the way, which is particularly important in a complex and changing context. Many lessons have been incorporated into ongoing work to strengthen relevance and effectiveness. This is commendable as it recognises that there is no 'right' way to effectively contribute to positive change. The team has also demonstrated a commitment to working closely with Timorese caregivers and is increasingly focused on engaging with leaders who are ultimately responsible for the quality of care provided in Timor-Leste.

The evaluation found that a number of approaches taken by the NDP team have contributed to the positive achievements to date, including:

- co-location of the NDP office in HNGV grounds
- long-term commitment, longevity of staff and staying on in the face of COVID-19
- commitment to maximising employment of Timorese team members
- values-based approach
- trust-based collaborative approach
- team management and teamwork.

The evaluation found that there is a clear sense of positive momentum and good progress in achieving positive changes in all the topic areas covered by the objectives. However, the targets set in the Five-Year Plan were not necessarily achieved. While progress is positive overall, there are a number of points of vulnerability in terms of longer-term sustainability, mainly related to the degree of official Timorese ownership and leadership of system-level change agendas.

The Five-Year Plan included expectations that the Program would be able to engage with activities beyond HNGV. Some initial steps were taken in this direction in 2019-20 but were halted because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the next phase of collaboration, discussions are needed to define the scope of this effort, so objectives are realistic and expectations are well managed.

The efforts and contributions by NDP are well regarded overall. SJGIH enjoys a positive reputation in Dili and maintains constructive and trust-based relationships with Timorese institutions and other international organisations. This is both commendable and important. It means there are good prospects that issues related to Timorese ownership and leadership and embedding changes to support improved care, can be negotiated in the next phase of collaboration.

‘Previously, some of the nurses didn’t communicate with patients...and had no compassion towards patients. After training and close monitoring, we have seen changes in communicating with patients and each other. I observe that they communicate really well and seek each other’s opinions on certain issues.’

On the basis of the evaluation findings included in Section 5 and discussion of emerging issues in Section 6, the evaluation team propose a range of recommendations, which are listed here for ease of access:

1. SJGIH should seek to build on its current efforts to engage more deliberately with Ministry of Health and INS leaders and officials, to contribute to greater prospects for coherent and integrated human resource development systems across Timor-Leste in the longer term
 - a. This builds on the systems which have been supported to date
 - b. This includes stronger coordination with other contributions to the national health system, both within Timor-Leste and from development partners
 - c. This could include expanding engagement with other referral hospitals, if prioritised by the Ministry of Health, within agreed plans and under joint governance.
2. SJGIH should seek to build on its current efforts to appoint Timorese into leadership roles in the Program, and increasingly shift relevant decision-making responsibilities to those based in Timor-Leste, recognising the need for context-specific responses and deep understanding of local issues and opportunities.

3. The plans for the next phase should seek to more clearly define the scope of collaboration, balancing recognition that the development of nurses and midwives is closely linked to all other aspects of health care delivery, but that SJGIH is likely to make the most useful contribution if it focuses in a limited number of areas.
4. Increased effort should be given to the monitoring of progress and learning during implementation, and more regular reporting to inform decision-making by all those involved, including Ministry of Health officials.
5. SJGIH should work closely with Ministry of Health, INS and HNGV officials to determine how best it can contribute to the strengthening of HNGV's role as a teaching hospital
 - a. The emphasis should be on how nursing and midwifery students can be appropriately trained and supervised to ensure quality services are provided and consistent quality training is made available for the future nursing and midwifery workforce.
 - b. This includes supporting the Ministry to officially recognise the group of skilled formadors so their expertise is kept in the public sector.
6. SJGIH could consider a more deliberately strengths-based approach to build on the achievements to date and existing strengths in nurses and midwives and the relevant institutions, in order to motivate energy towards increasing standards of care over time