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Call for Expression of Interest

Building community resilience against climate change through community-based water catchment activities (Nature-based solution)

CEF/TLS/2026/003

1 *Timeline*

Posted	Mar 5, 2026
Clarification Request Deadline	Mar 13, 2026
Application Deadline	Mar 31, 2026
Notification of Results	Apr 20, 2026
Start Date	Jun 1, 2026
End Date	Feb 28, 2027

2 *Locations*

A Timor-Leste
- a Lautein

3 *Sector(s) and area(s) of specialization*

A Cross Sectoral Areas
- a Gender equality and women empowerment

B WASH and Environment
- a Natural resources, environmental pollution and climate action
- b Water

4 *Issuing Agency*

UNICEF

5 *Project Background*

Timor-Leste has made remarkable progress in expanding access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services over the past 15 years. Access to basic water has improved from 63.2% in 2010 to 87.3% in 2024, while basic sanitation coverage has grown from 38.5% to 72.9% over the same period. However, these national achievements mask deep disparities between urban and rural communities. In rural areas, only 82.3% of the population has access to basic water, compared to 97.7% in urban settings. For sanitation, the gap is similar: 69.4% in rural areas versus 80.1% in urban areas. Furthermore, access alone does not guarantee reliable or safe WASH services. Many rural communities face frequent breakdowns of water systems due to limited funding, high staff turnover at municipality

government, and ongoing institutional changes. As a result, infrastructure often falls into disrepair, and communities have to rely on external donor support for major rehabilitations. The increasing frequency of climate-induced emergencies - such as floods, droughts, and landslides - further threatens water security, especially in mountainous regions where rural populations depend on spring water fed by rain. During the rainy season (from December to May), the rainfall is intense, and the rainwater takes a short time to run off into the sea; relatively small amount of water manages to soak into the ground. During the long dry periods, the soil moistures dry out, which is exacerbated by the soil type that do not easily retain moisture. In rural Timor-Leste, therefore, improving the amount of groundwater should help communities to have access to sustainable water source throughout the year and to reduce risk of water scarcity during dry seasons. To increase the groundwater absorption, UNICEF and partners are implementing community-based water catchment activities. These nature-based solutions (NbS) help retain rainwater, increase groundwater recharge, and build resilience against climate shocks, laying the foundation for healthier, more sustainable communities. Community-based water catchment activities empower local communities to understand, protect, and enhance their water sources. Through hands-on training and participatory planning, community members learn about the flow of water in their environment and identify strategic sites for constructing terraces, check dams, and retention ponds. These nature-based solutions (water retention structures) help retain rainwater during the wet season, increase groundwater recharge, and reduce the risk of landslides and flash floods. The true impact of these NbS interventions will be felt over years, as vegetation is restored, spring water sources are sustained, and water becomes available even during dry seasons. By investing in community-driven, climate-resilient WASH solutions, Timor-Leste can close the gap in rural water and sanitation access, improve health outcomes, and empower communities to thrive in the face of environmental change. The community-based water catchment approach has been developed by PERMATIL, a local CSO and permaculture organisation established in Timor-Leste in 1999 around the time of independence. UNICEF has been working with PERMATIL since 2022 to implement NbS activities in various locations of the country, including Ainaro, Viqueque, Aileu and Dili Municipalities. PERMATIL has a significant knowledge about the challenges associated with water resources management and agriculture from its long experience in working with Timorese communities. PERMATIL's community engagement is not limited to construction of water retention structures, but it also includes permaculture, reduction in de-forestation through slash and burn practices, and reforestation of local trees and shrubs that stabilise soils through their root structure and provide shading canopy to retention ponds (reducing evaporation losses). In 2025, UNICEF started to support National Regulatory Department of Water and Sanitation (DNRAS) under Ministry of Public Works to develop guidance documents and tools for standardizing community-based water catchment management. These documents are developed to formally document PERMATIL's knowledge and experience that are accumulated over the years. Using these documents that are recognized by the Government of Timor-Leste, UNICEF hopes that more WASH sector partners employ NbS approach and contribute to strengthen community resilience against impeding climate change in Timor-Leste. The guideline documents are expected to be approved by DNRAS in early 2026.

6 ***Expected Results***

In this expected Programme Document, the successful CSO partner is going to implement community-based water catchment activities (NbS activities) in 10 aldeias of Lautem Municipality, with expected total beneficiaries of 4,000 people. The project duration is for 9 months (3 quarters). The exact locations (names of aldeias) shall be discussed in detail and determined by UNICEF and the successful CSO partner during planning stage. The successful CSO under this CFEI is expected to utilize the guideline documents during implementation of NbS activities. The guideline documents that are currently under development (see Project Background section) are as follows, for reference: a. Community Orientation material on Water Catchment Management b. Manual for location selection, designing of nature-based solutions c. ToT training materials for the community on water catchment management d. School orientation material (booklet and animation video) e. GEDSI Analysis framework f. Template for Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) related to water catchment management The NbS activities are expected to take place in each aldeia according to PERMATIL's approach, and using the abovementioned guideline documents: 1. Community Consultation of the project (Tool: [a] community orientation material) 2. Baseline data collection, using mWater platform (Tool: [e] GEDSI analysis, [f] ESIA template) 3. Selection of community facilitators and conducting Training of Trainers (Tool: [c] ToT training materials and [b] location selection manual) 4. Community socialization for wider community members, especially the people who are going to participate in the construction work (Tool: [a] community orientation material, [d] school orientation material) 5. School socialization (Tool: [d] school orientation material) 6. Construction of water retention structures In addition, the CSO is expected to conduct periodic monitoring of the project progress

7 ***Indicative Budget***

50000.00000

8 ***Other Information***

Organisations that wish to participate in this Call for Expression of Interest are requested to design and submit a programme proposal that responds to the results described above. All submissions should be made through the UN Partner Portal (https://www.unpartnerportal.org/). A complete submission shall include the following: 1. A fully completed UN Partner Portal profile 2. A completed Concept Note (template attached) Only one submission per CSO is possible and applications should be submitted in English Any requests for additional information should be submitted in UN Partner Portal by the date indicated. UNICEF responses to any queries or clarification requests will be made available to all online in UN Partner Portal before the deadline for submission of applications. All national and international NGOs are invited to apply.

9 ***Selection Criteria***

Name	Description	Weight
Project management	Ability to demonstrate capacity of project management team including relevant experience of personnels	10
Realistic timelines and plans	Ability to lay out a realistic project plans including appropriate input of resources, indicative project timelines, and expected outcomes	30
Local experience and presence	Previous experience in the planned project area and readiness to establish a project team on the ground	10
Clarity of activities and expected results	Ability to demonstrate understanding of community-based water catchment management approach and capacity to employ the NbS guidelines in the project	20
Cost effectiveness	Ability to demonstrate realistic and cost-effective budget plan for achieving the planned outcomes	30

10 ***Attachments***

Description	URL
All CSOs are required to use this concept note template to submit the propo	Download the document here

11 ***Concept Note Template***

Download the document here

12 ***For more information on this partnership opportunity, and to apply, please visit***

UN Partner Portal