

'Challenges and Possibilities' aimed to draw upon the experiences and ideas of participants, including East Timorese women and representatives of international organisations, in order to explore three key issues:

1. The practices and assumptions of international organisations working with East Timorese women;
2. How East Timorese women have responded; and
3. How the international presence has impacted on women in East Timor.

'Challenges and Possibilities' represented a unique opportunity for East Timorese members of civil society, representatives of international organisations, and interested Australians to collectively explore a critical, yet often sidelined, issue. The primary aim of the event was to create a forum for reflective dialogue, collaboration and critical self and peer review so as to make an open assessment regarding the impact of international organisations on the lives of women in East Timor. The approach to the weekend's events emphasised participation, open dialogue and collaboration in a safe, engaged environment. This was achieved through a combination of seminars, professionally facilitated workshops and less formal opportunities for social exchange. For three days some 150 people came to Melbourne from around Australia and from East Timor to discuss these issues together; to share, to debate and to listen to one another's experience.



Voting in Venilale, elections June 2007

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Challenges and Possibilities

International Organizations and Women in Timor-Leste

Challenges and Possibilities: International Organizations and Women in Timor-Leste



A Weekend of Reflection, Dialogue and Collaboration

9-11 September 2005

Storey Hall, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia



Edited by Damian Grenfell and Anna Trembath





Two women from *aldeia* Luha Oli, Venilale, 2007



Participants and organizers at Exhibition Gardens, Melbourne

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Globalism Institute, RMIT University

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Challenges and Possibilities: International Organizations and Women in Timor-Leste

Damian Grenfell and Anna Trembath (editors)

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Cover image: Community celebration in Mape Village, Lolotoe, 2004

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From the Editors

The first version of this report was put together in the weeks following the Challenges and Possibilities forum in 2005. The forum itself had been a huge organizational task supported with few resources, and was only made possible because of the generosity of many volunteers who contributed their respective skill sets. The first report reflected the general lack of resources available; we did not have money to produce a high quality copy, we had no money for translations, the layout and copy-editing were very underdone. Making the report was a matter of staying back at work too late, too often to do what printing and binding we could. Despite our best efforts, this in part contributed to a lack of circulation of the outcomes from the forum both in and outside of Timor-Leste. Now fully translated and with an ability to distribute the report both internationally and in Timor-Leste, we hope that this new version—available in both in Tetun and English—goes a small way towards keeping the ideas and debates of that forum alive. A lot has obviously happened in Timor-Leste between then and now, but we feel that that should not distract from the enduring aims of people working together in an effort to achieve gender equity.

Damian Grenfell and Anna Trembath, December 2007

The Globalism Institute

The Globalism Institute is a research institute based at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. It was established in 2001, and has around twenty staff. Our research sites include Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, as well as various sites within Australia. The Globalism Institute places a strong emphasis on undertaking collaborative research projects with governments and civil society organizations in these sites. These projects draw on expertise in fields such as global politics, international relations, community studies, cross-cultural communication and international education. Our central research themes are globalization, nationalism and community sustainability. Further information about the Globalism Institute can be found at <http://globalism.rmit.edu.au>.

The Globalism Institute has been undertaking research in Timor-Leste since 2003, particularly focusing on investigating how forms of identity are redefined in through the process of nation-formation. The key themes guiding our research and other activities in Timor-Leste are Gender, Nation Building, Justice and Security, and Community. For further information about the work of the Globalism Institute in Timor-Leste in both English and Tetun, please see www.timor-leste.org.

Introduction

This year, 2005, marks the third year of formal independence for East Timor and the sixth since the Indonesian withdrawal in 1999. Long-term reconstruction and development programs continue to operate in East Timor, many focusing on issues affecting women.

In this context, 'Challenges and Possibilities' aimed to draw upon the experiences and ideas of participants, including East Timorese women and representatives of international organizations, in order to explore three key issues:

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2. How East Timorese women have responded; and
3. How the international presence has impacted on women in East Timor.

'Challenges and Possibilities' represented a unique opportunity for East Timorese members of civil society, representatives of international organizations, and interested Australians to collectively explore a critical, yet often sidelined, issue. The primary aim of the event was to create a forum for reflective dialogue, collaboration and critical self and peer review so as to make an open assessment regarding the impact of international organizations on the lives of women in East Timor. The approach to the weekend's events emphasized participation, open dialogue and collaboration in a safe, engaged environment. This was achieved through a combination of seminars, professionally facilitated workshops and less formal opportunities for social exchange.

For three days some 150 people came to Melbourne from around Australia and from East Timor to discuss these issues together; to share, to debate and to listen to one another's experience. This report is an attempt to reflect some of the ideas shared at the forum. It is put together by volunteers, and we hope that it is seen as a document that can be further built upon in the future. Similarly, we hope that the forum is seen as one opportunity for discussion, and that open discourse between different individuals and organizations will continue on this theme in various ways and in various locations in the future.

We hope you enjoy the report!



Participants at the Victorian State Parliament, with MP Glenyys Romanes

Program

Challenges and Possibilities: International Organizations and Women in Timor-Leste 9–11 September, 2005

Friday 9 September Challenges and Possibilities Public Forum	
TIME	Storey Hall, RMIT University: Building 16, 336 – 348 Swanston Street, Melbourne
6.30 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key note speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alita Verdial, Projects Manager, Alola Foundation • Mario de Araujo, Advocacy Officer and Project Coordinator, Oxfam Australia in East Timor and a founding member of AMKV (Asosiasaun Mane Kontra Violensia) • Manuela Leong Pereira, Executive Director, Fokupers • International NGOs and organizations present their work through visual displays and stalls • Photo exhibition of East Timorese Women by Dawn Delaney

Saturday 10 September Speakers and Participatory Workshops to Draft Set of Principles for International Organizations Working with Women in Timor-Leste		
TIME	Storey Hall, RMIT University: Building 16, 336 – 348 Swanston Street, Melbourne	
8.30–9.15 am	Collection of Registration Materials & Light Breakfast	Foyer
9.15–9.25 am	Welcome & Introductions	Auditorium
9.25–10.15 am	Introduction to the format, facilitation and workshop themes Speaker: Vijaya Joshi, completed a PhD on Women's Organizing, Militarism and the UNTAET and has worked with La'o Hamutuk, UNTAET and the International Rescue Committee	Auditorium
10.15 am–12.15 pm	Thematic Workshops. Participants break into facilitated workshop groups of less than 20 to discuss key themes.	Workshops Areas
12.15–1.15 pm	Lunch (NOT PROVIDED)	
1.15–2.00 pm	Speaker: Balbina da Conceição (Executive Director) and Natalina Ximenes (Administrative Officer), KOVEFOKIL (Co-operative of Veteran Women, Widows and Orphans Timor-Leste)	Auditorium
2.00–3.00 pm	Workshop presentation of Themes (one representative from each workshop outlining themes / ideas and principles)	Auditorium
3.00–3.30 pm	Afternoon tea	Foyer
3.30–4.15 pm	Resumption of Morning Working Groups for reflection of original discussion	Workshops Areas
4.15–5.15 pm	Joint Session to Delineate Principles	Auditorium
5.15–6.00 pm	CLOSE	

Sunday 11 September Speakers, Workshop and Lunch			
TIME	Activity	Details	Location
11.00 am–12.00 pm (Please arrive at 10.50 am)	Caritas Workshop on the Prevention of Sexual Violence	Limited to 30 participants	Building 37, Level 3, Lecture Theatre 4. (Opposite Storey Hall, next to Druids Café)
12.30–3.00 pm	Lunch and address by Benvinda Rodrigues, Friends of Baucau	Informal Luncheon	Research Lounge, Building 28, RMIT
3.00–3.30 pm	Claire Rowland	Presentation of Australia-East Timor Community Water Supply and Sanitation Program (CWSSP) Video	Research Lounge, Building 28, RMIT

Speakers

Alita Verdial

Working Together: Restoring Dignity and Building Bridges of Understanding and Support

Introduction

First of all, I would like to thank the organizing committee for inviting me to present my perspective on the topic Challenges and Possibilities: International Organizations and Women in East Timor in this conference.

I want to take this opportunity to also present, on behalf of the Timorese, our thanks to all of you, because East Timor's independence involved strong participation and support from international organizations and community. We will not forget this, and will keep it as part of our nation's history. This co-operation turned into a source of great hope for us to continue working together with the international community to develop our country, East Timor, which we all know is small and poor.

In my speech, I would like to recall the words spoken by Kofi Annan, then UN Secretary General, in his speech on the occasion of his participation in East Timor's Restoration of Independence Celebration on May 20, 2002 in Dili: 'The struggle for liberation was difficult, but the struggle for development will be even more difficult.'

General information on East Timor

I also want to present the current situation in East Timor as follows: in the area of health, and according to the Sector Investment Program report, the high infant and maternal mortality rates present us a huge challenge to search for a variety of measures needed to reduce it. Poor reproductive health, which is a big cause of maternal death, the number of teenage/underage pregnancies and the short periods between pregnancies due to lack of access to adequate information on family planning are also major problems for us. As such, and as we can see in the slide, the estimated IMR is eighty-three deaths per 1000 live births, the under five mortality rate is 107 per 1000 live births and maternal mortality stands at 800 deaths per 100,000.

East Timor's education levels are the lowest by regional and international standards. Based on a 2002 survey, 57 per cent of the adult population has low or no education. This implies that half of the nation's adult population cannot read or write, while most adult literacy and non-formal education programs are assisted by donors.

Looking at the reality lived in our country, there are many challenges faced by our nation in the development process. For these reasons, and like your contribution towards our independence, we will continue to ask you to be our partners in providing educational assistance.

Benefits from international organizations

As a post-conflict nation we subsequently obtained many benefits, mostly in the area of capacity building, from working together with international organizations. I will however provide examples of such organizations which have become Alola Foundation's partners.

Oxfam Australia and Caritas Australia provide technical assistance and a working spirit to their partner organization

Alola Foundation is a partner organisation to OXFAM Australia which is supported by UNIFEM, and during this working partnership OXFAM has provided us with much assistance, not only with funds but also through following up on our program planning,

design and implementation process. We view this as highly important as it builds capacities and transfers skills to local NGOs. Another important point is that OXFAM Australia provides sustainable assistance with the aim of helping local NGOs minimize their dependence on international NGOs or donors.

A similar experience we got from Caritas Australia was that, apart from its funding assistance, it continued to provide encouragement and a working spirit to local NGOs, and continued support that looked into the needs and the outcomes of activities already undertaken. This type of assistance is important to reinforce the roles and existence of local NGOs.

Apart from direct assistance to local NGOs, a workshop and training were undertaken to build local organizations' knowledge and capacity in a range of areas (in other words, education, health, conventions ratified by government, etcetera). We would also like the international community to assist East Timor's government implement the international conventions it has ratified and support civil society in strengthening its capacity to adequately respond to these international conventions.

International organizations have also provided great support for women to participate in development, and provided opportunities for East Timorese women to participate in international seminars, conferences and other major events. This is highly important for East Timorese women as it provides them opportunities to learn from the experiences of women's movements in other countries, and a reference for East Timorese women to develop advocacy strategies and mechanisms to address the problems faced by women in East Timor.

As part of civil society we have also the responsibility to become good partners to government in order to participate in the development of East Timor as a nation. Through the conventions our government has ratified, such as the the Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), our government must take whatever measures necessary to create an environment that guarantees children and women are not discriminated against. This requires strong support from the entire East Timorese civil society through the creation of organisational activities. East Timor has its own National Development Plan and, as local organizations, we need to create activities to respond to the government's goals and the National Development Plan.

Implications of working together for East Timorese women

This co-operation between international and local partner organizations is important, as can be currently seen in some changes to the existence and participation of East Timorese women. These changes exist because of the international organization's sensitiveness to gender issues when implementing programs or projects. This shows the importance of women's participation in development, whereas in the past women have always been regarded by East Timorese society as subordinates.

For Alola Foundation

It is clear that Alola Foundation's existence and success is owed to the co-operative work that the Foundation has developed with international partners, organizations and individuals.

The range of support enjoyed by Alola Foundation has paved the way for reinforcing and strengthening our partners' confidence in our organization. With the existing co-operation, the Alola Foundation has also began to fundraise using local resources, through concerts and exhibitions, amongst other things, undertaken in other countries as well as within East Timor.

From the support that Alola Foundation gets from international organizations, such as Melbourne University, we were able to provide assistance for 470 women across East Timor to complete their secondary education; nine were able to go to university, seven of which with scholarships from Apheda and individuals. In this academic year, this number will increase. We expect this offers some assistance to our Ministry of Education to achieve its goals: help prevent our girls from marrying early given the high risks and mortality rates that result from a high number of pregnancies in girls under the age of eighteen.

The working partnership with international organizations through volunteer workers from organizations such as AVI or individuals also greatly helps Alola Foundation's staff build their capacities. This assistance is especially useful in building the capacities of local staff.

For me personally

I would like to say that fellow workers are more commonly found in local organizations in East Timor. Most of us who work in social organizations do not come from a social services background. However, due to the needs of the current situation in East Timor we begin to serve our fellow Timorese through working in such organizations. Our international colleagues provided us technical assistance, encouragement, and patiently helped us understand our work. I recognize that when I started working for an organisation, I hardly had anything to offer my fellow Timorese women. However, with encouragement from international colleagues and tracing back my steps up until now, I can say that, albeit slowly, I have developed the spirit to serve my fellow Timorese.

Key elements of working effectively together

1. Assistance based on needs

This is very important in order to achieve the aims of addressing our needs. One example of this is Alola Foundation's current 'Mother and Baby Pack' project. This project is based on a request by the director of Dili National Hospital for Alola Foundation to provide mother and baby packs for mothers who come to the hospital to give birth in rather poor conditions. There are no clothes for them to cover their babies, nor are there clothes for mothers to wear during labour. Often they just rip the end of cloths to cover their babies, and mothers don't use anything to stop the bleeding during their stay at the hospital. Often they also do not want to give birth at the hospital or health facilities due to the lack of conditions.

Our government's capacity is still insufficient to provide adequate assistance in this area. Through Ms Kirsty Gusmao, Alola Foundation disseminates this information to the international community so as to get humanitarian assistance for the project. We don't ask for manufactured packs because it is not what we need, since we would need to know how to use and dispose of them or they could impact negatively on our environment. Instead we need money and materials to produce the packs ourselves. With the money we can buy materials in East Timor, recruit women who are unemployed—school leavers, as well as widows who were victims of violations during their lifetime—to be trained in sewing and work in projects like this one.

2. Respect for the history and life stages of East Timor as a nation

As a nation that has been through a lot of suffering, during the Portuguese period and the Indonesian invasion, we lost many opportunities. An impact of the Indonesian invasion was the loss of our self-confidence. On this opportunity, I would really like to convey to you that recognising East Timor's history is a positive first step in strengthening co-operation. Often we become second-class citizens in our own country. The time has come for our friends to join us and help rebuild our confidence to look towards the future and fight for justice for our suffering people. This does not mean looking back, but fighting against impunity for those who commit crimes throughout the world so that we may live free from all forms of

human rights violations. Alone we may not have the strength to speak out, but together with our international friends we will have a strong voice.

3. Cultural sensitivity

As a Timorese woman I have much pride in my culture. For us culture is dignity. Adaptation to a country's culture is the same as respecting people's rights. Whenever someone gets involved with a particular place, they must get to know the customs and values of the people from that place. This is the key to developing better working relationships.

4. Minimizing weaknesses and maximizing strengths

Colonization impacted on us in losing many opportunities to learn, go to school and get an adequate education to develop our capacities. Our international friends must recognize this and give it due consideration. One example I like to give is that whatever our international friends take one day to complete we require three to four days. We require your assistance in reducing these three days to just one. Where many people give us assistance and require quick responses through reports, language problems and analytical capacities delay our response time in preparing such reports. For this reason we really need that you recognize and help reduce this weakness of ours, and build on our existing skills through your assistance so we can make up for the confidence lost during the many past years and increase our capacities.

Many ways of learning from working together; training and cultural exchange

There is great optimism from working together and from the training provided by our international friends. There are opportunities for fellow East Timorese to develop their capacities through training overseas. This is a good way to get to know each other better and establish good working relationships.

Fundraising with local resources

We realize that as a new nation many international development partners will continue to assist East Timor, however there has been a reduction in this assistance. This poses a challenge to our creativity in seeking local sources of funding for our organisation's activities. Alola Foundation has made many attempts to fundraise within East Timor, however this has not been easy as it requires much creativity and patience to recognize the possibilities to generate income with local resources. If our international friends can help us build our fundraising capacities it will also help reduce our dependence on donors and will open an opportunity for us to strengthen our economy through the use of local resources.

Women as key players for development

Many organizations give assistance to East Timorese women through their activities. Many organizations employ referral systems, advocacy, humanitarian and legal assistance. FOKUPERS and ET WAVE run shelters that provide much assistance for women victims of a range of violations. However, we still do not have a final destination for this referral system. There is a great unrealized dream of establishing a post-referral vocational training centre for women victims of violations by their spouses, family and community. Such establishments could accommodate those in need for training in areas such as sewing, cooking, agriculture, micro-business and literacy. Thus, after leaving the shelters they could go to this centre in order to get the skills that would enable them to stand on their own and be self-sufficient. This would eliminate their dependency and increase the number of women actively involved in the development process. Our expectations are for East Timorese women to be free from violence, have access to education, be a force in the economy and get justice in their public lives.

Conclusion

- Recognize the importance of sharing experiences with other countries in order to be able to resolve difficulties in specific areas.
- Many would be able to learn from working and training together, and cultural exchange.
- Technical assistance and needs-based support to reconstruct East Timor.
- Continued needs-based assistance for women to take action as key players in national development.



Alita Verdial

Mario de Araujo

Oxfam and Partners in East Timor: Creating a Voice for Women and Carving a Space for that Voice

Introduction

My Name is Mario Araujo. I work for Oxfam Australia in Timor-Leste as the National Program Co-ordinator, and am also a founding member of a Timorese network of NGOs working with men against violence. I am also a Timorese man with a wife and six children.

I am here today because I received an invitation from the organizers of this conference to speak on the topic Challenges and Possibilities: International Organizations and Women in East Timor. You may ask the question, 'Why was I invited instead of other men, because there are many men with a strong voice in Timor-Leste?' You may ask why a man is speaking at all in what should be a forum for women? I offer today fifteen minutes of my world: as a man working for a better world for women in Timor-Leste, from the voice of a Timorese person working for an international organization working in Timor and that of a local organization playing by donor rules there. I would like to illustrate what I see as the issues for Timorese women, and explain a little of the work we have done, both as international and national NGOs, to address these: both the successes we have had and the challenges we face in bringing the foreign concept of gender equity to Timor.

What are the issues faced by women in Timor-Leste?

Women make up over 50 per cent of the population of Timor-Leste, and are disproportionately impacted by the country's extreme poverty (PERWL, 2005). Women make up the majority of illiterate people, and the maternal mortality rate, at around 840 per 100,000 births, is among the highest in the world (Poverty for a new nation, 2003:75).

Domestic violence against women represents approximately half of all crime reported to the police and is exacerbated by traditional roles of women in the community. Women tend to play a traditional role in the family, taking responsibility for domestic duties, as well as agricultural work and income generating activities. Men make most of the major decisions in the family, community and government. There are differing opinions with respect to whether men or women control the household finances. Approximately 25 per cent of households are headed by women, either widowed or divorced (Poverty in a New Nation, 2003:92)

The traditional, subservient role of women in Timorese society is reinforced by the system of 'balaque': a bride price system whereby the husband's family must make a 'payment' to the wife's family. This practice often leads to the belief that the wife is then the 'owned property' of the husband to do with what he likes, which can also contribute to mistreatment within the family.

There are low levels of women's political participation, particularly within local governance at the 'suco' (village) and 'aldeia' (sub-village) levels. In some places, women are allowed to participate in the traditional judgments, but only for giving opinions, never for making decisions. In other places, they are not allowed to participate even with their opinions. (Oxfam, 2003)

A survey conducted by Oxfam in Cova Lima district (2003) identified reasons for low participation rates of women: no available time because of workloads at home and in the fields; the lack of experience in discussing political issues, and men's idea that women still don't have the capacity to participate politically because of their low educational level.

Is gender a *malae* (foreign) concept?

The independence of Timor-Leste has seen it swamped with international aid organizations,

the UN and bilateral funding from across the globe. They come with money, technical support and experience that we need to strengthen our nation and, ultimately, find our own road to a democratic country where men and women enjoy benefits that are rightly ours.

Of all the areas in which we are working as international and Timorese civil society, many see the area of gender equality as the most difficult to actualize, as it is an area in which, for many people—both in Timor and elsewhere—the objective of strengthening the role and voice of women signifies the erosion of culture and the destruction of society.

Traditionally in Timor, 'gender' is seen as a *malae* concept that foreigners are imposing on people as a trade-off for support in terms of funding and technical assistance. Along with terms such as 'human rights' and 'democracy', the term 'gender' sits on a bookshelf with a donor logo plastered on front.

Others are stronger with their criticism. There are those who believe that empowering women in Timor-Leste is merely breaking Timorese culture and causing men to be more violent and angry as women defy them.

This is demonstrated in the following quotes:

'Because there is now so much talk of gender equality the number of rapes in Dili has increased.' (Gender Advisor Lian Maubara, 2002, in an article).

'Women's rights have taught women to wear short skirts.'

'Now we need to decide to what level we will give women rights.' (An educated government employee during a meeting discussing CEDAW in Timor-Leste).

'Can those long-haired members of our community really offer us the security we need as a community?' (A village Leader from Bobonaro district during the lead up to the village elections, 2004).

'We beat our women because we love them,' (Quote from community consultation on domestic violence).

Part of the challenge of working for gender equity in Timor-Leste is bringing concepts of gender equity into a forum in which people will see the value of men and women as being equal in community and society.

Oxfam Australia—working for women's rights in Timor-Leste

Oxfam began working in Timor-Leste in 1997. It recommenced in the emergency phase in 2000, and continues to work on development in Timor. I have been an Oxfam staff member for three and a half years, both as an advocacy program officer and, more recently, in the position of National Program Co-ordinator.

Oxfam works using a rights-based approach to development. This means that Oxfam believes that every human being has rights. These rights are inalienable, universal, indivisible and interdependent. For every human right there is a corresponding obligation to fulfill, protect and respect that right.

Most of Oxfam's work in Timor-Leste is implemented through partners: NGOs, community groups, student groups and government, working together with different sectors to support Timorese people to realize these rights in a newly independent nation.

The overall aim of Oxfam's work in Timor-Leste is to strengthen the capacity of East Timorese men and women to be active in the development of their nation. A focus of this work is to mainstream gender equity through all Oxfam programs. Oxfam has supported a number of organizations (particularly women's organizations) on the promotion of the rights of women in Timor-Leste. In addition, Oxfam supports a number of groups, including the East Timorese government, in an overall strategy to reduce gender-based violence in Timor-Leste.

The impact of Oxfam in Timor-Leste

In the area of politics, Oxfam began to work with civil society in 2000 to form a group to ensure women and men had equal rights under the constitution in Timor-Leste, and to promote participation of women in national politics. As a result of the work of this group, articles 16-17 and 47 in the constitution address equal rights for men and women in the development of Timor. In the national parliament, twenty-three of eighty-seven seats are held by women. There are two women ministers in cabinet and a number of vice-ministers.

During Timor's first village level elections, currently being conducted, Oxfam has supported civil society groups to support female candidates to stand for council in local government. To date, there are 1326 women sitting on village councils throughout Timor and seven female village chiefs who will lead their communities. With two districts left to hold elections, our next challenge is in supporting and legitimizing these leaders' roles in their villages.

In education, Oxfam supports local NGOs to teach literacy to women and men at a sub-district level, and worked with the Ministry of Education to hold Timor-Leste's first literacy conference in September 2003.

We support the economic and social empowerment of women in Timor, through our work with communities and with NGOs, so that women in East Timor have access to more than security; a stronger place and a voice within their families and communities. We also support men to learn to accept the empowerment of women, by facilitating workshops on topics such as 'How men and women can work together'.

A new approach: AMKV

AMKV was founded by twenty concerned men from around the country, the majority of whom had participated in an international exchange on gender-based violence held in 2002. The exchange, organized by a national NGO (La'o Hamutuk) and Oxfam Australia, brought Timorese men into contact with Puntos dos Encuentros, a men's group from Nicaragua that is working against violence in a post-conflict machismo culture. During the exchange, Puntos dos Encuentros conducted training with thirty-eight male participants from around the country on gender, violence and masculinity. This workshop encouraged the participants to confront and reflect on their behaviour towards women in their families and as a society.

The vision of AMKV is to build a democratic, independent and just society, free from violence and discrimination. It aims to raise the awareness of men and women about gender-based violence and eradicate such violence from all levels of society. It seeks to achieve this by running community-based education and discussion forums, undertaking advocacy, and building an effective network that brings together community groups, national non-governmental organizations and the government. As part of a network of organizations, it conducts mediation and counselling for separated couples.

AMKV's main activity is to conduct weekend discussion forums in communities and high schools, always involving participants from both sexes. Before the forums started, we were apprehensive as to how people would receive us and whether we would be able to influence their beliefs or behaviour—especially among male participants. We were acutely aware that men are usually the perpetrators of violence. Would they feel threatened? Would they be willing to change? We reflected on our own behaviour; we used to be like that, and then, slowly, with guidance from other men's groups and each other, we changed. The answer was simple: 'If we can change then so can others.'

We use common situations that would be familiar to the participants and we talk about our own personal experiences of change. We always promote examples of practical and realistic behavioural change so that on leaving the forums participants have the knowledge to make immediate changes in their own lives. During the discussions there are often heated

debates, but there is also a lot of humour and goodwill as participants reflect on the origins of their traditions, beliefs and behaviour around gender differences.

In 2004 and 2005, AMKV reached over 700 men; weekend warriors carrying what is a 'foreign' approach to the cultural norms in Timor. Initially, these activities generated some criticism and ridicule from men in different sectors. Ridicule was directed at our sexuality; it was common for people to think we were gay. Criticism came from colleagues and friends who believed that we should have been using our energy or influence to tackle other more pressing developmental issues, such as poverty, livelihoods and economic empowerment.

Over time there has been a change in attitude to the work that AMKV does. We increasingly receive positive feedback from key national figures such as the President, MPs, police and ministers, as well as students, civil society groups and communities themselves.

Some of the traditional views that AMKV is helping men to question are:

- the traditional practice of men asking a 'bride price' for their daughters.
- acceptance of women in leadership roles in the community.
- violence as a means of release in the home.
- women going to university.

At the community level, there are men who are responsive and willing to be involved. However, in general, at all levels of Timorese society, there is still a high level of disinterest and apathy around gender and gender-based violence.

Impact of international organizations on women—a message.

In my experience of working with international organizations here in Timor, I believe that many of the changes we have seen for the better for women would not have been possible without the presence of international organizations.

Through the work and support of organizations such as Oxfam in Timor-Leste there is greater gender equality in our country: women are now in leadership roles, people are questioning traditional patriarchal roles in the community, and many women and other marginalized groups feel empowered to stand up against violence.

Through the work of AMKV, with support from international organizations, men, particularly the youth, who represent the future of Timor, are beginning to carve a space for their female counterparts. It's happening slowly, but there are changes. However, we are still young as a nation, and there are still many obstacles that will continue to prevent women from accessing their rights for many years.

From a place in the middle somewhere, I also clearly see that this process is slow, that sometimes international organizations in Timor do get it wrong, whether in their approach, expectations, assumptions, or in miscommunication. I guess this is all part of development.

I leave you with a few points that I see as important to remember for international organizations working in Timor-Leste. Perhaps you could call them a 'guide'.

1. Be patient
2. Think in terms of sustainability
3. Listen to us
4. Speak in terms we understand

The strong culture of patriarchy has developed over a long time in Timor-Leste, however, it can change. If concepts from outside Timor can be translated into concrete examples relevant to people in their everyday lives—and both men and women can see the benefit—then the impact must be positive.

Let's make gender inequity history!

Manuela Leong Pereira

Hand-in-Hand towards Progress

Slide 1

Title

Slide 2

Fokupers

- An East Timorese NGO, founded in 1997
- Works on women's issues, especially victims of violence
- Areas of work:
 1. Assistance and counselling for women victims of violence
 2. Education and advocacy on women's rights
 3. Organizing women's groups in rural areas.

Slide 3

Experiences with international partners (individuals & organizations)

1. Donor
2. On secondment from international agencies
3. Volunteers.

Slide 4

The impacts on East Timorese women

- Motivates and increases self-confidence to work in strengthening women
- Unveil the domestication of women's issues (for example, domestic violence)
- Enhances the capacity of individuals as well as organizations
- Broadens the perspective of Timorese women.

Slide 5

Challenges

- Inflexibility in project implementation; greatest emphasis on the realization of project activities without consideration of the local situation, which is crucial for optimising projects' impacts
- Emphasis on professional relationships; interpersonal relationships are less developed
- Constant changes of personnel, results in changes of approach, risking project's continuity.

Slide 6

Challenges (continued)

- Gap in capacities; need time to adjust work pace/rhythm
- Certain cultural practices place additional burdens on East Timorese women
- Many taboos in Timorese society hinders development of knowledge (for example, knowledge on sexuality)

Slide 7

Obstacles

- Government's policy on language favours Portuguese, which hampers the contributions by foreigners of non-Portuguese background
- Hard for non-Tetun or Indonesian-speaking foreigners to work in East-Timor
- The attitude of know-it-all foreign partners on one hand and inferiority complex of Timorese on the other, hampers a mutually strengthening work relationship.

Slide 8

Obstacles (continued)

- Lack of understanding of local conditions results in the deployment of inappropriate strategies, which weakens both the movement and work relationships (inter- and intra-organizations)
- Tutor-pupil relationship in the context of 'capacity building' hinders the exploration of local capacities.

Slide 9

Conclusions

- Work relationship with internationals is unavoidable
- Many lessons can be learned for the development of Timorese women
- An inflexible relationship will destroy the 'sense of humanity and solidarity'
- If the relationship is too flexible the movement for social change that benefits women will not advance
- Thus, there is the need for the 'art' to build a relationship, with the touch of 'sense of humanity & solidarity' for the movement to progress.



Manuela Leong Pereira

Vijaya Joshi

Creating and Limiting Opportunities: Women's Organizing and the UN in East Timor

Good morning. Firstly, I'd like to thank RMIT and the Globalism Institute for organizing this important conference, and for inviting me here today. The issue of how international organizations affect women's organizations in countries like East Timor, Iraq and Kosovo is very important. It's important because it gives us the opportunity to look at some of the myths that we, as members of international organizations, may bring with us to countries like East Timor.

What I'd like to talk about today is just one international organization's impact on women in East Timor. This organization is the UN and, as most of you know, it administrated East Timor for two and half years after the Popular Consultation in August 1999. I would like to ask you a question here, and it is a question I have asked myself many times: Did the creation of UNTAET in East Timor increase opportunities for women's organizations? If the answer is 'yes', then how? If the answer is 'no', then why? I'd like you to keep your answer in mind as I share my experiences, and perhaps we can discuss it again at the end.

My own interest in the area came about through my involvement with an NGO called La'o Hamutuk and through my own experience of working with the UN in Same. During that time, I saw many contradictions within the UN, specifically with reference to women's rights. While I worked in East Timor, I saw attempts to get a minimum quota of women in the Constituent Assembly squashed by both the UN and the National Council. However, I also saw money and resources put into creating a Women's Charter of Rights to be presented to the Constituent Assembly and to increasing the number of women elected through less formal mechanisms than a quota system. I saw almost 10,000 peacekeepers stationed in East Timor, promoting peace and security. At the same time, I heard of at least four allegations of sexual assault of Timorese women committed by these same peacekeepers. I saw significant attempts to recruit women to the new Timor-Leste police force—at that time, under the control of the UN. But when I spoke to those female recruits, I heard stories of sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour which was never acted upon by senior members of the CIVPOL police force. So many contradictions. On the one hand, I witnessed the UN supporting women's informal political participation, encouraging women to join the police force, and demonstrating a commitment to safety and security. On the other hand, I heard instances of sexual assault, and a lack of political will to reprimand those who committed violence against women.

Today, I would like to provide an explanation for these contradictions.

My explanation is this: the UN Administration in East Timor was militarized. That is, it put the needs, philosophy and operating procedures of the military above any other civilian unit, and, because of this, the UN Administration created a political climate that constrained certain opportunities and created other opportunities for women's organizing. In essence, through my research I found that the political climate created by UNTAET for civil society organizations was designed to protect those most valued members of UNTAET—namely soldiers and other military personnel like police. So, in essence, women's activism that did not directly threaten the power of the police or military—such as increased political participation—were encouraged by UNTAET. Other kinds of activism—such as protesting sexual assault by peacekeepers or reporting CIVPOL officers—were largely ignored by UNTAET.

How did I come to this conclusion? I am a student of military culture. I have studied the various socialization processes that occur when men and women join a military institution. As a rule, these institutions are not receptive to women or women's rights. It is, essentially, a masculine organization. A female colonel in the US Army has described military culture in the following way:

Military culture is characterized by its combat, masculine warrior....As an institution comprised primarily of men, its culture is shaped by men. Soldiering is viewed as a masculine role...Thus, a deeply entrenched 'cult of masculinity' pervades military culture.... This cult of masculinity persists today even with the presence of 'others' (eg. women and gays) who do not fit the image of the combat or masculine warrior.¹

The self-conscious masculinization of the military has historically rested on the notion that the masculine warrior myth is crucial to the effectiveness of a fighting force.² Men within the military are socialized without women. Their hierarchies are male, and their attitudes and training practices make fun of women (for example, being called 'girls' if they fail). Where they are allowed to have relationships with women, these relationships are unequal. Who makes men's meals on base? Women. Who cleans their clothes? Women. When soldiers are given rest and recreation leave, what do many soldiers do? They visit sex workers. Soldiers do not see women as equal partners. Even when women are of equal rank within the same military establishment, male soldiers seek to undermine them, often through sexual harassment.

Increasingly, we are seeing the military overtake and influence the functions of civilian institutions. In humanitarian work, reconstruction and development, the military is often partnered with or replaces civilian organizations as the lead institution. Needless to say, when this happens, the military and its members bring their own socialization to these processes. In other words, civilian institutions, such as the UN, are being militarized. But this militarization has a male face.

The UN in East Timor had almost 10,000 military personnel for the duration of its administration. These military personnel brought with them ideas and attitudes about gender and the role of women that clearly affected the way the UN was run. But how and why did these 10,000 soldiers have such an effect? Because the UN civilian authority was planned by the military, and the needs of the military remained of greatest importance to the higher echelons within the UN.

The planning of UNTAET was not a smooth process. It involved political infighting, department changes and budget wrangling. The UN mission conducting the August 1999 referendum (UNAMET) was co-ordinated through the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) within the UN. The DPA had spearheaded the UN's involvement with East Timor since Indonesia had invaded in 1975, and was intimately involved with the May 5 1999 agreement between Portugal, Indonesia and the UN sanctioning the referendum. In this sense, the DPA created UNAMET with reference to a broad historical understanding of regional politics.³ In the violence that ensued after the referendum, the UN hastily cobbled together a response. Many commentators have expressed surprise at the lack of planning undertaken by the UN prior to the August 30 referendum.⁴ On September 20, an Australian-led international force (INTERFET) was deployed to secure East Timor by capturing the militias and escorting the Indonesian military out of the country. However, on-going military and governance support was needed.

On October 25 1999, Security Council Resolution 1272 mandated the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) to: provide security and maintain law and order; establish an administration; assist in the development of the civil and social sector; facilitate co-ordination of humanitarian, rehabilitation and development assistance; support capacity building for self-government; and create the conditions for sustainable development.⁵ This mandate clearly emphasized the governance and rehabilitation aspects

¹ Karen O'Dunivin, 'Military Culture: Change and Continuity', *Armed Forces and Society* vol. 20, no. 4, 1994, p. 533.

² Jean Beth Elshtain, *Women and War*, Basic Books, New York, 1987.

³ Chopra, 2000, p. 28.

⁴ Michael Smith and Moreen Dee, *Peacekeeping in East Timor: The Path to Independence*, Lynne Rienner, Colorado, 2003, p. 60.

⁵ Suhrke, 2001, p. 2.

of the mission, thus the DPA, with its added historical context of the East Timor situation, should have had a key role in planning UNTAET.

In mid-September 2001, just as mission planning was getting under way, the Secretary General's Office made the decision that 'while the planning team drew its staff from both departments and was assisted by a wider agency cast, the DPKO was to be in charge'.⁶ The transfer of control from DPA to DPKO was both rapid and confrontational, with the consequence that vital mission information was lost. '[T]here was significant loss of continuity of planning and leadership, in communication between New York and Dili, and in the transmission of in-theatre knowledge and experience from UNAMET to UNTAET.'⁷ This is corroborated by the Timorese leadership, who found the change to DPKO unsettling as they had already formed relationships with members of the DPA. Emilia Pires, who was part of the CNRT (Conselho Nacional de Resistencia Timorense—National Council of Timorese Resistance) delegation led by Xanana Gusmao to meet the Secretariat and planners within the DPKO on September 27 1999 comments: 'We were not familiar with DPKO. We assumed that by being in contact with DPA, we were already in contact with the UN. I suspect there may have been a communication breakdown between DPA and DPKO on this issue.'⁸

Staff within DPA come from a completely different organizational background to those in DPKO. The two departments are separate within the UN and control different types of missions. A quick look at the UN website confirms that while the DPKO runs 'military peacekeeping missions', the DPA administrates 'peace-building missions'.⁹ This difference is not semantic; the views of planners are integral to the nature and shape of each mission. DPKO is staffed mostly by military men, while DPA has a much higher concentration of civilians, including higher numbers of women.¹⁰ Research has shown that the presence of women makes a substantial difference to the internal workings and external perceptions of a peacekeeping operation.¹¹ Women's presence within DPA has certainly created a less masculinized environment within the department. However, DPA is also much less militarized than DPKO. So, there exists a difference between the masculinized and militarized culture of each department.

It is important to remember that UNTAET took over from INTERFET, a military force, rather than UNAMET, which had had some political and governance structures built into the mission. For the few months that INTERFET was in power, it performed the tasks of a '*de facto* military government'.¹² The interruption of political (rather than military) supremacy in the UN's relationship with East Timor led to significant changes in the nature and scope of the UNTAET, making its outlook more militarized. Kirsty Sword Gusmao, arriving in East Timor in September 1999, made a similar observation:

I realized I had been naïve to assume that UNTAET and INTERFET were a close-knit and co-ordinated team. Perhaps it was the fact that INTERFET differed from a peace-keeping force in that it was not, strictly speaking, answerable to the UN. Perhaps some of the other incidents of tension and miscommunication I was to note in the coming months reflected merely the difference between a military and a civilian approach to the life of a people and a nation.¹³

⁶ *ibid*, p. 6.

⁷ Chopra, 2000, p. 28.

⁸ Suhrke, 2001, p. 12.

⁹ <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko> and <http://www.un.org/Dept/dpa>.

¹⁰ Dyan Mazurana and Eugenia Piza Lopez, *Gender Mainstreaming in Peace Support Operations: Moving Beyond Rhetoric to Practice*, International Alert, London, 2002, p. 26.

¹¹ United Nations Development Fund for Women, *Getting it Right, Doing it Right: Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration*, United Nations, New York, 2004, p. 6.

¹² Smith and Dee, 2003, p. 68.

¹³ Gusmao, 2003, p. 281.

Sword's observation of a difference in a military versus civilian approach to a nation was evident not just on the streets of Dili. At UN headquarters, DPKO was formulating a specifically militarized mission. Based on (some) lessons learned from the Kosovo mission, the structure of the administration was hastily formulated. UNTAET was to have three pillars. The largest financial and personnel pillar was the peacekeeping component, with humanitarian and rehabilitation the second pillar, and governance and public administration being the smallest pillar. These were brought together under the Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary General (SRSG), Sergio Vieira de Mello. At UN headquarters, the question of how this structure was to be funded was also being discussed. The Security Council, while authorizing a budget of US\$750 million¹⁴, allocated this to the strict terms of peacekeeping, excluding civilian governance costs. Indeed the mission costing had been arrived at purely by looking at the military component, as it was assumed that nation-building activities were to be paid for by voluntary contributions from nations.¹⁵

This militarized environment physically and psychologically dwarfed other elements of the UN mission. The humanitarian and rehabilitation pillar, despite still being sorely needed, was replaced in 2000 (when the emergency was deemed to be officially over) by a development pillar. A subsequent independent evaluation ascertained that UNTAET was not effective in co-ordinating international NGO activity and failed to plan for the transition from humanitarian intervention to development.¹⁶ In this crucial pillar, the DPKO failed to utilize people with expertise and, instead, relied on military intelligence. In East Timor, as in other countries, the military were responsible for the bulk of humanitarian aid delivered. This led to significant problems between the military and civilian institutions, such as UNHCR and international humanitarian NGOs such as MSF, and compromised the delivery of aid. 'In retrospect, it is fair to assess that the importance of CMA [Civil-Military Affairs] was under-rated in initial planning by the Secretariat, reflecting lack of experience in the DPKO and by most of the contributing nations.'¹⁷

The smallest pillar (in terms of personnel and money) was Governance and Public Administration (GPA), which was responsible for establishing central and district governance, generating public and social utilities, establishing the rule of law, and encouraging and regulating investment in the private sector.¹⁸ In other words, this pillar had, perhaps, the largest job, and yet was least funded. These breakdowns provide clear indications that the civilian and humanitarian sections of the East Timor mission were given little thought and funding, and that greater energy and money was spent on the military component.

Subsequent evaluations of UNTAET have pointed to the lack of consultation with the Timorese in the planning process. Ironically, even the Timorese were not a party to decisions about their own country. Before Security Council Resolution 1272, the CNRT, the Timorese pro-independence organization, submitted a paper requesting Timorese consultative mechanisms to the administration, however, this was rejected by DPKO.¹⁹

Numerous commentators have discussed DPKO's neglect of Timorese input into the planning of UNTAET, and the effect it had on the subsequent mission. The picture that emerges of DPKO's planning procedures is that it was insular, with little mechanism for dialogue with those from outside its own powerbase:

The structure DPKO proposed for the transitional authority at this stage was a peacekeeping mission structure adapted from Bosnia and Kosovo...and the paper made no mention of how the East Timorese were to be involved.²⁰

¹⁴ Chopra, 2000, p. 31.

¹⁵ Suhrke, 2001, p. 10.

¹⁶ Kings College, 2002, p. 3.

¹⁷ Smith and Dee, 2003, p. 74.

¹⁸ *ibid*, p. 63.

¹⁹ Suhrke, 2001, p. 4.

²⁰ Kings College, 2002, p. 19.

DPKO's approach to East Timor was not guided by local expertise but rather by its past peacekeeping experiences... DPKO's ideological framework, however, insured that the state-building project in East Timor would be conceptualized as a peacekeeping operation with a strong emphasis on centralized UN governorship.²¹

In re-tracing the beginning of UNTAET, it becomes clear that the mission was militarized from its beginning. After September, when the DPKO had been formally appointed as lead department,

there was already at this stage an underlying uncertainty about the status of the mission and about what became known as its 'dual mandate' that made it both a peacekeeping and a peacebuilding mission. This uncertainty was to become a persistent theme throughout UNTAET's existence and was never entirely resolved.²²

This uncertainty could have been an opportunity for debate, but in reality this opportunity was quashed by DPKO's takeover of events. With such a large military presence in East Timor, DPKO's control had been assumed; the Secretary General confirmed this at the end of September with the formal announcement that DPKO was to run the mission. At the moment of its formulation, through to the creation of its structure and financing, the needs of the military and the judgments of military planners remained supreme.

In what ways could these debates and power wrangles in New York have shaped women's activism in East Timor? The militarized gender regime, that is, the combination of institutional arrangements, formal policies, informal assumption and organized relationships that gave rise to a privileging of militarized masculinity within the UNTAET structure, shaped women's organizing in very specific ways. Women's activism that centered on peacekeepers' behavior, such as rape and paternity issues, were the most marginalized forms of women's activism under UNTAET. The military was emphasized from the very beginning of the mission, and, through the institutionalized nature of militarization in the UN, a military masculinity was protected. Sandra Whitworth has commented on a similar experience in the UN's mission in Cambodia, UNTAC:

'Bringing the peace to Cambodia' in other words, was accomplished in part through the deployment of soldiers who assumed that their prerogatives as militarized men included access to prostitutes, as well as a freedom to pursue, harass, and assault local women.'²³

If peacekeepers feel they have the right to behave in sexually violent ways, and if the administrative structure that supports them condones their behavior through inaction, then opportunities for women's activism around this issue will be diminished.

So how did the militarisation of UNTAET affect women's activism and in what specific ways? As discussed earlier, two issues provide interesting contradictions: three cases of sexual assault by peacekeepers and the constituent assembly elections, and I'd like to go into a little detail here. My discussion here focuses on three alleged cases of rape that occurred in 2001. I have chosen these cases because of both the activism around the cases and the response of UNTAET. They were also the most public sexual assault cases in East Timor between 1999 and 2002.

The first case concerns the alleged rape of two children in the Western enclave of Oecusse by two peacekeepers in early 2001. The case generated quiet outrage among women's groups, international NGOs and the UNTAET Human Rights Unit. The administration did little to publicly acknowledge the issue until forced to by the Human Rights Unit.

²¹ Beauvais, 2001, pp. 1164-1165.

²² Kings College, 2002, p. 18.

²³ Whitworth, 2004, p. 13.

This reticence was due, in part, to the SOFA Agreement that waives peacekeepers' liability for their actions.²⁴ It is only in exceptional circumstances that the Secretary General may intervene in individual cases. This reticence is clear evidence of a militarized gender regime at work, for the UN assumes men will commit violent acts; UNTAET's disinclination to act on the allegations demonstrates their protection of militarized masculinity.

After being pushed by the SRSG, Sergio Vieira de Mello took the unprecedented step of requesting an investigation into the allegations. After the investigation, UNTAET spokesman Peter Biro stated, 'The UNTAET investigation has found strong grounds that an alleged act of sexual misconduct by U.N. soldiers occurred in Oecusse on the night of the 27th and 28th of May'.²⁵ A subsequent investigation was then undertaken by the Prosecutor-Generals' Office. However, despite the UNTAET evidence, the office concluded that there was not enough evidence to lay charges.

The second case concerned an East Timorese woman working as a maid in a hotel, who was raped by a Jordanian CIVPOL officer in late 2001. In this case, UNTAET acted more proactively, partly because the victim took steps to ensure that the rape was reported. Once again, the CIVPOL officer was immune from prosecution under the SOFA Agreement, however, the SRSG and de Mello intervened, and asked both Jordan and the Secretary General for permission to try the case under the operating judicial procedures in East Timor. This permission was granted, and the CIVPOL officer was charged and held in custody. To much protest, he was released on bail to await trial. The trial never came. The under-funded court system was not able to hold a hearing on the case until April 2002, by which time the CIVPOL officer had finished his contract. It was not within UNTAET's budget to fly him back to East Timor to face trial.²⁶

We can draw conclusions about the nature of women's activism from these examples. Clearly, UNTAET made some efforts to carry through the case of rape against the CIVPOL officer and the peacekeeper. However, UNTAET's combination of policies and institutional arrangements privileged a militarized masculinity, which, in turn, constrained opportunities for sustained activism. I would like to turn to a more positive example of women's activism in East Timor under UNTAET, the Constituent Assembly elections.

More successful activism was undertaken by women's groups around the Constituent Assembly elections, held on August 30, 2001. The elections were held to vote in an eighty-eight-member body charged with writing the Constitution for independent East Timor. It was also widely speculated that this body would form the Legislative Assembly in Independent East Timor.²⁷ The UN's Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) was to run the elections. Seventy-five of the elected members were to be national, with a further thirteen (one from each district) being elected at district level. Parties fielded a number of candidates, but people were asked to cast one vote, either for a party or an independent. Based on the number of votes garnered, a proportion of party members/independents would then serve on the Constituent Assembly.²⁸

Rede Feto, a network of women's organizations, lobbied both the Timorese National Consultative Council and UNTAET regarding the recommendation of a quota system for women in the Constituent Assembly elections. Apart from lobbying individuals within UNTAET and IEC, they, with the support of the NGO Forum, sent letters to

²⁴ Many argue that without a SOFA of this nature, countries would not offer their troops to UN missions. In other words, troop-contributing countries make this waiver a condition of their participation in peacekeeping missions. Interview with Simon Chesterman, Executive Director, Institute for International Law and Justice, New York University, Melbourne, June 10, 2004.

²⁵ 'UN peacekeepers in Timor face possible sex charges', *Reuters*, 3 August 2001.

²⁶ Conversation with Helen Brown, Assistant to the Deputy SRSG, 22 May 2002.

²⁷ These speculations proved to be correct, with the Constituent Assembly giving itself the authority to be the country's Parliament for a period of five years.

²⁸ *Observer Manual East Timor: Constituent Assembly Elections*, The Asia Foundation, Dili, 30 August 2001. On file with author.

the Secretary-General Kofi Annan and each member of the Security Council, outlining their justification and support for the quota system. Finally, UNTAET, as advised by the Independent Electoral Commission, received the recommendation negatively, arguing that it compromised the notion of free and fair elections.²⁹

Despite this rejection of the quota for women candidates, UNTAET put in place a number of affirmative action mechanisms to promote women's participation in the elections. The SRSG urged political parties to nominate women for winnable slots and to incorporate women's issues into party platforms, and suggested that extra broadcast time would be available if it was used for women candidates. As a result of this activism, a record 27 per cent of members elected to the Constituent Assembly were women.

So, despite rejection of the quota system, the activism leading up to the election and the persistence of NGOs to draw attention to the issue at the highest levels (the Security Council) resulted in a successful outcome. We need to be alert to these inconsistencies. This represents a change in political opportunities, but only of a very specific kind. Unlike the cases of sexual assault, UNTAET was prepared to engage with women's organizations and, although they did not formally endorse a quota system, they did undertake a number of informal measures to increase women's political participation.

Studying this period in Timorese history is important. Women's organizing, although often marginalized in national political analysis, gives us a clearer understanding of the gendered and militarized mechanisms at work within a state apparatus. Indeed, protests about lack of government policy are more illuminating than activism around existing policies, for they give us clues about which issues are receptive to feminist activism and which are not. For example, activism around domestic violence was not acted upon by UNTAET at all.³⁰ In contrast, increasing women's political participation was a major issue for UNTAET, and one in which they were proactive.³¹ Similarly, women's organizations were tenacious in their activism to increase women's political participation in the Constituent Assembly elections, while activism around sexual assault cases had a very short life.

So, to return to our initial question, did the creation of UNTAET create opportunities for women's activism? Well, yes, and no. In many instances, UNTAET provided the political climate, the resources and the support for women's organizations to campaign on issues of women's political participation. In other cases, such as allegations of sexual assault leveled against peacekeepers, UNTAET ignored women's activism. So, international institutions can do good things for women's activism in a country. They can also do bad things. In my mind, the way forward is to document some of these inconsistencies so that we can draw attention to them, and then act on them.

²⁹ Chesterman, 2001, p. 29.

³⁰ Kathryn Robertson, *Gender-Based Violence: Challenges and Ways Forward: a Report of Focus Groups in Four Districts*, International Rescue Committee, Dili, 2002.

³¹ 'Update on the Activities of the Gender Affairs Unit in the Constituent Assembly Political process', Gender Affairs Unit, UNTAET, Dili, 29 June 2001. On file with author.

Fernando Pires, Maria Zulmira, Joanita Madeira and Laura Avelina Gomes

Caritas Australia's Human Rights, Law and Justice Program, Timor-Leste

Slide 1

Title

Slide 2

History

- East Timorese culture does not provide much opportunity to discuss cases of sexual violation. The stigma placed on victims by communities makes them embarrassed to speak out on their cases.
- Cases of sexual violation resolved through traditional law does not value women, especially victims' opinions, and are often resolved between the families, ignoring the rights, wishes and feelings of the victims.
- During the war period, Indonesia used sexual violation as a weapon to weaken and dominate the resistance.

Slide 3

History (continued)

- During the war period, individuals had to resolve their cases by themselves and there was no support for victims. There was no confidence in the justice system, and people feared reporting to authorities since many cases involved the police and military.
- People's attitudes toward crime was that it involved an individual, and that individual alone could resolve it. Sexual violation was regarded as taboo, and could not be made public.
- Lack of access to information regarding this crime and appropriate means for one to seek resolution of this problem .

Slide 4

Work for 2001

- Between April 2001 and December 2004, (HRLJP) Caritas Australia in East Timor undertook activities especially directed at community education on the issue of sexual violation. The first training team comprised six women.
- Provided workshops for community members from the thirteen districts across East Timor.
- This training focused on leaders, church, women and youth. The objective of the training was to increase awareness of this crime and how to help victims.

Slide 5

Work for 2002 and 2003

- Based on the feedback received from the training conducted with communities, CA made changes to the sexual violation program.
- The new training was to concentrate on groups of men; the training period was extended, and training was directed at communities which most lacked access to information.

- The CA team also added six men as trainers to carry out this work.
- CA also looked for other means to disseminate information such as radio shows, posters, pamphlets, booklets and SPA.

Slide 6

Work for 2002 and 2003 (continued)

- Provided training to communities in seventeen sub-districts in five districts.
- Ran TOT for five groups from four districts to help them establish their own training teams on sexual violation.

Slide 7

Evaluation

- In December 2003, the DHLJ program was evaluated in a one-day workshop and through visits to the community organizations from Dili and districts that received training and small funds.
- The evaluation gave rise to recommendations that the program target only a few places geographically.

Slide 8

Evaluation (continued)

- The program should focus on places where the team has relationships with local NGOs
- It strengthens local NGOs' capacities to run their own training.
- It changes the focus from victim assistance to sexual violation prevention.

Slide 9

Program redesign

- Through the redesign done by an international advisor, the following four HRLJP program components were created:

Strong Partnership Empowered Community (SPEC)

- Work with four partner organizations in Oecussi and Lospalos districts to build their capacities, and together develop training materials on sexual violation prevention.

Slide 10

SAP (Social Awareness for Prevention of Abuses)

- Work to develop training materials and resources on sexual violation
- Sexual violation prevention manual
- Booklet
- Radio Drama
- Poster
- Pamphlet
- Radio show
- Bulletin

Slide 11

EAS Justice Program redesign

- Provide practical assistance to NGO Forum Peduli Wanita Oecussi to establish a shelter in order to assist victims get formal justice.
- Facilitate access to victim support services (counselling, courts, shelter, safe room).
- Provide practical assistance to national NGO Pradet Timor-Leste to establish a safe room at the Dili National Hospital.
- Establish a network for NGOs who work on this issue to improved co-ordination between them.

Slide 12

Traditional Justice Program redesign

- A pilot project to promote dialogue between traditional elders in order to ascertain the processes used when they deal with sexual violation cases.
- Seek appropriate ways to raise the awareness of traditional elders on human rights principles and women's rights and to identify whether those principles are present in traditional law and, if not, look for possible ways to incorporate or introduce them into traditional law.

Slide 13

Prevention Strategies from Partners

- O N E (Oanukani Nita Eceremo)
- Strengthen good relations with Government and community
- Socialisation
- Training for community and students
- Sub-district level campaigns.
- Sub-district level seminar/meetings.

Slide 14

Prevention Strategies from Partners (continued)

- CFEO (Centro Feto Englawe Oecusse)
- Work together with women NGOs in Oecusse
- Work with Atoni community radio
- Work together with Oecussi police VPU.

Slide 15

Prevention Strategies from Partners (continued)

- AMKV (Asosiasaun Mane Kontra Violensia)
- Workshops for the community
- Men and women's groups
- Students
- Local authorities
- Disseminate information on sexual violation prevention.

Slide 16

Prevention Strategies from Partners (continued)

- BIFANO (Binibu Faef Nome)
- Training for uitasae village chief, youth
- Use radio to promote the program
- Training for police VPU from Oesilo sub-district
- Promotion of women's rights in regard to sexual violation prevention (men and women's groups).
- Training for students from the Oe-silo sub-district high school
- PNTL/ F-FDTL

Slide 17

Thanks.

There will be justice when everyone respects women's rights.



Maria Zulmira

Claire Rowland

Women's Participation in Water and Sanitation Activities

Slide 1

Title

Slide 2

CWSSP's Activities

- Working in three districts
- Working through local NGOs to help priority rural communities develop a water system to meet their needs
- The community members make decisions about their system, build and maintain it for the future.

Slide 3

Why are women important?

- Daily water collection for household use
- Knowledge of water source condition, water requirements and community problems arising from water
- Maintain the new system
- Previous involvement in water systems.

Slide 4

Women's current involvement in CWSSP locations

- Sitting in meetings
- Cooking
- Labour
- Managing water rate
- Health promotion.

Slide 5

Barriers to women's participation

- Infrastructure
- Decision-making
- NGO Approach
- 'Not necessary'.

Slide 6

Unusual Stories

- Making decisions
- Skilled labour
- Managing their own work group
- Fixing their broken water system

Slide 7

Purpose of film

- Share experiences between communities
- Normalize women's participation
- Open minds to the community benefits of women taking on non-traditional roles.



Claire Rowland

Participants

Many people came together from Timor-Leste and around Australia to discuss the impact of international organizations on women in the world's newest nation. A list of organizations that provided support to the forum and to various participants is included on the final page of this report. Listed here are the participants from Timor-Leste who represented a wide range of views and experiences, and who were integral to the success of the forum.

Alita Verdial: Alita Verdial was born and educated in Maliana, and received a Diploma in Education from Jember University in East Java. She now lives in Dili. In 2003, Alita began to work for the Alola Foundation where she is a Projects Manager with a mentor from AVI Australia. Her work involves overseeing all of the Alola Foundation projects, funding proposals, donor relations, facilitating the smooth transition of funding between grants, and responsibility for operational costs.

Angelina Sarmiento: Executive Director, FONGTIL (East Timor NGO Forum).

Balbina da Conceição: Executive Director, KOVEFOKTIL (Co-operative of Veteran Women, Widows and Orphans Timor-Leste)

Beba Sequeira: Executive Director, Asia Pacific Support Collective for Timor-Leste and board member, REDE Feto (umbrella organization for women's groups in East Timor).

Benvinda Rodrigues: Women's Development Co-ordinator, Buka Hatene Centre, Baucau (supported by Friends of Baucau).

Cesarina Rocha: Personal Assistant to Madam Kirsty Sword Gusmao, Alola Foundation.

Claire Rowland: Claire works for the Australia-East Timor Community Water Supply and Sanitation Program (CWSSP) as the Capacity Building Adviser in Bobonaro District. This program works through local NGOs to assist communities build and self-manage water and sanitation facilities that meet their needs. Claire was involved in CWSSP's field study on the role of women and men in communities which are working together with CWSSP. She has also been involved in the development of gender training materials for CWSSP's program partners.

Fernando Pires: Program Co-ordinator, Human Rights Law and Justice Program for Caritas Australia.

Georgina Sarmiento: Georgina is the Area Co-ordinator for Turiscaí for Concern's program in Timor-Leste. She has a particular interest in gender issues.

Idelta Rodrigues: Project Assistant, UNFPA Gender Based Violence Program.

Joanita Madeira de Fatima: Joanita is the Project Officer for the Social Awareness for Prevention of Abuses (SAP) component of Caritas Australia in East Timor's Human Rights Law and Justice Program. SAP focuses on distributing information to communities in East Timor's districts, helping local NGOs with small grants, and preparing media materials and manuals for the prevention of sexual assault, child rights, traditional justice, prisoner rights, and empowering women. Joanita has also been involved with the women's organization Mate Restu Groups, based in the Suai district.

Joaquim da Fonseca: Joaquim da Fonseca currently works as the Human Rights Liaison Officer for the Human Rights Treaty Reporting Team of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Co-operation in Timor-Leste. Prior to this, he worked as the spokesperson and international campaign co-ordinator for Yayasan HAK, a Dili based organization advocating for human rights and justice.

Laura Abrantes: Gender Consultant for the Asia Pacific Collective for Timor-Leste.

Laura de Avelina Gomes: Laura has been working for Caritas Australia for the past three years in the Human Rights Law and Justice (HRLJ) Program. She has been involved in the production and distribution of information to the districts about the prevention of sexual violence and the assistance of victims. She has recently helped to redesign and form a strategic plan for the HRLJ Program. Laura is also a Project Officer working with Caritas's human rights partnership organizations in the Oecusse district.

Manuela Leong Pereira: Manuela is the Executive Director of Fokupers (Communication Forum for East Timor Women), a women's organization that since 2000 has been working for improved social, economic and political rights for women, against a backdrop of patriarchy and immense poverty. Manuela's expertise is in the areas of domestic violence care, advocacy and policy work, and women's community development.

Maria Agnes Bere: Maria Agnes is co-ordinator of the Women's Justice Unit at the Judicial System Monitoring Programme (JSMP). The Women's Justice Unit monitors all cases involving women before Timor-Leste's district courts and the court of appeal to ensure they comply with international human rights standards. The Women's Justice Unit also undertakes outreach activities using workshops, television and radio in order to enable more women to access the formal justice sector.

Maria Filomena de Fatima (Maia): Co-ordinator, Gender Based Violence, Office for Promotion of Equality, Prime Minister's Office.

Maria Zulmira Alves Soares: Maria has been working for four years with victims of sexual and domestic violence, and is currently employed in Caritas Australia's Human Rights Law and Justice (HRLJ) Program as a Human Rights Liaison Officer. As part of her role, Maria helps build the HRLJ program in the Oecusse district, working with the local Oecusse NGO, FPWO, and the national mental health NGO, Pradet. Maria has also been involved in ETWAVE.

Mario de Araujo: Mario is a founding member of AMKV (Asosiasaun Mane Kontra Violensia, or the Men's Association Against Violence) in Timor-Leste, and is a long-time social activist. For the past three years, he has worked for Oxfam Australia in Timor as an advocacy officer and national program co-ordinator. He is committed personally and professionally to promoting greater gender and social equality, particularly at the community level.

Natalina Ximenes: Natalina is the Administrative Officer for KOVEFOKIL (Co-operative of Veteran Women, Widows and Orphans Timor-Leste).

Outcomes

One of the activities at the forum was to develop a draft set of principles to guide international organizations in their work with women in East Timor. On Saturday 10 September, participants broke into six working groups to discuss ideas for a draft set of principles, with each group coming up with their own list of suggestions. Initially, there were forty-four principles in total across the six groups. These were shared and discussed with all the participants at a joint session, and were then amalgamated by the facilitators into a reduced set of principles that were in turn deliberated on in each of the workshops. At the end of the day, thirteen principles were displayed on stage. The draft set of principles represent the work and ideas of one group of people working for one day. As such, it is hoped that these principles will be treated as a starting point for a much fuller discourse in the future, with the principles and the ideas behind them further debated and refined by all those interested in the impact of international organizations on women in East Timor.

Workshop Summaries

The following workshop summaries were put together by students from the BA International Studies program at RMIT University.

Workshop 1

The workshop was opened by Robyn from the Institute of Cultural Affairs, who welcomed everyone to the session and explained her role as a workshop facilitator. Robyn described the purpose of the morning workshops within the context of the conference, as a means to gather draft principals to guide work with women in East Timor. These draft principles would then be collated from all six workshops and be condensed to form a set of draft principles that represented all the themes and concerns brought up in the workshops. In the afternoon, each workshop would then examine in detail two or three principles and finalize their wording. Finally, these would all be brought together to form the final set of draft principles.

The role of reflection was highlighted as essential to the day's proceedings and central to the way the facilitation process operates. Robyn emphasised her role as a facilitator rather than as a participant. Her role was simply to make it easier for the group to share their experiences and gain the lessons from them. The workshop, like the conference, was intended to be a process that encouraged participation and worked to harness the knowledge from all those attending.

Robyn brought the participants' attention to the guiding question for discussion: 'What principles will inform our collaborative work with women in East Timor?' The workshop was intended to give participants the opportunity to share experiences, ascertain the findings from these experiences and use these learnings to produce draft principles that could guide work with women in East Timor in the future.

Participants within the workshop came from a variety of backgrounds. These included local and international NGOs within East Timor, the East Timorese government, NGOs in Australia with connections to East Timor, employees from councils in Victoria and New South Wales, AusAID employees, visual artists, journalists, educators and postgraduate students. The group reflected upon who they were as a group and why they were there. It was noted that within the room there was a myriad of experiences and extensive knowledge of working with women in East Timor. Some group members suggested everyone came together due to a shared interest in and passion for East Timor and/or women. Another described the group as people who want to have relationships with each other. Others were surprised that within Australia there were so many people that held an interest in East Timor. Many commented on the high level of skill and talent in the room. The likelihood of a diversity in viewpoints in regards to what issues needed to be addressed

was acknowledged. This prompted the suggestion that it was likely most people in the room held strong political and ideological views. In light of this, the participants recognized the need to be clear about the process of the workshop, and ensure discussion remained relevant to the guiding question if it was to be effective.

In order to illustrate the way to gain insights from experience, Robyn told a story of a friend who had been involved in an unsuccessful development program in East Timor. The program had intended to implement a food waste recycling program in a village, only to be told by community members on arrival that there was no food wastage within the community. A participant identified the problem in this situation as the imposition of projects upon the East Timorese. Participants suggested a possible lesson from this story could be the need to ask and address the needs of the people with whom any development program is working.

Workshop participants began to share stories of their experience working with women in East Timor. One participant expressed concern about instances when AusAID had not listened, and hence they felt the organisation was arrogant. This led to a discussion about the role of donor agencies. Some felt that because donor agencies are so far removed from the reality on the ground it can be difficult to gain support from these agencies for programs development workers and local communities feel are important. Some participants felt this occurs more frequently the larger the donor agency becomes. Many asked the question, 'How can we get donors to listen?' There was a concern that politics often determines where funding goes, not the needs of the East Timorese people. One participant highlighted the fact that all donor agencies have many competing interests. For example, AusAID is responsible to the Australian people, and they must remain accountable to them. Some participants were of the belief that we need to look beyond the organizations and laying blame, and think about the individuals in the organization, because it is at the individual level that change occurs.

Other participants expressed concern at the ease with which the needs and wants of the East Timorese are overlooked. International organizations go in to East Timor with a set of expectations, and in their excitement forget about the people. The East Timorese government model was used as an example of this. Some acknowledged that while this is an excellent Western structure it now needs to be translated to make sense within the context of East Timor. A possible lesson from this was identified: the importance of consulting with the East Timorese and recognizing that the people best able to come up with solutions are those who experience the problems.

Participants then broke up into small groups to share stories and gather the insights from them. Robyn reminded everyone of the need to find the lessons in our experiences and to focus on coming up with principles that could guide collaborative work with East Timorese women.

After ten minutes of small group discussion, the groups came back together to share the stories they had heard and the insights they had gained from these. One participant told of their experience as an East Timorese refugee in Australia. From this experience, the group learnt that a diversity of histories and experiences exist for East Timorese women. They proposed a possible principle from this: to learn of and value the diversity of experiences and cultures in East Timor.

Another participant talked about how much she realized she had to learn when she went to East Timor. She felt this forced her to realize how important it was to listen and to keep an open mind.

Others mentioned that while in East Timor they had been overwhelmed by the stories of trauma many of the local people shared with them. The lesson gained from this was the need to address this form of vicarious trauma without reimposing it on the people one is working with. A commonality in the experience of women in Australia and East Timor was recognized by some participants, although this did differ in severity.

Many participants stressed the importance of openness and working in a spirit of friendship. This was of particular importance to the East Timorese women in the room. Others in the group felt that the word 'friendship' was not appropriate and should be replaced with 'partnership'. The need to respect the cultural background of the East Timorese and not impose ones values upon them was also stressed. One participant commented that being prepared to adopt and learn the ways of the culture one is working in is of utmost importance.

Participants then broke again into smaller groups, and worked on writing down the findings from the discussion. These were then shared with the whole group, and there was an attempt to consolidate them into similar themes. These findings were as follows:

- Walking with the Timorese
- Friendship in the workplace
- The importance of friendship
- Openness is the key
- Open communication is needed early and often
- Understanding intricacies and local gender relations
- Sensitive to learning culture
- Acknowledge different conceptions of time, but do not dismiss the possibility of change
- Respect for different working styles/cultures
- The attitudes and values of donors may be patronizing and not constructive
- All parties should compromise in a donor relationship
- Sensitivity and providing help when needed
- Provide basic needs of people
- Provide opportunity to express the needs and wants of the East Timorese
- Commonality of women's issues
- Opportunities to express needs and wants of women
- Formalizing actions on women's issues
- Finding out what the local histories are
- Different histories
- Task oriented
- Effective management
- Time continuity to reach understanding with people

From these findings, the group identified the principles that could guide them in their work in East Timor. Robyn stressed that the exact wording was not of great importance at this stage as they would be brought together with the other workshops and discussed in detail later in the day. These ten principles were formed by roughly consolidating the points above:

1. Developing equal, respectful, friendships, trusting and partnerships
2. Clear and agreed shared goals
3. Mutual openness in communication
4. Mutual sensitivity and cross-cultural awareness

5. Mutual sensitivity to individual capacity and infrastructure capacity
6. Considering the implications for women in whatever we do
7. Ask the East Timorese people what they want, and listen and act on what they say
8. Acknowledging the innate existence of human capacity
9. Ensuring sustainability – triple bottom line
10. Knowledge of collective and personal histories is essential to effective relationships.

These principles were combined with those produced in the other five workshops to produce eleven draft principles. Workshop 1 was assigned to work on principles 10 and 11. At the beginning of the workshop these principles were as follows.

10. Understand and work with the current social political reality
11. Ensure broad geographical coverage beyond Dili

In response to discussion that had occurred in the main conference forum, many participants expressed a need to include a commitment in the principles to the East Timorese Government Development Plan. This was seen as being of extreme importance by many in the room, especially the East Timorese. The need to recognize both the National Women's Congresses was stressed by many participants. Many were also of the opinion that the national policy of the OPE should be highlighted in principle 11.

Some in the room were concerned with the use of the terms 'us' and 'we' in the principles. They felt there was a need to address the actor the principle is referring to, be it the East Timorese, westerners in East Timor or just those in the workshop. Some also felt that the term 'principle' was too authoritative, and suggested this term be replaced with 'guideline'. Some were of the opinion that performance indicators needed to be included to measure if the principles produced were still effective in five years time, or at all.

Once again participants stressed the importance of prioritizing the needs of the East Timorese rather than the logic of governments and organizations. They were of the opinion that the interests of government were often incompatible with those of the local people, and suggested that while NGOs can try to work across these, sometimes they remain in conflict and are not at all compatible.

The workshop then divided into two groups to finalize and amend principles 10 and 11. The final outcome of these were as follows:

Principle 10

Understand and improve Timor-Leste's political and social realities.

- Acknowledge NDP within this process
- Acknowledge civil society.
- Acknowledge collective and personal histories.
- Acknowledge existing state, church, and traditional structures.

Principle 11

Commit to a just distribution of services and resources across Timor-Leste

- Foster new projects in districts because there are many opportunities for new initiatives in the rural districts.
- Ensure that resources and services reach the poorest and the most vulnerable.
- Provide resources to ensure that women from the districts can participate in and be represented at decision-making forums and capacity-building programs.

Workshop 2

Introduction

The group session commenced with an introduction to the aims and objectives of the workshop drawing attention to the focus question: 'What principals will inform our collaborative work with women in Timor-Leste?' Following this, it was emphasized that the workshop could touch on all possible issues of interest to the group as the groups had been assigned no specific theme to explore.

The group was encouraged to share with one another their interests in Timor-Leste, and these introductions revealed an impressive diversity within the room.

Discussion groups

The next task was to divide into small groups around the room to share experiences that have led to an understanding about how working with women of Timor-Leste could have been done more collaboratively. These experiences were to be discussed with a view to informing the principles. A member of the workshop suggested that both things that did work and those that didn't work should be considered during this discussion.

Groups of three or four were formed, and members discussed a variety of experiences among themselves for several minutes. Before coming back to the workshop, groups were asked to compile a list of ideas that emerged within the individual sessions, and to select one point as their most important and another as their boldest.

Presenting the ideas

The following ideas that emerged from each individual group were regarded as the most important:

- Consultation with people on real needs; not the imposition of our expectations and values. Long-term collaboration that results in trust. Allow time for relationships.
- Building genuine relationships (structure of trust) through meaningful dialogue and forums for women.
- Be flexible, don't take yourself too seriously.
- Women can do anything required in the development process, so should be involved at all stages in development activities.
- Communication requires listening and consulting so that trust can be developed. Two-way learning is essential.

The following ideas were regarded as the boldest of the group findings:

- Learn the language in order to listen well.
- Learn, understand and respond appropriately. Learning about the extreme tragedy of many women creates a greater commitment to support Timor-Leste's women's struggles. The political becomes personal.
- Planning of long-term programming with clear focus.
- Take time, let things develop slowly. It's our project but it's their life.

Following this, similar points were grouped together thematically to allow for any remaining ideas to be added to these themes or create an additional theme. As the themes were created, key words were drawn out, and gradually a principle was coined from the ideas.

The principles

1) The first theme is comprised of the following ideas:

- Consultation with people on real needs; not the imposition of our expectations and values. Long-term collaboration that results in trust. Allow time for relationships.
- Building genuine relationships (structure of trust) through meaningful dialogue and forums for women.
- ‘Relationships’ are fundamental to all work at all stages of engagement, with each other, with outside groups and agencies.
- Equal not hierarchical working relationships between international and local staff.

From this, the participants extracted some key words including ‘Relationships’, ‘Trust’, ‘Equality’ and ‘Allowing time’. Some were of the opinion that relationships are an activity and important; they should be valued and resourced, and it takes time to develop trust and equity within them. However, others were concerned by what was meant by the term ‘resourced’, which led to a debate about how relationships need time and money, and that it should not be assumed that they develop outside the work environment. In addition to this, some members of the workshop were uncomfortable with the term ‘equality’, stating that they often did not feel equal to the Timorese in the workplace, and that observation had led them to believe that the Timorese often came off with less in a relationship. It was then pointed out that the term ‘equity’ was being used instead of ‘equality’, as a means of emphasizing fairness within such relationships.

2) The second theme comprised the following ideas:

- Learn the language in order to listen well.
- Communication requires listening and consulting so that trust can be developed. Two-way learning is essential.

The key terms in this theme were ‘Listen’, ‘Communication’, ‘Two-way’ and ‘Learn’. From this, participants believed that the principle should essentially state that communication is about two-way listening and learning—with an emphasis on that order, considering one must listen in order to learn. Some members of the group pointed out that the principle needed to be made more specific from a women’s point of view, suggesting that ‘listening to women’ was an important point to add. Additionally, it was suggested that it was essential to this principle to provide forms and opportunities for communication so that it was about listening and learning.

While this discussion was occurring, other group members became concerned with the use of the term ‘communication’. It was argued that the term was very abstract, and that what people learn from these communication processes and the actual experience of communication needed to be considered. Participants offered that communication is, in essence, an exchange of information and a form of exploration.

3) The next theme was comprised of the following ideas:

- Women as facilitators will encourage greater participation of women, and 50 percent of the team should be women.
- Women can do anything required in the development process so should be involved at all stages in development activities.

This theme led to a debate about the proportion of women involved in projects. The opening statement suggested women should be involved in all stages and levels, with at least 50 percent involvement. However, some argued that the types of issues should determine who is consulted, and that this should be considered before applying quotas. It was then pointed out that ideas were getting confused, that the facilitators and people

involved in projects are two different groups, and, therefore, that it is important, regardless of the issue, to maintain a 50 percent representation of female staff to reinforce their equal importance within the broader community. It was finally decided that women's involvement should be encouraged as much as possible.

4) The following theme was regarded as a principle in itself:

- A clear mapping of organizations overseas and in Timor-Leste (who is doing what, etcetera) so women workers know who to contact and how.

5) The next theme was comprised of the following ideas:

- Learn, understand and respond appropriately. Learning about the extreme tragedy of many women creates a greater commitment to support Timor-Leste's women's struggle. The political becomes personal.
- Patience. Western expectations will be challenged!
- Operate within cultural and experiential framework initially, and change from within.

The key ideas within this theme were thought to concern the idea of 'culture', a commitment to cross-cultural communication and respect for values. In addition, the notion of 'dialogue' was extended to emphasize the importance of context, and that an understanding of the context and cultural values within Timor-Leste was integral to this process.

Some group members were uncomfortable with the term 'patience', regarding it as somewhat patronizing. It was explained that this term was in fact referring to patience towards western workers within Timor-Leste who needed to work on not imposing their own values on the situation.

6) The next theme focused on the following ideas:

- Take time, let things develop slowly. It's our project but it's their life.
- Planning of long-term programming with clear focus.
- Guarantee practical outcomes, not just consultation and reporting.
- Engaging women initially is best done at the *uma* (family) or *aldeia* level, beginning with small groups of women who already know each other.

This theme was mainly concerned with the key ideas of 'Time', 'Sustainability', 'Practical outcomes' and 'Focus'. Group members were largely of the opinion that women needed to be more involved in the frame regarding strategies for engagement.

7) The final theme consisted of the following two ideas:

- Need for flexibility within planning to cope with the nature of change in Timor. Things don't happen as planned, for example the Human Rights/Serious Crimes Unit.
- Be flexible. Don't take yourself too seriously!

Due to time constraints, a general consensus agreed that the final point in this collection would be enough to constitute the principle without debate.

The workshop session ended with participants agreeing that the process had been a very successful and productive one.

Session Two

The second session opened with a brief introduction of the eighth and ninth principles to be discussed.

General thoughts about the principles were offered around the group with ideas about what needed to be addressed in this session. The general consensus was that the principles had 'lost their teeth' and they needed to be made more dynamic. It was agreed that this should be the objective of session, with a commitment to avoid jargon given the diversity of the forum. In addition, more detail was required as the principles were too vague as they stood, and it was suggested that dot points would be useful to help expand upon the principles. Rather than splitting into smaller groups, as had been done in the previous session, it was agreed that the diversity of opinions were important for discussing both principles, so the group remained as a whole.

Following this, concern about the wording of the focus question was raised with some members wishing to define the term 'our'. After the term was clarified as meaning 'foreigners', it was requested that it be removed from the question; for most of those working in Timor-Leste the majority of their staffs comprised Timorese people.

A discussion followed on how to build upon Principle 8. The group wanted to bring back more of their original principles into this principle, believing it had become too passive. It was decided it needed to be made into something more tangible as a way to encourage women to be more active.

While some members of the group believed the principle was complete, they agreed that it needed to focus more on the different capacities of women and men, or their strengths and weaknesses. They felt that it needed to address the differences between men and women, as there may be more specific skills that women need. In addition to this, it was agreed that the principle needed to address how to engage and, simultaneously, provide opportunities for women. It was argued that women need to be involved from the beginning and need to be brought to the forefront. This was believed to ensure women have power in the decision-making process, especially if it is a program for women.

The final revised principle was agreed to as follows:

Enable women to be more active in decision making, especially decisions that affect their day-to-day lives.

The ninth principle was discussed in a similar way. The main concern with regard to this principle was the notion of culture and what was meant by it. A background to the situation was offered: people recognize the current culture does not enable women to participate in the decision-making process, and this is regarded as the traditional culture in Timor-Leste. Some group members questioned whether this was the 'culture' referred to in the principle or whether it was a new tradition that enabled women to be more active. A debate followed on whether the aim should be to focus on the past or create a new tradition; only when this was established could talk begin on what to do with this tradition or culture.

In this discussion, other members argued that 'culture' is not a static concept. It was felt that it should be regarded as always changing and evolving, and, as such, that the principle should be directed to the future. These members believed the starting point should be the current situation, which needed to be worked with and understood even while working towards another goal.

This argument prompted a further suggestion: that the answer is to delve into the known history of the culture, drawing upon the deeply valued achievements and practices of the past. In other words, it is important to look not just at a static or current situation, but at what made sense to the community from a historical perspective. The emphasis here was on the search for an articulation of what is deeply valued and what has been most successful in previous situations for the people of Timor-Leste.

A suggestion was put forward for an extension to the principle that reads:

- Articulate and build on deeply valued practices and experiences of the past to develop a future program.

This was accepted, however, group members were still concerned with the body of the principle and that the term 'culture' was too abstract. The issues emerging from the differences in how people work was thought to be an important aspect to consider. The question of whether the term should be left in or completely reframed was raised, and as a result the group agreed that it needed to be further refined so as to be understood from a variety of perspectives.

The final version of the principle was agreed to as follows:

- *Respect and celebrate the diversity of Timorese culture and leadership that supports the participation of women.*
- *Articulate and build on deeply valued practices and experiences from the past.*

Workshop 3

Themes, debates, ideas and experiences

Workshop 3 began with each participant briefly introducing themselves. From this first activity it was clear that in the room was a wealth of knowledge, experience and resources in the fields of development, gender and East Timor.

The guiding question of the conference, 'What principles will inform our collaborative work with women in Timor-Leste?', was considered and analysed next. One of the workshop members believed this question would 'help to shape actions and outcomes' of future work between Australia and East Timor. Some members of the workshop believed that the question and the principles referred to would provide a great 'opportunity to share ideas between Australian women and East Timor women.' Overall, there seemed a genuine consensus that by participating in the conference and considering these topics development was headed in the right direction.

Small Group Discussion One

At this point, after briefly considering the guiding question, the workshop was divided up into small groups for discussions. In these groups, the participants were asked to consider these two questions: 'What have we done?' and 'What worked well?'. From this reflective activity the workshop was drawing on the participant's knowledge and experience. This produced some valuable insights, the first of which was that previously internal East Timor agencies and NGOs (primarily the smaller ones) had often been used by international agencies simply as an entry point into both East Timor and the development field. Workshop members reported that international agencies had often worked for their own benefit rather than East Timor's.

Another very important view that came out of this first small group discussion was a comment about agencies and individuals coming into East Timor to work. This comment came from someone living in East Timor who believed there were three important things that people coming into the country to work should have: preparation, a willingness and ability to adjust to the culture and climate, and an appreciation of the East Timorese people.

Small Group Discussion Two

After this first reflective discussion, a new question, 'Learning attained?', was presented, and the small groups each had to produce several principles that they individually had attained. From this, twenty-four principles were produced. While some of these overlapped, all had merit, and were important and informed.

Some of the themes these principles covered were:

- transparency and honesty

- being willing to adapt/adjust to the cultural and physical differences of a foreign country
- respecting each other, our cultures and our differences
- beginning with the experience and knowledge that the East Timorese people already have and possess
- openness and flexibility
- valuing relationships
- coming with a smile
- being prepared to go slowly and be patient
- ensuring proper understanding and communication, particularly in respect to the language and cultural divide
- ongoing learning and reflection
- ensuring activities, programs and initiatives are complementary and not overlapping.

After this, the group refined these themes and primary principles into eight principles:

- Value practical learning and insight
- Mutual respect of difference
- Sharing and learning from stories
- Appropriate programs
- Valuing relationships
- Build upon our experience
- Slowly but surely
- Ensure clear, two-way reciprocal communication

Afternoon session

In the afternoon workshop session, the participants were assigned two of the main themes to be refined into final principles. The aim of this was to ensure that the final principles reflected the primary principles from which they were drawn.

The first principle that workshop three was given was 'Build on skills/capacity already present'. This principle had been drawn from the morning session, specifically from the following primary principles:

- Build on skills/capacity already present
- Mutual sensitivity to individual capacity and infrastructure capacity
- Appropriate programs.

The participants decided that to improve upon the principle it was most important to recognize that skills/capacity is already present within East Timor. The notion of starting afresh and believing there is nothing to work with is to completely lose sight of the capacity already present. After much deliberation, it was agreed that the final principle would be:

'Identify and build on skills and capacity already present.'

The second principle the workshop was allocated was 'Develop mutual openness/trust in communication'.

This was derived from the primary principles of:

- ensuring clear two-way communication

- sharing and learning from stories
- building our experience
- developing partnerships through two-way dialogue
- creating trust through honesty, openness, transparency and flexibility.

To improve on this principle the workshop highlighted the importance of how we communicate and work together, both within East Timor and within Australia. One participant highlighted regular communication, whether formal or informal, as being the key to success. By doing this, they were able to more successfully collaborate and able to avoid the overlapping of projects. Another participant spoke of communication as representing a broad spectrum of interaction. The agreed principle was:

‘Ensure mutual, open and honest communication together in East Timor and in Australia inclusively at the family, community and government levels.’

Workshop 4

This workshop brought together a breadth of experience from the Australian NGO sector, including larger development organizations well established in East Timor, and smaller civil society groups engaged in building solidarity and friendships with communities in East Timor. The depth of experience and the insight of East Timorese participants to the conference provided a fruitful forum for a discourse on the challenges and possibilities of working collaboratively with women in East Timor.

A critical challenge identified by the workshop was the forging of authentic and sustainable relationships between Australian organizations and East Timorese women to further the development needs of East Timor as identified by the East Timorese. By failing to foster authentic relationships, a benefactor and recipient relationship tended to emerge rather than a genuine partnership driven by local needs and recognising local capacities and strengths.

Relationships which assumed a benefactor/recipient nature are often characterized by unclear expectations from both the East Timorese and internationals. There is concern that a culture of dependency has defined NGO relations in East Timor. The failure to articulate clearly the intentions and capabilities of internationals working in East Timor often leads to unfulfilled expectations, threatening the trust and openness necessary for good development practice.

The forging of authentic relationships, however, remains a significant challenge. Communication is difficult because of poor information and communication technologies in East Timor, language differences, and the different cultural contexts of the East Timorese and international groups. Without personal contacts or resources to travel to East Timor it was difficult to partner with East Timorese women’s organizations.

These difficulties accounted for Australian NGOs choosing to collaborate with strong, well established East Timorese women’s NGOs, such as the Alola Foundation, in an attempt to forge sustainable partnerships. This tendency is symptomatic of a centralization of resources in the urban centre of Dili.

East Timorese women recognized this as a particular risk for rural women. Because of a concentration on Dili based groups, rural grassroots NGOs seek to link themselves with groups like Alola, leading to a centralized model of development partnership. There was concern this will contribute to a disempowerment of grassroots impetus and control over their own development objectives. In some cases this shift was interpreted as failing to address core basic needs in rural areas.

It was further recognized that the empowerment of grassroots NGOs was important for their potential contribution to the shaping of policy in East Timor. It was recognized as

important that development partnerships do not disregard or bypass the role of the East Timorese government. The structures and process of governance which should capably address the needs of the nation are still being formed. International NGOs should be sensitive to the work of the East Timorese government in directing development work. Strong relationships between international and East Timorese NGOs and the East Timorese government are important for the monitoring of NGO activity, ensuring a co-ordinated response to need and contributing to policy formation.

Workshop 5

The group discussion began with the participants introducing themselves and giving a brief statement about their involvement or interest with women in Timor-Leste. The group was composed of a variety of people who belong to organizations that work with Timorese women, have travelled and worked in Timor-Leste, or are planning to go there. The participants' interests covered the areas of health, education, fundraising, promoting women's issues, working with grassroot NGOs, and working with children in Timor-Leste.

The group then divided in two to discuss experiences of working with women in Timor-Leste. Positive and negative experiences were discussed to try and find a way to identify what works best in a particular situation. The issues discussed dealt with some basic guidelines to follow when working with Timorese women and the difficulties that the participants have faced through their experiences whilst working in Timor-Leste. The discussions in the groups raised some very sensitive issues, and overall it was a fast moving and complex discussion.

The group discussion began with the question, 'What was the most pressing problem facing the women of East Timor?'

In response to this, the issue of domestic violence was quickly brought to our attention by one of the group members. They pointed out that domestic violence is not a new issue as it predates the Portuguese and was exacerbated during Indonesian occupation. One participant made the point that domestic violence had not been properly addressed in her own organization. Furthermore, she felt that many international organizations do not give high priority to this very sensitive issue, and went on to note the difficulties in trying to get international organizations to latch onto ideas and developments that are occurring at the grassroots level.

Domestic violence is not an issue that East Timorese women will raise with an 'outside' organization. Rather, it was suggested, it is something that they feel they must deal with themselves. When domestic violence does occur, women don't tell anyone about it as they think it is part of their own culture, and women don't want to report these events because they will be in big trouble when they return home. At the moment, organizations are trying very hard to work with Timorese women to raise this issue and to solve it.

There were a number of other questions considered in the workshop: What can international organizations learn from this experience? What are the insights they can gain to help improve the way in which they work with women in Timor-Leste? Essentially, what can these organizations do to help the Timorese women who are experiencing domestic violence?

Some participants in the workshop stated that Timorese women are learning a lot from international organizations that train them in languages, and they are learning about how to deal with experiences of domestic violence. Organizations are teaching the Timorese women how to work on their own, without men, so that if they are in a dangerous situation they are able to survive it without men.

Subsequently, some general rules or observations were made when dealing with Timorese women:

- Listen and be attentive to the culture of Timor-Leste.
- Respect the way that women dress.
- Learn some basic conversation (in Tetun) and provide international workers with a course in Timorese culture. Learning a culture is much like learning a language, not just for international organizations but also for friendship groups working with women in Timor-Leste.

Many of the mistakes that foreigners make when working in Timor-Leste are accidental; the result of not having a proper understanding of the cultural norms. East Timorese women don't expect international workers to dress like them, but wearing inappropriate clothes can be seen by them as an insult and make it very difficult to actively work with them.

It is imperative to follow Timor's agenda; don't try to push your ideas onto them, and let the ideas and developments flow naturally.

There were two things identified that should be avoided when working in Timor-Leste:

- Never promise something that you can not deliver. Say that you'll try or that you will do your best, but never promise
- Don't ask for something that you are not sure you need or want, because if you don't use it, it will be seen as huge insult. This goes for information as well.

One of the participants asked a question to the East Timorese women that were in the group: 'Is there a particular way of thinking or mentality that groups should have when working with women in Timor-Leste?' It was a significant question, which received this lengthy response:

Timor-Leste has just started to rise up from the worst destruction. In terms of knowledge, it is very low. So at the moment they are very open to accept any help, they accept any sort of help in culture and learning. In Indonesian time, school was not open for girls and women and for everybody. International organizations can help financially by helping women and girls at least to write their own name and try to get girls to go to school by sponsoring them to go to tertiary and teaching school.

It is good to ask questions of the Timorese, ask lots of questions rather than just looking around and talking to the other foreigners. Especially when working with women's groups, you have to be patient and not expect fast results. It takes time. The most important thing to do is to help them develop management and administrative skills so that they can keep track of funding they receive.

The workshop groups came together and shared their learning experiences. These were placed on the wall so the group could begin to make their way from the experiences shared to developing six draft principles. The two groups made similar findings:

- Respect the process. Don't expect too much, too fast, and be patient.
- Ask questions and engage
- The importance of establishing long term people-to-people friendships and delivering.
- Focus on specific groups and people who have the knowledge and skills of the local environment and community, and work only with them in order to reach the wider community.
- Focus on literacy for women and girls.

- Don't ask for something, including information, if you aren't going to fully use it because it may seem as an insult to do so.
- There are difficulties in balancing accountabilities and standards with the local community.
- Understand the cultural context.
- Follow the Timorese direction, rather than imposing your own agenda and processes.
- Build strong interpersonal relationships and friendships, and respond quickly.
- Never promise anything unless you can deliver.
- Learning about a culture is very difficult; it is like learning a language.
- Recognize the diversity of women; don't assume they are all the same, and avoid stereotypes.
- Acknowledgement and understand cultural expectations relating specifically to children and women.
- Be aware of our colonial mindset as visitors.
- Respect dress, speaking and basic language skills, at least learn basic conversation of language and dialect of the people that you are working with.
- Follow Timor's agenda not your own.
- Building capacity not just skills, but also resources.

From this point, the objective was to produce a set of draft principles. There were obvious themes and commonalities throughout these, including cultural understanding, capacity building, recognizing diversity, and leadership.

After much discussion and debate the following six draft principles were developed, which reflected the issues discussed in the smaller groups:

1. Build on skills that are already present.
2. Commit to person-to-person relationships.
3. Respect Timorese culture and leadership.
4. Have realistic expectations (related to resources, skills, etcetera)
5. Focus on capacity building
6. Respect the diversity of the people we are working with.

Workshop 6

The discussion and dynamics of this group were very productive. The awareness and patience of group members through the translating process was appreciated by all. It allowed a smooth flow of interesting topics and varied experiences to be expressed. Most members of the group had spent a significant amount of time working in the field in Timor-Leste, creating a wonderful exchange of ideas and experiences.

In the first part of the morning, the group divided into four smaller groups, enabling a more efficient way of communicating and generating a plethora of ideas. Each person was able to express and share their experiences. Each group then presented their key issues and topics to the whole group. This proved to be very successful, providing a platform of ideas to spring from.

The discussion highlighted evident trends drawn from previous projects, in particular, that too often the focus of projects is short-term, and follow-up or monitoring is, for the most part, not enforced. As a result of this the integrity of projects and its objectives can be lost.

Another trend discussed was the tendency to just throw money at women's issues without considering the impact and gravity of the issues. The integrity of the projects was criticized also for a lack of foresight regarding ongoing management and sustainability. The focus of the group then shifted to a consideration of personal values of individuals within international organizations. These stressed that as a foreigner you need to be aware of your own ideologies and expectations, have the ability for self-reflection, and understand that you are impacting on the people you are working with. Moreover, your focus as an international worker should be on what the Timorese want and not your organizational needs. This then led to a discussion of how crucial it is to enable and empower the community to participate in assessing their own needs.

The importance of acknowledging and understanding the cultural barriers to participation was explored. In particular, the different dynamics of participation in community meetings held in the presence of men was compared to meetings involving only women. The group then recognized the need for appropriate steps to be taken towards allowing forums for women only.

Another issue addressed was the influences and parameters of existing institutions and how crucial it is for international organizations to recognize, consider and involve these structures when designing projects. An example given reinforced the fact that if the organization does not work or involve the government in their proposal or design, the project will be inherently unsustainable. A balance is fundamental.

A discussion around the church and other existing power relations involved in traditional structures was extremely interesting.

The need for briefing and debriefing members of international organizations when involved in projects was also raised.

The Timorese women in the group identified three major obstacles they believe confront international organizations working in East Timor: culture, human resources and money. These obstacles seemed to be, essentially, the underlying themes of our discussion.

By the end of the morning session, the group had created eight key guidelines that could help with collaborating in future work by international organizations in Timor. (See the 'Initial Draft Principles' document in this report).

After lunch, the dialogue of the group was even more fluid, perceptive and integrated. The main focus was on capturing the different perceptions and thoughts in relation to what extent and capacity men should be involved. The integral role of engaging men and making them part of the positive development of women was articulated. Men's awareness and sensitivity towards traditional structures that may inhibit women's potential, participation and growth towards independence was explored.

The group also had to refine one of the principles that had been created in the morning session:

Focus on education and capacity as fundamental to develop status of women.

The group had a common aversion to the word 'capacity'; it seemed too general, loaded and not conducive to the context. A brainstorming session produced a more refined principle:

Focus on education and maximizing and developing skills which enable women to achieve their full potential.

This was a truly wonderful weekend of reflection, dialogue and collaboration. Not only was the networking of ideas and concepts successful but there also networking on a social and professional level.

Draft Principles

Principle 1

- Value relationships and take time to develop mutual trust and respect.

Principle 2

- Commit to long term partnerships.

Principle 3

- Work together towards long term outcomes which are:
 - Economically, environmentally, and culturally sustainable,
 - Mutually agreed, and
 - Achievable.

Principle 4

- Women in Timor-Leste shall define their own needs and goals and it is the responsibility of international organizations to respond to these.

Principle 5

- Identify and build on skills and capacity already present.

Principle 6

- Ensure mutual, open and honest communication together in East Timor and in Australia inclusively at the family, community and government levels.

Principle 7

- Focus on education, as well as maximising and developing the skills which enable women to achieve their full potential.

Principle 8

- Enable women to be active in decision making, especially in those decisions that impact on their day to day lives.

Principle 9

- Respect and celebrate diversity of Timorese culture and leadership that supports the participation of women
- Articulate and build on deeply valued practices and experiences from the past.

Principle 10

- Understand and improve Timor-Leste's political and social realities:
 - Acknowledge the National Development Plan (NDP) within this process
 - Acknowledge civil society
 - Acknowledge collective and personal histories
 - Acknowledge existing state, church, and traditional structures.

Principle 11

- Commit to a just distribution of services and resources across Timor-Leste through:
 - Fostering new projects in districts because there are many opportunities for new initiatives in the rural districts especially Oecusse and Covalima

- Ensuring that resources and services reach the poorest poor and the most vulnerable
- Providing resources to ensure that women from the districts can participate in and be represented at decision-making forums and capacity building programs.

Principle 12

- Work collectively with the Timorese Government at all levels.

Principle 13

- Engage men in transforming the status of women.



Principle 3 in visual representation (artwork by Tom Nicholson)

Resources

Commentaries

For the Challenges and Possibilities forum, people in Timor-Leste and in Australia were asked for comments on their experiences and reflections on the theme of women and Timor-Leste.

My Opportunity to Work with Foreign Women in East Timor

Joana Belo da Costa, Mape, Lolotoe, East Timor

My name is Joana Belo da Costa. I live with my parents and six other family members in the village of Mape in Lolotoe, East Timor. I have five younger siblings and an older sister. My younger siblings are still in school and, given the opportunity, they would really want to get a lot from their schooling. My younger siblings and I really want to continue our education, but it is very difficult for our parents since they are unemployed and find it hard to get the means to support their children's education. In my case, I asked my parents to continue supporting my studies, and despite the financial difficulties I pushed myself to complete my high school education.

During my senior high school, I stayed far away from my parents and family. As such, everything was difficult in my life. It was difficult to get money to pay for school, just as it was difficult to get food supplements from my parents due to difficulties with transportation. Day after day, I looked back and forth for someone to ask help from, for someone who could at least listen to my concerns. Everything was very difficult for me during my school years.

After finishing high school, I was under a lot of stress and was sad that my school days had ended, but if given the opportunity I would really have liked to go on to university. However, I could not move forward, and as I looked back at my parents, I felt sorrow for what was to be of my future education. If I was to continue on to university, placing added pressure on my parents, what would be of my younger siblings' education? I thought of looking for work to support their schooling and did so, but could not find any. I made an effort to look for ways to enrol myself in English and computer courses, but could not get the money to pay for it. As such, I went back home to help my parents at home and out in the garden. However, I felt a lack of progress and opportunity, and thought of how I could proceed with my studies in order to provide me and my country, East Timor, a better future.

Three months later, I met a 'mana' (sister) by the name of Vonnie who was a volunteer worker from Darwin, Australia. She worked with the East Timorese in the sub-district of Lolotoe. She worked as a volunteer English teacher at high school and adult classes. I was very happy to have met her, and when I asked her whether I could join her free English classes she took me in as one of her students. Later, she taught me how to make game cards, which she used to teach her high school students, and she also taught me how to set up a laminating machine to laminate cards and other things.

Some time later, she came up with a new idea and asked me whether I would like to do some library training at the 'Sala de Leitura Xanana Gusmao' (Xanana Reading Room) in Dili. I accepted and started the training, which ran from the 14 July to the 22 November 2004. The trainer was Fiona from Brisbane, Australia. During the training, she taught us how to set up and run library services, how to use the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system, how to do spine labelling, and how to catalogue books, among other things. For four months, I also attended a basic computer (Word and Excel) course, then went on to complete a two month advanced Word and Excel course on the 22 November 2004. After completing the training, I returned to Lolotoe where I continued to do what I had learned from the library training course in Dili.

This was the opportunity I had to work together with women friends from abroad. I took much interest and had much confidence in 'mana' Vonnie and Fiona, whose care and devotion showed me a way and provided me a great opportunity to learn many things during the time I trained and worked together with them. Although I did not have much experience from my school days, I now had some experience and skills which would allow me to work as a librarian, thus helping to create opportunities for the children to learn and increase their knowledge from the wide range of information available in a library. As such, this opportunity to work together with our friends from overseas gave me confidence in them and made me very happy to have had such a good experience and to get a good opportunity to work. I hope to be able to get more opportunities and good experiences from working together with our women friends from overseas.

Thank you very much to all the international women friends who helped me get good experience through their good work and interest and an opportunity of much value for my life as well as for East Timor.

'But Mama, I Think Like This'

Lynne Butler

I have recently returned from eighteen months work and study in East Timor where I was fortunate enough to be involved with a group of very strong, resilient and capable, young Timorese women. We worked together in a local NGO, with me as the international technical advisor. My role was to act as mentor, trainer, proposal writer and doer of any other odd jobs that seemed appropriate. Being easily the most senior person in the office I quickly lost the title of 'Mana' (sister), and became 'Mama'(mama). This was a term of respect and affection which, out of vanity, I initially resisted until I realized it gave me the right to sit in the front of the truck on long trips and to eat first at parties.

After many years working in Australia with various NGOs and managing Aboriginal training programs, I felt that I had a lot of knowledge and skills to share with the group. We would often have informal training sessions at which I would enthusiastically 'share' with them my bounty, and they would just as enthusiastically and attentively listen to my every word. At these times, my heart would swell and I would no longer have doubts about what I was doing in East Timor. I knew, indeed, that I was truly 'building their capacity'. That was until, of course, a soft and respectful voice from the back of the room would interrupt me to say, 'But mama, I think like this', and then proceed to tell me that what I was saying was interesting, but they had another way of doing things.

What was happening in fact was that I was being gently and respectfully reminded that no matter how expert or knowledgeable we think we are, when it comes to sharing knowledge and skills, the beneficiaries of our wisdom have every right to choose their own way—and should most definitely be encouraged to do so.

Gender-Based Violence and Ainaro

Belinda Coates

My name is Belinda Coates and I am a social worker currently employed by Ballarat Health Services at the Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA). In 2003, I had just been working at CASA for a few months when I got involved with the Ballarat/Ainaro Friendship group. The Ballarat group, associated with the Australia East Timor Association, had been working together since 1999. In 2003, the group had supported two people who worked at the Ainaro community centre, Maria Barros and Valentin Soares, to visit Ballarat. One of the aims was for them to meet with people across Ballarat agencies and local government. A delegation from Ballarat to visit Ainaro was also in the process of being planned for later in the

year, in order to formalize the friendship relationship. Maria and Valentin visited Ballarat CASA, and then later invited CASA to participate in the delegation. It was recognized that there may be useful knowledge and skills that CASA could contribute to the friendship relationship in regard to recovery from trauma and addressing gender-based violence in the community. Fortunately for me at the time I was the only staff member available to travel overseas in the next few months. A delegation of twelve people from across a variety of community sectors such as local government, health, education and agriculture set out on a whirlwind ten-day visit to Timor-Leste and Ainaro in June 2003.

Initially, I didn't really have any assumptions or expectations about how I could contribute. It was a very steep learning curve for me to begin to learn about the history and culture of Timor-Leste. It was quite overwhelming at first to begin to contemplate how to use my knowledge and skills to assist in some way. So instead I concentrated on learning about Timor-Leste and Ainaro. In view of my social work training and values, the key interest area for me has been human rights in a general sense. History and current world events consistently demonstrate that women and children are often most vulnerable to human rights abuse in conflict and post-conflict situations.

It became clear that at the outset it would be most important to learn about the women of Ainaro in order to begin to think about ways to share knowledge and support the rebuilding of the community. Women often play a key role in communities and in traditional cultures like Timor-Leste, and this role is often more important as women are the primary carers for children and families. As I researched past and ongoing human rights abuse in Timor-Leste, it became clear that, as was often the case in post-conflict countries, gender-based violence (gbv) was a significant ongoing issue. **The key value underpinning my learning and involvement has been that culture and tradition are never an excuse for the denial or abuse of human rights.**

During my first visit to Timor-Leste, I spent time in Dili trying to learn about services that had been established to address gbv. I was impressed by the range of services that had been established in a relatively short time, such as REDE Feto (a group of services to working to address gbv), and by some of the very progressive services, such as the Alola foundation, Fokupers, CARITAS sexual violence prevention program and men against violence programs. However, it became evident that there were many barriers to providing these services to the districts and rural and remote areas outside of Dili. I realized that the lack of resources and funding was a major issue. Communication, roads, transport and just the remoteness of some rural areas also contributed to these difficulties. As my background includes rural social work, I could relate some of these issues to the provision of services in rural and remote Australia.

As my visit to Ainaro was going to be very short (just ten days in total) I had some very basic aims: to meet people in the community, learn about Ainaro and, hopefully, meet with some of the women's groups. I met with women from the two largest women's groups in the area, OMT and OMPT. I was very impressed with the commitment and courage of these women. They had been supporting women and families in the community with very few resources and no ongoing funding.

I spoke a little about my work in the gbv area here in Australia, and shared with them the history of the women's movement and how this eventually led to the provision of services. I also explained that in Australia we also have ongoing issues with gbv. The women spoke of the poverty and hardship in the community and of their struggle to keep their groups going without resources. I was inspired by their ability to support each other despite the incredible adversity of the past and the ongoing lack of resources. The women asked for material assistance, but I was unsure of our capacity to provide this. We heard their concerns and took a note of requests without giving guarantee that we could deliver. One group also stated that there was a need for a 'safe house' in the community to address gbv. Again, we took note of this request, but felt overwhelmed about how to start

to look at ways to assist the community. I felt that I still had so much to learn and still had very limited knowledge about what was already happening. There seemed to be a lot of potential for overlap and duplication, with many seemingly ad hoc programs being run by international groups and NGOs.

Following this visit in 2003, I continued my involvement with the Ballarat/Ainaro friendship group. This group had set a broad range of goals, and within this I had developed some very broad goals around human rights. The Friendship group decided to organize a collection of goods to raise community awareness about Ainaro in Ballarat. In July 2004, a second delegation from Ballarat to Ainaro was organized. This time there was a health focus, with a group of midwives from Ballarat focusing on safe birthing practices. Safe birthing kits had been distributed in Ainaro over the past year, and the midwives were providing some follow up. An education representative also participated in the delegation and formalized friendship school relationships in Ainaro. I joined this delegation, as it seemed like a valuable opportunity to meet with a broader range of women in Ainaro and follow up with connections made in the previous year. Another worker, Kate Pepplinkhouse, who has an interest in gbv, also joined this delegation. Kate is a Family Violence Prevention networker with Child and Family Services Ballarat.

During our visit in 2004, Kate and I explored opportunities to link the women of Ainaro with existing programs for women in Dili. We met with Alita Verdial from the Alola Foundation in Dili and discussed ways to do this. The women of Ainaro expressed interest in exploring options for economic development, and we provided them with information about training programs being run by Alola. We received feedback recently that six women from Ainaro went to Same late last year and undertook training in economic development. Whilst in Ainaro, Kate and I also considered practical ways to assist the women of Ainaro in the short term. We discussed this with women's groups across the district. The women we spoke to were keen for us to support the sale of tais to Ballarat. Since our visit, we have continued to explore ways to assist the women of Ainaro develop ways of producing, marketing and selling their tais. We have formed a sub-group of the local Ballarat/Ainaro friendship group, focusing on human rights, gbv and women's economic development. A long-term member of the Ballarat Timor-Leste group Dawn Delaney (a local photo-journalist) has had an ongoing interest in women and gbv and has joined Kate and I in forming this sub-group. To date, we have purchased and sold Ainaro tais, and used the money we have made to purchase further tais. We are exploring options with other groups, such as friends of Same and ETWA, who are also looking to further develop opportunities for women's economic development through marketing of tais.

In recent months, I have been in contact with a social worker, Susan Kendall, from North Shore Sexual Assault Service in Sydney, who has been involved with establishing mental health services (PRADET) in Timor-Leste since 2000. She has more recently been working on setting up a gbv program called Fatin Hakmatek (a safe room program, literally meaning 'place of rest') for women and children who have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse. This program has been operating in Dili for twelve months, and they are commencing the establishment of this program in the regions. To date, they have had very minimal involvement in the Ainaro district, but are very keen to establish this program in the districts outside of Dili. In my initial discussions with Susan, we discussed the possibility of assisting with identifying women in Ainaro who can be trained as counsellors in this program. If they set up the program in Ainaro there will be also training provided for police and medical workers. Our friendship group has also been exploring the option of establishing links between the police of Ainaro and Ballarat, with a long-term aim of ongoing support and mentoring. This possibility is still being explored.

Our sub-group of the Ballarat/Ainaro friendship group is planning a delegation to Ainaro in early October this year (2005). Kate and I will be returning to further explore opportunities to facilitate the commencement of the Safe House program in Ainaro and to further explore

opportunities for women's economic development in relation to tais weaving. We have invited Ballarat police to identify one or two police to participate in the delegation and to join our friendship group in an ongoing way. This is not yet confirmed. We have also invited a worker from a Men's Behaviour Change program in Ballarat to join the delegation, with the aim of establishing links. This is also not yet confirmed.

In terms of practices and assumptions in working with the women of Timor-Leste my work as a social worker is underpinned by the values of community capacity building and human rights. The human rights/women's economic development sub-group of the Ballarat/Ainaro friendship group operates within the framework of our friendship relationship agreement, which aims to assist where there are requests for assistance and build the capacity of the community. The women of Ainaro have responded very positively to our involvement to date. There is a clear understanding that our friendship relationship is a long-term commitment with long-term goals that have been developed in consultation with the community.

Through my involvement with our friendship group I am aware that is an incredible privilege to be invited in to a community to share skills and knowledge. However, I have learnt that the opportunities to learn from the people of Timor-Leste far outweigh what I can offer.

It has been argued that community development is traditional social work, and it remains our best chance of forwarding our original mission of seeking to overcome social and economic injustice. Ife (2003) further points out that community development and human rights seem to be 'on about the same thing'. That is, a society that values human rights is an active participatory society. It would be arrogant for well-meaning foreigners to assume that they can go to Timor-Leste and do community development or teach the people of Timor-Leste how to do it. We need to 'tread lightly' and be mindful of imposing values, whilst acknowledging and respecting fundamental human rights.

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The Blue Mountains East Timor Sisters Project (BMET)

The Blue Mountains East Timor Sisters

Background

The Blue Mountains East Timor Sisters' Project (BMET) was formed in May 2004 in response to a direct request from an East Timor activist, Beba Sequeira, for assistance for women in East Timor. Beba had visited the Blue Mountains to present at the 1st and 2nd Women and Earth Conferences—a national grass roots conferences organised by Sydney women, the

first of which was held in the Mountains). At these conferences, Beba met Mary Waterford, a Blue Mountains based community worker. Mary was asked if she could raise funds for East Timorese women, and Mary responded by diverting a portion of funds raised from a local peace initiative towards East Timor. These funds were used to support infrastructure development for the organization that Beba works for, APSC-Timor Lorosae (Asia Pacific Support Collective—Timor Lorosae). This was the start!

With a relatively easy beginning, Mary worked to embed East Timorese women's issues into other networks, such as the BM Women's Action Group, who then contributed funds from events. Quickly, the interest for a separate organizing group became obvious and an independent meeting was called. Since mid 2004, a group of Blue Mountains women have continued to meet under the identity of 'Blue Mountains East Timor Sisters' Project' (BMET).

To date, the BMET has few formal structures though it does have a clear culture, set of values, loose structure and has been extremely effective in engendering local support and achieving outcomes. A planning day has been set for 28 August with an independent facilitator to articulate vision, values, philosophy, structures and to set planning priorities for the forthcoming period. This is a definite beginning to stage two in the life of the BMET.

Note that this document has been prepared by one member of the group, with input from a couple of other members.

In general terms, the BMET has the following characteristics:

- Group meets monthly on a weekday evening
- Responsibility for setting agendas and chairing taken by a couple of members. (This has just happened)
- Only women attend meetings, but men have been involved in assisting with fundraising activities.
- The BMET has three sets of members:
 - (1) a 'core' set of highly engaged members—characterized by their attendance at all or most meetings, central contribution to fundraising and, more recently, through their visit to East Timor. Eight women.
 - (2) a group of semi-regular attendees, and those who do not attend meetings, but will regularly support fund raising events. Six women.
 - (3) a wider set of casual participants/ people who want to receive minutes and may contribute from time to time. Approximately twenty women.
- Typical meetings will have fifteen attendees, with approximately four new members at each meeting.
- Meetings are open, widely advertised, and new members are welcomed.
- There is no membership application process; the only documentation to date is a flyer.
- In the main, decisions are made within meetings, but on occasions individuals or small groups of members have determined actions.
- The group functions on a high degree of trust and mutual respect.
- There is an opportunistic culture: opportunities are taken as they arise.
- There have been no major conflicts or differing interests to date.
- The particular interests of individual members (for example, an interest and contact with Alola Foundation) have determined project priorities.
- The group is highly energetic and activity levels are always high; meetings are speedy, humorous, and agendas are full. Communication is mainly through an extensive email list.

- The limitations in formal structure have been viewed as a strength. A semi-anarchic, organic organization is preferred.
- The group is aligned with other local networks and groups. This has assisted with making broader contacts and profile
- Administrative aspects are covered by well organized local community agency (which is a great boon!).
- Fundraising has been effective, and one large donation has meant that the group has adequate funds to achieve its project goals (that is, economic security)

Achievements to date:

- Nine scholarships provided to mostly young women
- Administrative and infrastructure support provided to APSC-TL to facilitate its ongoing viability
- Four sewing machines purchased for women's co-operative in Hato Bulico
- Two visits to East Timor by BMET members. Six members visiting as a group in July 2005
- Blue Mountains City Council has developed a friendship relationship with Hato Bulico, which will result in the development of initiatives in the sub-district
- Funding of baby packs through Alola Foundation
- Funding support for Tricia Johns' enterprise
- Fares and live-in support for East Timorese women to visit Australia on speaking tours.

Practices and assumptions of international organizations working with East Timorese women

The philosophy of BMET Sisters has been based on 'friendship' and individual connection—both highly valued. As described above, the BMETS has its origins in personal connection.

This value of inter-personal connection has carried through to the way that the BMETS functions as a group. The group places value on the individual contribution of members and on supporting connections between its members.

Although the connections have been forged with two particular ET women and this has occurred through 'chance' meetings, it is also apparent that these women have particular characteristics that are held in high value—Beba and Laura have set aside working more broadly within the conventional political system in favour of working voluntarily as grass roots activists; B and L are leaders and are deliberately supporting the leadership of other women; they are interested in building their community and in sustainable ventures.

Ideologies that the BMET is loosely founded on include: community development, feminism, social justice, capacity building. Some members have expressed the desire to work globally on women's issues and see the connection between activism on local women's issues and global activism. For some others, their interest in East Timor as a struggling neighbour with a history of oppression has motivated them to contribute.

The value of raising funds locally to develop projects or to contribute to ET projects is taken for granted (ie unquestioned) amongst the group. So far, 'good ideas' have got a run with very little scrutiny from the group. Typically one member might have received a request or have had a 'good idea' then this will have been taken up by the group on trust. Members just want to 'get things going'. The fact that there has been no formal or even informal planning to date is indicative of the group's mode of operation – at the same time the group prides itself on its effectiveness. There has been substantial local media coverage of the group's activities, and this has boosted its profile and self-image. This *modus operandi*—

spontaneous, non-hierarchical, inclusive, opportunistic, positive, action orientated—has worked well so far.

The BMETS has not viewed itself as an 'international'; it has not used this language nor had it occurred to the BMETS that it sat within a wider series of like-minded groups across Australia carrying out similar work. Few group members had broader East Timor connections. (Mary developed connections with Jude Conway in Darwin and Melania Stevens in Lismore—gained through the Women and Earth Conference—and Wendy had contacts with Alola). It is only recently that many wider connections have been forged (with EWTA and local Councils with Friendship relationships).

How East Timorese women have responded

East Timorese women have responded well. In that the Sisters were convened in direct response to a request from an East Timorese woman, there has been an investment from both parties to make the relationship valuable for East Timorese women. As suggested above, contact with East Timorese women has been largely through two individuals (Beba and Laura) who are networked with women's organizations in East Timor and a wider range of non-aligned women. These women have a 'grass roots' orientation.

Beba and Laura have had a number of roles on behalf of the BMET, including

- Planners and project identifiers
- Administrators on behalf of the BMET. For example, Beba and Laura identified the students to receive scholarships, managed data collection, accountability and the dispersal of funds
- transporting goods to women in rural areas, for example, sewing machines to a women's co-operative in Hato Bulico
- passing information to local tais producers and organize for products to be woven, packaged and transported to Australia
- meeting Sisters members on visits to East Timor, and providing visits, tours etcetera.

The Sisters have paid some administrative salary and assistance with the maintenance of office premises and the APSC-TL vehicle costs. The response from Beba and Laura has been extremely positive, and they acknowledge the key support role that the Sisters play in the ongoing sustainability of APSC-TL. The Sisters have also funded nine scholarships for secondary and tertiary students. Students have reported that they would have been unable to continue to complete their education had the financial support through the scholarship not been provided.

Through Beba and Laura contacts have been made with women involved in Mana Marta's tais production co-operative. These women are now involved in the production of tais for sale in the Mountains. We assume that there has been a benefit for these women in terms of livelihood.

How the international presence has impacted on women in East Timor

I'm not sure that I can answer this question completely. Some of my observations include

- East Timorese women having had additional opportunity to develop networks in Australia; women are visiting the Blue Mountains in September for two weeks of presentations
- East Timorese women being able to use their relationships in Australia as part of their local profile

- having some income has been provided (which is needed!)
- an improvement in English skills through communication with internationals
- facilitation of access to education.

Challenges and Possibilities of Working with Women in East Timor

Concern Worldwide, Timor-Leste

The activities of international organizations working with Women in Timor-Leste fall into four strategic areas:

- Training for capacity building in productive activities or activities which contribute to household food security—food processing, financial management, literacy and health education
- Building the economic capital of women, via income generating activities such as kiosk, sewing and agriculture
- Building social capital for women through training and support to strengthen community based organizations and co-operative development. For example, Concern works with eleven community-based organizations comprised wholly of women, giving them the space to make their own decisions and generate their own incomes
- Increasing the political capital of women through training and support to stand as candidates in local elections.

These activities are designed to

- increase the participation of women
- ensure women have opportunities to analyze their situation and identify interventions to improve their livelihoods
- ensure equal access to skills development
- ensure women have the skills and control to make decisions within the family and community sphere.

To date the impact of this work has been

- through increased incomes women are better able to support themselves. However, some of these activities do increase the burden of work.
- to increase the sharing of responsibility in the household and community, and reduce the patriarchal system, which is very strong in Timorese culture.
- a greater involvement of women in the political process, for example, as members of parliament, ministers, suku (village) chiefs, etcetera.

The response from Women in Timor-Leste depends on their experience and education:

- Women with low levels of literacy and education (and note that 79.4 percent of women will not have completed primary education³²) are less willing to support cultural change or understand (or be able to conceptualize) problems related to gender. Therefore, they are more receptive when the activity has a clear relationship to their lives, and issues are often better addressed through practical livelihoods activities (for example, in Luro, small scale agriculture and jam and preserve making are combined with literacy).
- Women who know how to read and write and have higher education may not have a conceptual understanding of concepts like human rights and

³² Demographic Health Survey, Ministry of Health, 2004.

democracy, but are quicker to acknowledge their rights to be involved in development and to increase their own skills.

The challenges and possibilities in implementing gender sensitive programs for Concern in Timor-Leste

Concern Worldwide is a non-governmental, international, humanitarian organization dedicated to the reduction of suffering, and working towards the ultimate elimination of extreme poverty in the world's poorest countries. It has been working in Timor-Leste since 1999. Concern supports two livelihoods programs in Timor-Leste, which have been running since January 2003 with the overall objective of 'creating an enabling environment in which poor Timorese women and men in rural areas have improved livelihood security'. The programs use participatory approaches to engage with rural communities to increase livelihood assets and opportunities in two of the most isolated areas in Timor-Leste: Turisca in Manufahi District and Luro in Lautem District.

Although the program objectives and indicators are designed to ensure the program has a positive impact on men and women, after the first year, it was clear that women were not participating meaningfully and that there were inequalities in terms of access and control of benefits. Concern invited a gender expert to spend three months with the teams, and the key challenges and recommendations may be common to many programs:

- Participatory methodologies which are used in problem analysis and identification can often be limited to those issues which are on the surface (for example, a lack of water, poor harvests and hungry seasons). A much more thorough and ongoing social analysis is needed to understand the social and cultural factors which impact on the position and condition of women. If this doesn't happen only the visible constraints to the participation of women (for example, women are shy) will be noted. The structural (social and cultural) will remain 'invisible' and will not be addressed.
- Gender analysis must form part of the planning, implementation and monitoring stages.
- Beware of the assumption that activities are gender neutral and that there is no differential in the impact on men or women.
- Field staff must be able to use a gender perspective when facilitating activities in the field.
- There must be specific gender expertise within the teams, but care must be taken not to delegate responsibilities to 'gender experts'.
- Program must have activities specifically directed to improving women's condition and position.

In response, the Concern team developed a log frame for gender. The goal was to mainstream gender principles and practices in all objectives of the program in order to enhance access, participation, control and benefits of the program for women. In order to achieve this, Concern placed an emphasis on staff capacity building through training (social analysis with a gender perspective) and discussions.

Each staff member was given responsibility for gender, and gender issues became a regular discussion topic in team meetings. The teams are now much more gender aware: they consciously monitor change from a gender perspective and can talk about impacts on the condition and position of women in a more meaningful way. Their approach is very much a gender and development method in which men are as involved as women in the change process. As well as increasing the awareness of the staff team, activities have been started to directly build skills to empower women, improve women's wellbeing and address attitudes and behaviours. Through advocacy, health education, training and literacy the teams are

trying to address issues of access to maternal health care, domestic violence and skills development. The organization will move into nutrition programming as a means to have a direct impact on maternal and child health.

Friendship, Changes and Exchanges

Anonymous

There is only two months age difference between my friend Maria and I. We are two young women who have known each other for over five years, and when I'm in Dili we live in the same house together. We only know bits and pieces of each others mother tongues so we usually speak Indonesian when we're hanging out.

Shaving

I was sitting in my room shaving my legs one Saturday afternoon when Maria came in and sat on the bed. While we chatted, she watched me shaving, and gradually our conversation turned to what I was doing. We talked about social pressures and body image in Australia compared to Timor-Leste.

The next day Maria came to me with her arms outstretched. 'Feel this, it's so smooth and silky, just like your legs,' she said with a cheeky grin.

Maria's husband came in and joined me in teasing her. I said, 'Are you crazy? I told you it'll just grow back anyway so there's no point'. He said, 'Are you crazy? Don't you know only bad women and foreigners do that. Stop trying to be something you're not'.

Maria argued that if it was okay for me, it was okay for her. She qualified this, however, by explaining that she just wanted to see what it was like, just once.

Rubbish

We were on the way to the supermarket and Maria had some lollies. After unwrapping one and popping it into her mouth, she dropped the wrapper on the ground. I was on to her quick as a flash. 'Maria, how could you do that? Don't you care about your own city? Surely you don't want Dili to turn into a big rubbish dump (blah, blah).'

She laughed at me, but picked up the rubbish. Then at the supermarket I bought things that would create more rubbish than Maria generates in a month.

Fish Don

Excerpt from an untitled story by Kalakay Mandhita (pseudonym)

'But fish don't know anything about gambling, humans do.'

She looked at me, holding the pen even more tightly between her fingers. She needed explanations. I was putting my serious face, using a plastic straw and a fork to dissect the mournful-looking fried fish lying on the table between her and me.

'The Ancient Greeks used to do it. When sailing, they consulted fish's guts to predict the future, so they wouldn't hit a storm and sink.'

'Who are the Ancient Greeks?'

'Oh, they're all dead now.'

'What from?'

'An accident. Their boat hit a storm and sunk.'

On saying the last sentence, I could not help but smile. Not so much at my own joke, but more at the face that she was making; her face was contorted, it was a face of a serious pupil

listening to a sage. I told her about Greece once before, and she took a pen and carefully crafted every word I was saying on a used serviette—the only writing material available at that time. Are the people in Greece better than the Portuguese, she asked me, with the same face that she was making when she asked me about the fish and Ancient Greeks.

I put down my plastic straw and fork.

‘I was just joking. Stop making that serious face.’

At my confession, she burst out laughing, and then decorously put her hand on her mouth, holding back her laugh.

‘Oh, you cheeky Javanese-boy. Is that the right word, cheeky?’

‘Yes, that is correct. I was being cheeky.’

I could see her eyes glowing, as they do whenever she put newly acquired English words into their right places.

She couldn’t stop laughing afterwards, while repeating, in Tetum, every little thing I have just said at least three times to her husband who was sitting next to her. By then she already put down the pen and paper that she was using to write down strings of number to predict a winning number for a lottery. It was a new lottery system, from an overseas-based gambling business, from which she and her husband have won some money previously. The winning number was from her sister’s dream, not from fish’s guts, she kept on telling me subsequently for days, still laughing endlessly afterward.

In the background, the sun is setting and Cristo del Rei is standing tall with his arms open wide, embracing something. Or maybe anything.

Untitled

Anna Trembath

Recently in Dili, I was sitting outside an NGO ready for a meeting with a female staff member to discuss the forthcoming forum in Melbourne. I chatted with a group of all-male staff. We began to discuss the forum, and from what these men were telling me it was apparent that this NGO had experienced some difficulties working with international advisors. The staff related how international advisors sometimes set directions for the NGO without sufficient co-operation with the local staff, and complained that particular necessary tasks were beneath them, such as helping with translating material for funding applications that needed to be written in English. There appeared to be a tendency for unequal relations between some international advisors and East Timorese, where the knowledge and skills of East Timorese staff had been undervalued and where there had been a clear power hierarchy between foreigners and East Timorese.

Yet once the conversation turned specifically to East Timorese women, I was told that while women had displayed certain ‘capacities’ during the resistance period, since independence women had been largely bereft of appropriate skills. For this man, a conference in Australia represented an important opportunity for East Timorese women to ‘increase their skills’, ‘develop more capacity’ and learn from non-Timorese participants.

On the one hand, he seemed critical of a particular power dynamic created by some advisors, of a ‘we know better than the Timorese, they can learn from us’ kind of attitude. Yet when it came to East Timorese women, this man believed that women needed to learn and develop capacities through the experience of working with foreigners. It seemed as if the same criticism suggesting a need for a more equal and two-way relationship between foreigners and East Timorese was not being extended to include East Timorese women. Women in Timor-Leste, it appeared, only had to gain from internationals, but didn’t have much to contribute.

By Susan George as quoted from her book *Another World is Possible If*.

Anonymous

'Those who genuinely want to help the social justice movement should study the rich and powerful (including the WB, UN, UN agencies, government, parliament, and others), not just the poor and powerless. any knowledge about them at all will be valuable to the movement.'

'Empowerment' is Participation in Power

Deb Salvagno

The idea of power is at the root of the term 'empowerment'. Power must be understood as working at different levels, including the institutional, the household and the individual. Empowerment is sometimes described as being about the ability to make choices, but it must also involve being able to shape what choices are on offer. Empowerment corresponds to women challenging existing power structures, which subordinate them. As such, what is seen as empowering in one context may not be in another. Empowerment is not about reversing existing power hierarchies, but rather about empowering women and/or women's groups to make their own choices, to speak out on their own behalf and to control their own lives.³³

The Challenges and Possibilities events have highlighted the importance of forums where different points of view, experiences and ideas can be shared without disapproval and condemnation. The encouragement of dissenting views is important because it is often through conflict that we move into different, more appropriate forms of social relations.³⁴ For this reason it is essential to create spaces where the language of diversity and difference is not undermined and silenced; where sensitivity to particular community contexts is respected and appreciated – however challenging this may be.

The Friday evening forum and the participatory nature of the Saturday workshops at the Challenges and Possibilities seminar created such spaces. Women and men from local and international communities came together to share stories, experiences, opinions and ideas, and to collate these into a draft set of principles, which, if adopted, will inform the approach and practices of individuals and organizations working with women in East Timor. These principles will hopefully encourage the development of sustainable and equitable programs that allow women to participate in power processes and be involved in the decisions that impact on their lives. However, a narrow commitment to certain assumptions, organizational arrangements and specific ideologies will undermine alternative approaches.

Writing in 1997 at the height of the celebration of the New Economy and NGO participation in globalization, the veteran scholar activist James Petras sounded a cautionary note. NGOs, he wrote, 'emphasize projects, not movements; they 'mobilize' people to produce at the margins but not to struggle to control the basic means of production and wealth; they focus on technical financial assistance of projects, not on structural conditions that shape the everyday lives of people. linked to a framework of collaboration with donors and government agencies that subordinate practical activity to non-confrontational politics.'³⁵ Petras argues that a political world is created where the rhetoric of empowerment cloaks the reality of subordination with international and national structures of power, structures

³³ Weiriga, 1994, <<http://www.awid.org/ywl/glossary/?term=Empowerment>.

³⁴ Sue Kenny, *Developing Communities for the Future*, Nelson Thomson Learning, Victoria, 1999, p.27.

³⁵ James Petras, 'Imperialism and NGOs', *Monthly Review*, 1997, <<http://www.theorganizer.org/Globalization/NgosImperialism.html>>.

that many women are excluded from, not only in East Timor but elsewhere. This is not to discount the reality that NGOs operate in difficult circumstances, but whether or not you agree with Petras, notions of empowerment are often overlooked as important principles that underpin practice, particularly within large, bureaucratic organizations with top-down management—as Balbina da Conceicao’s experiences reveal.

The Challenges and Possibilities seminar was the first time that Balbina was presented with the opportunity to tell her story in a public forum. Some participants at the seminar may have been unfamiliar with the early beginnings of the Taibesi project and the experiences of the veteran women involved. Consequently, many were surprised, particularly by Balbina’s frankness—myself included. Her candid description of her experiences during her sixteen years with the clandestine movement illustrated the sacrifices women made to end the occupation. Her unguarded exposition of the difficulties, as a director of the Taibesi project, she and her activist friends faced in 2003, will, I’m sure, cause further debate. Sadly, these difficulties stemmed from being prohibited to participate in power processes such as management choices and executive decisions. Balbina spoke of months of apprehension, anxiety and heated dialogue, and how she and her friends exercised their democratic right and began to inform the broader community, including parliamentarians, the veterans association and the president’s office, about what was occurring in the project. Other incidences like this have occurred in East Timor. The difference is that rather than accept exclusion and blurred management processes, Balbina and her friends spoke out. Actions, Kenny argues, that are key manifestations of an empowered community, such as access to open and democratic community structures, collectively deciding on the future directions of their community and belief in the right to control their own destiny.³⁶

The women’s actions were not surprising considering the part many played resisting a brutal occupation. What was unexpected were the reactions of many internationals and the large donor agency that was supporting the project, who saw the confrontations in a negative sense rather than an application of civil rights, part of democracy building and an opportunity for dialogue to learn and understand why the Timorese women were restless. Interestingly, supporters of the women were labelled as ‘leftie unionists’, yet many of the internationals who disapproved and declined to lend a hand claimed to be supporting political and social empowerment of women in East Timor. In this sense, it is important to recognize that independence was the first phase in a national transformation, and it therefore follows that political gains must extend into the social and economic spheres—not simple service provision, but true participation in power. Encouraging people to participate in the continual processes of shaping their society, their communities and their identities—empowerment—must be championed and played out in reality not just in rhetoric.

Balbina also spoke about the difficulties illiterate women face in East Timor, particularly from people who fail to acknowledge that even though they can’t read, women have potential and an ability to comprehend what is occurring in their name. The most interesting issue to be revealed in her powerful presentation was the definition of orphan children. Balbina asserted that the western understanding of orphan children has further disadvantaged children who come from families with a living parent yet live in extreme poverty. Discussing this notion was in keeping with the theme of the events, which aimed to explore the assumptions of international organizations.

Natalina Ximenes, herself an orphan of the occupation, like many other presenters spoke about the need for responsible and responsive economic development, particularly for young women in East Timor. Natalina is a designer and seamstress, and through her work she supports many people in her community. She was also working at the Taibesi project through all the unrest, and decided to stay to support her friends. What occurred was very unfortunate, but didn’t take place just to prove a point about empowerment. There were also many complications and misunderstandings, not to mention missed opportunities for all those involved.

³⁶ Sue Kenny, *Developing Countries*, p. 27.

Balbina, Natalina and their colleagues are now managing the enterprise on their own. The major problem they face is finding sustainable markets for their product. Their skills are amazing, but they have years of catching up to do as mechanized textiles production has come so far it almost mimics the uniqueness of handmade cloth; almost. The one thing it will never do is replace the solidarity between people who acknowledge the value of 'handmade' items and make a conscious decision to purchase goods made under Fair Trade. In this we feel hopeful that ETWA's fundraising and product development initiatives here in Australia will give the women enough breathing space to build sustainable enterprises.

East Timorese textiles are produced, as they have for centuries, using back-strap looms. Back-strap weaving is incredibly time consuming and physically demanding, but for many women it's the only means they have to earn a living. For example, Filismena is a war widow. She is about forty years old and has three school age sons. She is an accomplished and proficient weaver, regarded as a 'professor' by those who know her. She has managed to sustain her family and educate her sons by producing textiles, however, she suffers chronic back pain as a result. Without access to targeted health care weaving will become so painful that she'll have to stop. Consequently, she'll lose her income, and the effects on her family will be enormous. This is a story that's repeated all over East Timor, and is yet another barrier to women's economic development. ETWA hopes to first research the health of women at the project and, with their assistance, develop programs that target their health issues.

Weaving on back-strap looms produces textiles that are as varied and unique as the women that produce them. ETWA members are aware that product must be developed that integrates and balances both the cultural distinctiveness and the commercial application of skills. Early in 2006, we will launch 'Design Incubators', intended to create textile and product designs that maintain cultural elements and create economic opportunities for weavers, sewers and artisans in the world's newest nation. We're committed to strengthening the manufacturing base of East Timor while trying to ensure that economics isn't separated from the spiritual and psychological dimensions of life. We're also careful to ensure that the local economy is supported by providing funds to purchase materials locally.

To support rural women, the group in Dili has established three weaving groups in isolated communities. These initiatives aim to decentralize manufacture and allow women to remain in their communities. A point that was reinforced by rural women is the importance of maintaining cultural practices through the generational transfer of techniques and designs. When we were in Timor in July 2004, a mother presented us with three delightful scarves woven by her nine-year-old daughter. My first thought was that this young girl wasn't at school; an assumption rooted in western priorities. However, the little girl's shyness and pride in her work was so obvious that I quickly changed my mind. I also realized that the relationship between this young girl and her mother were probably enriched through such exchanges of skills and knowledge.

As ETWA is based in Melbourne, we often work in a kind of vacuum, separated from the reality of the lives of women in East Timor. Equally, the women we work with in East Timor have no context within which to understand our work. The weekend gave ETWA members and all participants opportunities to share experiences, listen and discover. Although many ETWA members were busy ensuring the events ran smoothly and couldn't participate in the workshops, we hope to adhere to the principles developed by participants. We also hope to adhere to the community development principles of valuing diversity, collective responsibility, sharing of resources and, most importantly, co-operation. We would like to encourage other organizations to do the same, and we welcome people to become involved in our work.

Sadly, I missed many of the presentations at the forum and the seminar. As part of the organizing collective, I was busy chasing blue tack and taking photos. However, people

who were present have since shared their delight, experiences and satisfaction. To everyone who assisted, presented, translated and participated in the Challenges and Possibilities events, particularly Balbina, Natalina and the many other East Timorese people present, thank you!

Bibliography

Bibliography of additional materials on women in Timor-Leste

This bibliography of additional materials related to women in Timor-Leste was compiled by students from the Bachelor of International Studies Program at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. By no means does it represent an exhaustive reference list, and it is limited in that it remains only in English. We hope it can be added to in the future. For a more extensive list of resources, including web resources, please see www.timor-leste.org/gender.

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Singing Timorese songs

Organizers and support

Community and Organizational Support

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- Tom Nicholson
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- Janet Smith
- Derek Streulens
- Emma Conlan
- Barbara Oliveira
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- YWCA Timor-Leste Working Group and Hotel Y.
- Fokupers, Timor-Leste
- Blue Mountains East Timor Sisters
- AETA: Australia East Timor Association (Melbourne)
- Caritas Australia
- Concern Worldwide
- Oxfam Australia
- Judicial System Monitoring Programme
- FONGTIL (East Timor NGO Forum)
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- Elaine Telford
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The Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA), has, since the 1960s, been fostering cultures based on inclusive participation and profound respect. Patterns of engagement based on these values help people to work creatively, minimize conflict, and accomplish more together than individuals working alone.

The ICA has developed models for providing training and consultancy in methods and perspectives of participatory change. These processes have been implemented successfully world-wide as Technology of Participation (ToP TM) programs. ToP programs enable people to think through their total situation and deal with complexity and ambiguity. Highly participatory in nature, and utilising the participants' own cultural understandings, ToP TM methodologies focus on ensuring productivity and innovation through participation, while ensuring a consistent and comprehensive direction.

The ICA's global network spans more than thirty-five countries. Its inclusive approach to participative development has gained worldwide recognition and respect in its three major arenas of activities: sustainable development, life-long education and organizational transformation. ICA holds consultancy status with United Nations agencies.

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