

TIMOR LESTE

SUPPORTING WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT IN PEACE BUILDING AND PREVENTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE: COMMUNITY-LED APPROACHES



Women around the world face significant challenges to their participation in peace building processes; beyond this, national level legal frameworks around women's peace building or prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) often do not filter down to the community level.

In Timor-Leste, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) is undertaking a global program entitled "Supporting Women's Engagement in Peace-building and Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict: Community-Led Approaches."

The two-year initiative in Timor Leste, which was launched in April 2007, is part of a global UNIFEM program funded through a US\$6.5 million grant from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID). The following six conflict-affected countries are involved in the program: Afghanistan, Haiti, Liberia, Rwanda, Timor-Leste and Uganda.



Interview with women survivors by UNIFEM's partner in Bobonaro

ability of support services for survivors, particularly through the establishment of a referral pathway for access to medical and psychosocial support, as well as to shelters.

- Establishing community prevention mechanisms to tackle SGBV.
- Providing training for police, court actors, local authorities, and village councils on legal provisions for SGBV, their roles as duty bearers, and the needs of survivors.
- Supporting livelihood programs for survivors of SGBV to reduce vulnerability and break the cycle of violence.

OBJECTIVES

With a budget of US\$519,911, the objectives of the UNIFEM program in Timor Leste are:

- To support women's capacities to engage in peace building and prevent conflict at the community level;
- To support women at the community level in preventing SGBV and responding adequately to the needs of survivors.

ACTIVITIES

The program is being implemented in selected communities within the two border districts of Covalima and Bobonaro. Some of the key activities of this program in Timor Leste include:

- Training women's groups to strengthen their capacity to engage in peace building activities.
- Working to make community-based peace building institutions and local authorities, such as village councils, more responsive to women's priorities.
- Awareness raising about women's rights in relation to SGBV, national SGBV legislation, and the avail-

SGBV IN TIMOR LESTE

While little information exists on the true extent and severity of SGBV, indicative studies suggest that:

- In 2003, 51% of women consulted had felt unsafe in their relationship with their husband in the previous 12 months,
- 24.8% had experienced violence from an intimate partner.¹
- 49% of cases reported in 2004 to the Pradet safe house at the Dili National Hospital involved child sexual assault.²

¹Traditional Justice and Gender Based Violence' (IRC 2003), p. 13.

²Cited in 'CEDAW Initial Treaty Specific Document: Timor Leste' (Office of the Prime Minister 2007), p. 13.

Types of SGBV in Timor Leste include: domestic violence, rape, gang rape, child abuse (rape, incest), sexual exploitation, and exploitation of bride price.

During the Indonesian occupation of 1975-1999, systematic rape, torture and sexual slavery were used as a weapon of war.

ANTICIPATED CHANGES

- Strengthened institutional capacity of service providers to prevent SGBV;
- Increased awareness and political commitment to end violence against women;
- Decrease of sexual violence in the target communities.

BASELINE DATA

As part of the program inception activities UNIFEM undertook a baseline study on prevalence and attitudes toward SGBV, as well as women's participation in all levels of peacebuilding. Through this study, several findings emerged which shape the programme priorities. For example, the study showed that community attitudes toward sexual and gender based violence vary between the two focus sites of Covalima and Bobonaro. In Covalima the local community perceives sexual violence as commonplace although the local authorities interviewed denied the existence of any forms of sexual violence.

The baseline study revealed sexual exploitation as particularly common in the borderline sub-district of Covalima. In contrast, discussing the issue of sexual violence remains taboo in Bobonaro, where the community largely remains silent on the subject.

According to the findings, several factors contribute to women's vulnerability to sexual violence:

- Women's subordinate status in a patriarchal social structure despite a matrilineal system of property in-

heritance;

- Limited knowledge and awareness of sexual violence;
- Women's economic insecurity and limited access to livelihood programmes;
- The use of drugs administered to lower the inhibition and resistance of victims is used to for sexual exploitation and rape;
- Women's participation in peace building and communal conflict resolution forums is very limited and is usually conducted without the participation of the woman or victim.

PARTNERS

UNIFEM is working with the following partners to implement this program:

- Asia Pacific Support Collective-Timor Leste (APSC-TL)
- Forum Komunikasi Perempuan Timor Lorosae (FOKUPERS)
- Peace and Democracy Foundation (PDF)
- Associassaun HAK in cooperation with the government of Timor Leste, particularly the Ministry of Justice and the Secretary of State for Security.

The pilot project is expected to raise community awareness on SGBV as a prevention strategy. The pilot project will work with judicial actors and community authorities as well as care givers to ensure that they are aware of their obligations as duty bearers and the rights of those they represent. The project will also identify possible entry points where women can influence and participate in local mediation mechanisms. UNIFEM expects that these positive changes can be scaled up in the target districts and replicated in other districts of Timor Leste.

For further information and access to baseline data, contact:

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Meeting with women survivors in Covalima