



Submission No 43

Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Timor-Leste

Organisation: International Women's Development Agency

**Submission to the Joint Standing Committee
on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade on
Australia's relationship with Timor-Leste**



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Overview

International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) appreciates the opportunity to engage with the Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade on Australia's relationship with Timor-Leste. IWDA is the only Australian development organisation entirely focused on women's rights and gender equality. IWDA's vision is for a just, equitable and sustainable world where women have a powerful voice in economic, cultural, civil and political life. Since 1985, IWDA has worked with agencies in Asia and the Pacific to support women's economic empowerment and livelihood security, address violence against women and women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution and peace building process, and expand women's civil and political participation.

IWDA has worked in Timor-Leste since 2004, with a focus on women's civil and political participation and economic empowerment. IWDA currently works in partnership with two local organisations in Covalima and Bobonaro Districts to support women in rural areas develop micro-businesses and increase women's knowledge, confidence and skills to be able to participate and take up leadership and decision-making roles in their families, groups and within the wider community. In the past year, these initiatives have been funded through AusAID's Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). IWDA's program in Timor-Leste has strategically focused on supporting women in rural areas, because they comprise the majority of women in Timor-Leste, are particularly vulnerable to poverty and discrimination, and opportunities close to home are most relevant to women who are seeking to combine their responsibilities for unpaid household and care work with improving their economic situation. In her 2012 Report, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, noted that:

Timorese women face pervasive structural discrimination and negative gender stereotypes, which dramatically impede their ability to participate in and benefit from education, employment, health services and political representation. A life of poverty and discrimination is the reality for many women in Timor-Leste.¹

This submission draws on IWDA's experience in Timor-Leste and on learning and insights from our broader programming, research and advisory work across Asia and the Pacific over the last 27 years. Our analysis and recommendations are aimed at strengthening the capacity of Australia's aid program to work with government and civil society in Timor-Leste to advance gender equality and contribute to effective, sustainable development in Timor-Leste that benefits both women and men.

Gender analysis and mainstreaming is integral to aid effectiveness

Gender equality is widely recognised as integral to sustainable development, aid effectiveness and achieving all of the Millennium Development Goals. Its centrality and importance is reflected in identifying gender equality as an overarching principle of Australia's aid program. It is not an optional extra but a core requirement.

As Timor-Leste's largest donor, representing almost 43 per cent of total official development assistance in 2010, and equivalent to approximately 9.5 per cent of Timor-Leste's state budget in 2011, the Australian Government has the potential for significant influence through how it approaches dialogue with the Timor-Leste Government on development issues.

IWDA strongly supports AusAID's commitment to gender equality in its Timor-Leste Country Strategy

¹ United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda, (A/HRC/20/25/Add.1, 20th 24 May 2012), p. 14.*

2009 to 2014, and the recognition that “some of Timor-Leste’s most daunting challenges are brought about by the lack of equality between men and women” and “Australian assistance will therefore address squarely the issue of gender equality”.² In this context, IWDA underlines the importance of Australia’s commitment that ‘A Gender Action Plan which updates analysis and identifies the specific measures which the program will adopt, including addressing violence against women, will inform the entire program.’

AusAID’s most recent Annual Program Performance Report (APPR) for its Timor-Leste Program points to the need to strengthen reporting on both gender and disability:

Reporting on integrating gender and disability factors was weak across most sectoral programs. Very few quality assessments mentioned disability and there is not yet a mechanism to assess if any of our programs are benefiting people with disability (our programs in water, sanitation and hygiene and surgical services are the exceptions). There was no mention in quality assessments of other factors (age, ethnicity, degree of poverty), which may create marginalisation. A key challenge, for the East Timor program is to improve analyses on equality and contribution to equity.³

However, **this is unlikely to be just a reporting issue, and more likely to reflect an underlying weakness with integrating gender and disability analysis in programming, monitoring and evaluation.**

Referring to AusAID’s work through multilateral organizations in Timor Leste, the APPR notes that:

“The ability of the multilateral organisations to achieve gender equality, disability and environment outcomes is also mixed, with the International Labour Organization having the best framework for achieving progress against these critical cross-cutting issues. This is also an area in which AusAID’s own program quality in Timor-Leste could improve.”⁴

The APPR makes clear that **further efforts are required to support gender-responsive policy and programming and advance gender equality in Timor-Leste.** This analysis should guide future programming and resourcing priorities. **Integrating gender analysis and mainstreaming across Australia’s aid program is an essential step in ensuring that Australian aid effectively and efficiently supports the Timor-Leste Government to respond to the needs and priorities of both women and men.** Acting on the specific issues identified in the APPR, and on the broader recommendations regarding strengthening progress towards gender equality in the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) Annual Reports on Development Effectiveness for 2009, 2010 and 2011, would improve the effectiveness of Australia’s aid program and benefit women and men, girls and boys in Timor-Leste.

Supporting further capacity development of government and local organisations in gender mainstreaming is essential if Australia is to support the advancement of all Timorese people and assist in addressing prevailing inequality as Timor-Leste develops. As the decentralisation process in Timor-Leste gains momentum, it is particularly important to support gender mainstreaming at the district government level. Gender analysis and mainstreaming should be prioritised in AusAID’s assistance (through the provision of support services managed by Cardno Emerging Markets) to the Government’s National Program for Suco Development.⁵ This support should recognise and

² AusAID, Australia-Timor-Leste Country Strategy 2009 to 2014, p. 6.

³ AusAID, Republica Democratica de Timor-Leste Annual Program Performance Report 2011, 2012, p. 20.

⁴ AusAID, Republica Democratica de Timor-Leste Annual Program Performance Report 2011, 2012, p. 21.

⁵ The National Program for Suco Development (PNDS) is an initiative of the Government of Timor-Leste, jointly managed by the Ministry of State Administration and Ministry of Finance. It aims to work with communities at the village level to help eliminate poverty by investing in community-driven infrastructure projects. AusAID is assisting the government to develop the PNDS through the provision of support services managed by Cardno Emerging Markets

strengthen the existing efforts of the Secretary of State for the Promotion of Equality (SEPI) – the main Government body responsible for advocating for gender mainstreaming in Government institutions and State agencies – and local gender advocates working in civil society organisations, who have already made significant achievements.

More generally, in the context of the recent cuts to announced aid program commitments, which will impact directly on health and rural development programs in Timor-Leste, IWDA would like to particularly underline the importance of Australia's continued investment in development assistance. It is difficult to precisely track the gender implications of the recent re-allocation of aid funding to meet domestic asylum seeker costs (or other decisions) because the Australian Government does not undertake the kind of detailed gender budget analysis across portfolios that it did from the late 1980s to the mid-late 1990s. The policy architecture that went with this – review of all new policy and savings proposals and briefings from the Office for the Status of Women to the Expenditure Review Committee of Cabinet about any differential impacts on women and gender inequality - is also gone, so there is no routine mechanism for alerting government to gendered impacts of policy and expenditure decisions *as part of the decision making process*. Remedying this would assist policy coherence and program effectiveness by providing the government with a clearer picture of the gender implications of policy and funding decisions.

Women's civil and political participation

Women's representation in the national parliament is higher in Timor-Leste than in many parts of the region, at 38.5 per cent, which is a significant achievement that provides a platform for ensuring women's perspectives are heard in determining national development priorities, It should not be assumed, however, that national decision makers represent fully the diverse interests of the community, including the specific interests of women in rural areas. Additionally, the presence of women, while vital from a democratic perspective, does not guarantee their ability to influence decision making in line with their numbers, given prevailing attitudes towards women, and the limited links between national political representatives and local women's organisations. Supporting and mentoring women parliamentarians remains a priority, along with supporting further development of links between parliamentarians and constituencies.

It is particularly important that specific attention is given to supporting women's leadership at local levels. Currently women constitute only 2 per cent of Village Chiefs.⁶ Women's leadership journey often begins close to home, where they can combine participation in public life with family and care responsibilities. Women's representation at this level is particularly important, to inform decisions that shape women's lives, and to provide experience that can open up leadership opportunities at district and national levels. Women's interest in and ability to contribute to political life or high level leadership is integrally linked to a leadership journey that involves opportunity and capacity development. For many women this takes the form of 'learning by doing', beginning at community level

Women's equal representation in political processes, parliaments and government at all levels is a core democratic requirement, and helps ensure that decisions about national development priorities and approaches and resource allocations are informed by the needs, interests and priorities of both women and men. The democratic deficit and constraint on development that results from women's exclusion from decision-making processes limits the information, ideas and priorities that inform a

⁶ Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, Office of the Secretary of State for the Promotion of Equality, Statement by H.E. Sra Idelta Maria Rodrigues, Secretary of State for the Promotion of Equality. On the occasion of 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Briefing and Roundtable discussion on "Equal Futures Partnership – To Advance Women's Economic Empowerment and Political Participation", New York, 5 March 2013.

nation's development, policy approaches and resource allocations. Alongside women's participation, having gender analysis as a routine part of decision-making will improve effectiveness and efficiency.

Ending violence against women

IWDA welcomes AusAID's development of a new program for Ending Violence Against Women that builds on the work of the Justice Support Sector Facility Program. **Violence against Women is a critical human rights issue for women in Timor-Leste, with approximately one-third of women (38 per cent) aged 15 and over having experienced physical violence.**⁷ IWDA therefore recommends that **the program should match the scale and development significance of gender inequality and violence against women in Timor-Leste.**

We expect that the current design team will act on the recommendations in the 2008 report by the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) of AusAID, *Violence Against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Promising Approaches* and reiterated in the 2012 report by the International Center for Research on Women, *Violence against Women in Melanesia and Timor-Leste: Progress made since the 2008 Office of Development Effectiveness Report*. Both reports emphasise a comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing violence against women, including violence prevention through fostering community norms of gender equality as well as nonviolent behaviour, and that significant and consistent investment is needed in implementing the recommendations.⁸ AusAID should consider implementing additional initiatives in Timor-Leste consistent with those that have been implemented in the Pacific, specifically the Pacific Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative.

Addressing research gaps to better address violence against women

Improvements in women's economic circumstances may sometimes be associated with increased violence if women are seen as challenging traditional authority and control, exercising increased autonomy or failing to fulfil other unpaid family and caring responsibilities. Recent research by IWDA and partners in Melanesia confirmed that:

Violence and manipulation in the household remains a barrier to women gaining complete control over income they earn. Women reported their money being stolen, taken by force and misused by their husbands on a regular basis, with some hiding their money and lying to their husbands about their earnings in order to prevent this outcome. Addressing family dynamics and social norms that tolerate this behaviour is essential to ensuring women gain greater control over their income.⁹

While this research was not undertaken in Timor-Leste, IWDA's experience is that the situation for women in Timor-Leste is very similar, and this is consistent with the understanding in the ODE's report *Violence against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: A review of international lessons (2007)* and the Australian Government's response to this report, *Stop Violence: Responding to violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor (2008)*.

The Australian National University and IWDA submitted a proposal to research the relationship between violence against women and women's economic empowerment initiatives/women's improved cash income in Melanesia as part of the last round of Australian Development Research

⁷ Timor-Leste Demographic and Health Survey 2009-10, p. 229 – 230.

⁸ International Centre for Research on Women, *Violence against Women in Melanesia and Timor-Leste: Progress made since the 2008 Office of Development Effectiveness Report*, 2012, p. 63.

⁹ Carnegie, M, Rowland, C and Crawford, J (2013), 'Rivers and Coconuts: conceptualising and measuring gender equality in semi-subsistent communities in Melanesia', *Gender Matters*, #2, March, p.6

Awards. The research was designed to address the evidence gap in the Pacific about the nature and direction of the relationship between economic empowerment and violence against women, in a context of evidence from South Asia pointing in both directions (that women's improved economic situation is linked with a greater capacity to leave violent situations, and that it is a moment of increased risk), and in a context where ending violence against women and promoting women's economic empowerment are Australian aid policy priorities.

Unfortunately, although the research proposal was shortlisted, funding for gender-focused research confirmed in this round was less than half the announced funding ceiling (\$2,493,721 compared with \$6,000,000) following the decision to redirect aid funds to domestic priorities, and this research proposal was one of those not funded as a consequence. Funding for the gender theme was reduced more than any other. IWDA and ANU are pursuing alternative funding options and believe that **understanding the relationship between women's improved economic circumstances and violence against women in Melanesia and Timor-Leste is a priority if development actors are to meet their minimum ethical responsibility to 'do no harm'.**

Enabling women to benefit from expanded economic opportunities

IWDA's experience and available evidence is that growth in economic opportunities for women - of itself - does not necessarily translate into positive outcomes for women, because of the impact of prevailing gender inequalities on education and skill levels, time, mobility and decision making. While expansion of economic opportunities, including opportunities to trade and access export market, can improve women's financial circumstances and provide a platform for empowerment and a catalyst for wider transformation in gender relations, this is not necessarily the case. Whether or not new economic opportunities translate into overall net benefits for individual women depends on how well women are positioned to take up these opportunities and what else is happening in their lives, in particular: (a) the extent of their unpaid work responsibilities; and (b) their influence over decisions about household expenditure.

Because women have traditionally had primary responsibilities in the home, when they enter the paid labour force, they often continue to carry out their unpaid work of caring for the family and the household. Consequently, **women work more hours overall than men when paid and unpaid work is combined, and the inequality is particularly acute at ages when reproductive and paid work peak.** For example, in rural Ghana at age 30, men work 50 hours a week, women work 80 hours a week. In the Pacific, time use data is more limited but confirms that women have a greater workload than men when paid work and unpaid household and care work are combined and less discretionary time in which to participate in public life or undertake training.¹⁰ Women's unequal share of household and care work is a significant limitation on their ability to take up new economic opportunities, particularly those that involve travel away from home.

Professor Sylvia Chant from the London School of Economics has shown that for many women, **participation in the formal economy has not been a liberating experience but rather, associated with a growing feminisation of responsibility for paid work and reproductive roles in the family.** While her recent research has been in the Philippines, Gambia and Costa Rica, her conclusions draw on 25 years of working on gender issues. Chant has found that as women's lives have changed to take on more responsibility for household livelihoods and moving their families out of poverty, there has been little compensating increase in men's sharing of household work. Women's increased contribution to household income has not translated into greater capacity to

¹⁰ Mohamed, M.R. (2009) *Making invisible work more visible: Gender and time use surveys with a focus on the Pacific and unpaid care work*, UNDP Pacific Centre, Suva, Fiji, p.1

negotiate a more equitable sharing of unpaid work, even when economic change mean men have more time in which to take on additional household and care responsibilities. Instead, 'expanded leisure time may provide additional opportunities for resource depleting activities such as drinking, smoking and gambling that further increase the difficulties women face in meeting their responsibilities for the family's day to day needs.'¹¹

Given the gendered division of labour within households typical in Asia and the Pacific (and elsewhere) a paid job or improving women's access to savings services and credit to start or grow a microenterprise may often be added to an existing substantial workload – which, while vital to family and community well-being and sustainability, remains largely invisible in national statistics. **New opportunities, then, may not lead to overall improvements in individual and family well-being unless women are also supported with negotiating a more equitable sharing of unpaid household and care work. Without a holistic understanding of economy that makes visible unpaid, informal and formal work, there is also a risk that women's increased involvement in the formal sector comes at the expense of their existing valuable, though unvalued, economic and social contribution through unpaid household, caring and community work.**¹²

If we are to understand the current situation of women and men in Timor-Leste, their potential to engage in new economic opportunities, and shape Australia's development assistance accordingly, we need an understanding of economy that provides a picture of the full range of existing economic and social activities undertaken by women and men, paid and unpaid, that create value in the community. This is essential to understanding what kinds of development opportunities are most relevant and what needs to change (for example, sharing of household work, child care support, or ability to control how income is used) if new opportunities are to result in improved well-being for women and men, their families and wider communities.

Conceptualising the economy in a way that makes visible and values unpaid and non-cash work may also change views about the relative benefits of encouraging women and men to shift from the informal sector into what are often perceived to be other more 'productive' activities. Identifying opportunities to enhance productivity across the diverse economy may enable some women and men to stay in communities rather than move to towns or urban centres.¹³

Improving women's economic opportunities is not just about removing barriers to women's equal participation in the formal economy. It is also about making visible and valuing unpaid household and care work, and supporting economic and social arrangements that work better for women and men and support them to share paid work, reproductive and care work and social roles across the life course.

[Recent research involving IWDA and university and civil society partners in Melanesia](#) suggests that shifting understandings about the value of unpaid work, its contribution to sustaining families and communities, the amount of work done overall and the relationships between different kinds work is key to enabling men and women to share responsibilities in a way that is more equitable and maximises individual and community benefit.¹⁴

¹¹ Rivers and Coconuts: Conceptualising and measuring gender equality in semi-subsistent communities in Melanesia', p.2, citing Chant, S (2009), 'The 'feminisation of poverty' -- a contested concept in need of better gender and poverty indices: reflections from comparative research in the Gambia, Philippines And Costa Rica", Paper prepared for a workshop on 'Needs, Development and Gender Equity', University of Oslo, 12-15 March

¹² For more on this issue, see IWDA's recent issue of [Gender Matters](#), '

¹³ Ibid, p.16

¹⁴ Ibid, p.3

In this context, **Australia's development assistance to Timor-Leste should look to approach economic development in a way that doesn't privilege the 'formal' economy and undermine the diverse, productive work that already happens in local communities.** IWDA has recently developed tools to assist with conceptualising and measuring a holistic understanding of economy, which are available for [download](#).

The benefits – to individual women, their children and the wider community - of a woman earning more income may also be limited by her lack of control over decision making about how that income is spent. Given the evidence that women spend much more of every dollar they earn on their family than men do, if they cannot control what happens to the additional income they bring in to the household, it may make little difference to their quality of life or that of their children.

As noted in the section on violence against women above, improvements in women's economic opportunities can increase their risk of violence. However, a recent review of progress made since the 2008 ODE report on violence against women found only a few examples of new initiatives to integrate interventions addressing violence against women into programs in other areas such as economic empowerment initiatives.¹⁵ The recommendations in the 2012 review of progress provide an important guide to building on the Government's efforts to date to prevent violence against women.

IWDA would also like to draw the Committee's attention to the gendered implications of resource development. Experience elsewhere shows the importance of close consideration of gender issues if both women and men are to benefit from responsible, sustainable development of Timor-Leste's resources. Policy makers need to actively seek to ensure that development planning manages risks and creates opportunities for women as this sector develops, so that the historic opportunity presented by development of Timor-Leste's resources benefits the whole population and contributes to addressing a key development priority - gender equality.¹⁶

Women's rate of participation in the formal labour force is currently half that of men, 28% compared to 57% for men. Women are much more likely to be in informal or vulnerable employment, working without a contract. Of working women, about half work in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. The next highest area is in the wholesale and retail trade. Women with little to no education are mainly concentrated in the areas of low-skill elementary occupations and in craft-making, even more so than men.¹⁷ In this context, **a key priority is identifying and supporting development interventions that will assist and support women in poorly remunerated and uncertain employment situations to benefit from new opportunities emerging with resource development.**

Finally, it is critical that thinking about Timor-Leste's trade relations and integration into the global economy includes both gendered perspectives and pathways for the voices of women, particularly those with limited resources and power – because they are often hit hardest in situations of economic change and have more limited mobility to move in response to that change.

Civil Society Engagement

IWDA strongly supports AusAID's Civil Society Framework, including as a guide to shaping engagement with local civil society. **IWDA welcomes the recognition of the need to make greater use of NGO capacity at the country-level in terms of the provision of services and for social**

¹⁵ International Centre for Research on Women (2012), *Violence against Women in Melanesia and Timor-Leste: Progress made since the 2008 Office of Development Effectiveness report*, p. 45

¹⁶ Rio Tinto's *Why gender matters: A resource guide for integrating gender considerations into Communities work at Rio Tinto* provides tools and analysis of the gendered impacts of resource development.

http://www.csr.uq.edu.au/docs/Rio_Tinto_gender_guide.pdf

¹⁷ Labour Force Survey 2010

accountability.¹⁸ Where the state's reach is limited, advocacy by civil society of policy and programming issues and recommendations, informed by on-the-ground experience can play an important role in getting to decision makers information and priorities from front line work.

AusAID is currently supporting international and local NGOs, through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) and directly through the post, to work with marginalised populations in rural areas to progress their rights and achieve better development outcomes for themselves, their families and communities. However, there is potential for AusAID to further engage with NGOs and civil society as dialogue partners, to share information, expertise and learning in order to better inform the aid program and enhance responsiveness. AusAID can also play an important modelling role in the way it works with and listens to civil society, normalising such interactions and demonstrating the value of routinely engaging with civil society, not just for the purposes of consultation, but as a partner in Timor-Leste's development.

Given the importance attached to engaging with local civil society, IWDA recommends that the Committee hold a public hearing in Timor-Leste to hear directly from civil society in country about their experience of and expectations for the relationship with Australia. Local civil society organisations have direct experience that would benefit the Government's understanding of how the bilateral relationship is perceived on the ground and where the potential and opportunities are. They have insights and local knowledge that can be marginalised when processes require inputs in ways that are familiar to consultants rather than communities.

Sarah Smith, doctoral candidate at Swinburne University and IWDA research volunteer, has recently conducted interviews with civil society representatives in Timor-Leste as part of her doctoral studies. These provide insights into current perceptions of local civil society representatives regarding international development actors. Her interviews suggest that after nearly 13 years of a heavy international presence in the country, engagement with local civil society has not always been effective or efficient, and is often characterised as 'siloes'. Local communities are very sensitive to lack of involvement in development programs. When assumptions are made about the nature of post-conflict or development situations in country, this is acutely perceived by local counterparts. The absence of accountability processes that involve local communities is seen by them as particularly problematic. International donors were perceived as more readily sharing their results and reports with their stakeholders, rather than the East Timorese Government and people.¹⁹ Inadequate processes for building ownership of development programs amongst the community suggest that current approaches are not always consistent with good development practice, and better accountability arrangements would help identifying such issues.

The Committee's inquiry provides a timely opportunity for reflection on the importance of participatory development processes and civil society engagement for locally drive, appropriate, sustainable development.

¹⁸ AusAID, Australia-Timor-Leste Country Strategy 2009 to 2014, p. 6.

¹⁹ Sarah Smith, Private communication 9 August 2012.

Summary of recommendations

1. Further efforts to ensure gender analysis and mainstreaming across the aid program, in line with the Country Strategy commitment that 'A Gender Action Plan which updates analysis and identifies the specific measures which the program will adopt, including addressing violence against women, will inform the entire program.'
2. Increased support for the capacity development of government and local organisations in gender mainstreaming, building on work of local gender advocates.
3. Ensure the Ending Violence Against Women program matches the scale and development significance of the problem of gender inequality and violence against women in Timor-Leste, and acts on the recommendations in the 2008 report by the Office of Development Effectiveness, *Violence Against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Promising Approaches* and the 2012 report by the International Center for Research on Women, *Violence against Women in Melanesia and Timor-Leste: Progress made since the 2008 Office of Development Effectiveness Report..*
4. Consider implementing additional initiatives in Timor-Leste consistent with those that have been implemented in the Pacific, specifically the Pacific Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative.
5. Address research gaps on the link between economic empowerment and violence against women and use the new evidence to inform initiatives to end violence against women.
6. Strengthen engagement with NGOs and civil society to share information, expertise and learning, in order to better inform the aid program.
7. Model for the Government of Timor-Leste effective, open, diverse engagement with civil society in the way in which Australia works with and listens to civil society in Timor-Leste.
8. Hold a public hearing of the Committee in Timor-Leste to hear directly from civil society in country about their experience of and expectations for Australia's relationship between with Timor-Leste.
9. Prioritise identification of and support for the kinds of development interventions that would assist and support Timorese women and gender equality to benefit from development of Timor-Leste's natural resources.