

**Supporting Women as Effective Leaders and Promotion of Women's Participation in Governance
in Timor Leste**

Assessment of a UNIFEM-led initiative by Sofi Ospina,

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Introduction

Until 1999, centuries of colonial rule meant that little was achieved in terms of economic, social and political empowerment of the nearly one million population of Timor Leste. Traditional values, in which women are portrayed as secondary citizens, are still widely prevalent especially in the 85% of the population that lives in rural areas; political, ritual and conflict mediation powers are the domain of men. Thus women have been traditionally deprived of participating in decision making and public life.

Since 1974, however, women have been fighting to change this paradigm. They participated actively in the three fronts of resistance in the struggle for independence and in the promotion of equal rights. During the 1999-2002 United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) they lobbied for the creation of a Gender Affairs Unit (GAU), promoted a 30% per cent quota for women in decision-making positions within UNTAET, organized a women's network (REDE Feto) to promote gender equality within government and society, and created a women's caucus (Caucus Feto Iha Politica, referred to simply as 'Caucus') to support women in politics. A major milestone in this period was the promotion of women's participation in the Constituent Assembly elections in 2001 resulting in their election to 27% of the seats.

What is the UNIFEM-led Initiative?

The UNIFEM-led initiative Supporting Women as Effective Leaders and Promotion of Women's Participation in Governance in Timor Leste was designed by the UNIFEM Country Office in Timor Leste in consultation with the Caucus and the Office of Promotion of Equality (OPE) which is within the Cabinet of the Prime Minister and is responsible for the formulation and implementation of gender equality policy and to promote gender mainstreaming across the government. It has its foundations in 2001 when a partnership was established between UNTAET GAU and UNIFEM to organize and conduct training for women as potential candidates to contest the Constituent Assembly elections. This led to the creation of the Caucus to support women candidates, replicate the training at local levels, and raise awareness of women as voters.

The Initiative aims to change gender relations and accelerate development in Timor Leste through the active involvement of women as effective leaders and to promote their participation in governance at central and local levels. It encompasses a three-year programme for enhancing rural women's leadership and participation in nation building in Timor-Leste (known as PERWL) and a programme to enhance women's capacity as effective and accountable electoral candidates, elected officials and legislators, and informed voters (known as WIP). WIP builds on PERWL and targets pre- and post-election activities, including promoting media's understanding and positive reporting of women in politics and decision making.

PERWL has three components

(1) Capacity building for women across the country in the concepts and principles of transformative leadership, politics and communities.

¹ This is a version of a longer paper that has been shortened for the purposes of analysis and discussion at the Workshop on Gender Equality and Aid Effectiveness, Bangkok 2-3 April 2007.

- (2) The development of materials and methods for promoting gender equality adapted to the needs of women at the grassroots level.
- (3) Research to assist in the formulation of evidence-based activities to address the socio-economic needs of rural women.

PERWL has a total budget of Euro 625,000 funded by the European Commission (Euro 575,000), UNDP (Euro 18,750), and UNIFEM (Euro 31,250 in kind). Additional funding has been provided by UNDP (US\$ 100,000) and UNIFEM (US\$ 30,000). As the funding is due to expire by mid-2007, UNIFEM is seeking funding to continue its implementation.

Assessing the UNIFEM Initiative in the light of the Paris Declaration principles

Many stakeholders interviewed for this study felt the most important issue was that, with a few key exceptions, donors were not consistently engaged in the promotion of gender equality, in general, and the promotion of women as leaders and participants in governance, in particular. This situation prevails despite donors having strong policy statements in support of gender equality, as was reaffirmed by their representatives during interviews.

All those contacted agreed on the importance of gender equality and its special significance in Timor Leste at this time. As a NORAD representative mentioned: “it is a worthwhile and necessary to increase gender equity in the country and to support the fledgling democratic structures...Supporting women in the political arena is an important task in Timor Leste”. A USAID colleague echoed this: “Mainstreaming gender perspectives in any area and at all levels of development is one of the main challenges...time and effort should be put at their maximum to promote women to be effective leaders”.

Ownership

The activities of the Initiative were identified as a priority by the OPE which has strongly supported it since its inception and an OPE staff member is assigned to ensuring coordination with UNIFEM. OPE’s Adviser on the Promotion of Equality co-chairs the Steering Committee that consists of the Caucus, the National Directorate for Territorial Administration - DNAT -, (responsible for decentralization and local governance and administering the elections) and the National Institute of Public Administration - INAP – (responsible for the administration of the entire public service and the capacity building needs of public servants). The involvement of these three entities ensures government involvement at a high level. The partnership with the district administrations has resulted in a great involvement of local governments and their sensitization to the Initiative’s relevance.

Ownership is not limited to the government. Civil society organizations (CSOs) have also been involved since the outset. Caucus and REDE Feto, a network of women’s organization composed of sixteen CSOs, have actively participated in both the Initiative’s leadership and its implementation. However, while the initiative is “owned” by these CSOs it is clearly not owned by conservative sectors of society and some religious leaders because the initiative is challenging their values. Nevertheless, the 2005 local elections showed a small but certain progress in the acceptance of women to hold positions as village and hamlet heads, a role traditionally assigned to men.

Alignment

The policy environment for advancing women as effective leaders in Timor Leste is not strong. For example there is no affirmative action mandated in the electoral law, no targets for gender balance in the civil service at senior levels, no parliamentary committees on gender issues, and until recently no recognized women’s caucus in parliament. Yet the Initiative is consistent with the government legal framework and aligned with the government policy on gender equality. The Initiative’s activities are grounded in Articles 16 and 17 of the Constitution concerning equal rights and equal opportunities for

women and men. Furthermore, the National Development Plan (NDP) considers gender equality as a prerequisite to reduce poverty. The GoTL ratified CEDAW and its Optional Protocol in which equal participation in politics is one of the principles of non-discrimination.

Also, many of the activities to promote women as effective leaders are aligned with Law No 2/2004 ‘On the Elections of Suco Chiefs and Suco Councils’, Article 2 of which stipulates that women and men can be candidates and elected without discrimination. Its Article 3 further specifies that Suco Councils must include two women and two youth, one of each sex. Thus, the local authorities’ electoral law guarantees, at least, three female positions on each suco council.

The Initiative’s programme of transformative leadership and women’s participation in politics and decision-making is a specific strategy to achieve OPE’s objective of women’s political empowerment. Alignment is further assured by OPE’s full involvement in the coordination and some aspects of the implementation of UNFEM’s work. .

Another dimension of the Initiative’s strong alignment with government activities is its support to strengthen the capacity of OPE and the development of its strategic planning. OPE has been sensitizing other government bodies on gender concepts and tools, set up gender focal points in line ministries and has developed sectoral gender check lists to ensure a gender perspective is integrated into line ministries’ policies and programmes with the support of the Minister of Planning and Finance. OPE capacity to respond to all these tasks, however, is still limited. Thus UNIFEM is assisting OPE progressively to improve its capacity to help line ministries align with the government’s own gender policies.

An indication of the strong link between UNIFEM and the GoTL was the government attendance at the “High Level Consultation on How to Ensure the Participation and Representation of Women in the Political Life of the Nation through the 2007 Legislative and Presidential Elections” organized by UNIFEM in partnership with OPE and Fokupers (a civil society partner) in March 2006. It was attended by the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the President of the National Parliament, the SRSG, all the ministers, members of parliament and leadership of political parties (in addition to UN agencies, development partners, ambassadors, civil society organizations, prominent intellectuals, women’s advocates and the media).

Donor representatives contacted for this paper assessed UNIFEM to have a good interaction with the government and its activities to be strongly aligned with government policies. A bilateral donor representative stated that UNIFEM “has established an excellent dialogue with GoTL leaders at the top and a convergence of objectives....so buy in from government to UNIFEM programs has been great”.

Harmonization

While the Initiative has enjoyed a certain level of ownership by government and CSO stakeholders and has been strongly aligned with government policies it has not yet had the benefit of a consistent and harmonized approach to the promotion of gender equality by donors.

Donor support for gender-related work has been mostly through bilateral projects or through multilateral organizations but without adequate coordination. The level of commitment of some donors has been intermittent. For example, AusAID funded a gender mainstreaming project that started in 2000 but stopped in 2002. The most consistent and long-term support has been from Irish Aid which has provided technical assistance to strengthen the capacity of OPE and the gender mainstreaming work in selected line ministries and the engendering of the planning processes within the Ministry of Planning and Finance and funded the gender specialist on the CSP monitoring and evaluation missions. USAID has been supporting

women in leadership through direct funding to international and local NGOs to promote women's participation in the political process and empowering women to have their voices heard. Multilateral organizations initiated the promotion of women's participation in politics and decision making and in local governance structures. The World-Bank-administered multi-donor funded Community Empowerment Project set the stage by mandating a gender balance in village councils established in around 450 villages across the country in 2000-2001. This created a precedent for the participation of women in local structures and prepared the ground for reserved seats for women in local authorities' elections (see above). UNTAET and UNIFEM supported the promotion of women as potential candidates for the Constituent Assembly as discussed above.

The Ministry of Planning and Finance leads aid coordination with World Bank support. The Consolidation Support Programme (CSP) is a mechanism of government and development cooperation across a number of sectors in which policy dialogue is undertaken six-monthly. A results matrix specifies quarterly benchmarks to be monitored in critical areas defined through annual action plans. The promotion of gender equality in public administration has been included in the results matrix since 2005 and key gender issues have been raised across different sectors such as justice, police, health and education. Another mechanism is the Sector Investment Programs (SIPs) linking policies, programmes and expenditures for defined sectoral priorities. The GoTL assigned a permanent seat to OPE in the sector working groups to include gender concerns in each sector. One of the SIPs covers the Rights, Equality and the Justice Sector.

Despite the inclusion of "equality" as a topic in both of these coordination/harmonization mechanisms there has been no broader policy discussion on gender or the role of women in governance. As one bilateral development agency representative highlighted there is not "a critical mass of donor concern about gender inequities in all sectors". In sum there are no overarching mechanisms of development coordination that actively include gender equality and the promotion of women as leaders as a core principle. However, bilateral donors have made a step towards harmonizing their approach to gender work. A first meeting in this direction, was convened by the AusAID Counselor at the end of January 2007. Irish Aid, Norway, NZAID, and the WB participated, as did the UN DSRSG.

A UN Consultative Group on Gender brings together gender focal points from all UN agencies to share information and network. Since the April 2006 crisis the group has not met regularly. UNIFEM is an active member of this group as well as UNFPA and UNICEF (two UN agencies addressing gender issues within their programming).

UNIFEM has not, so far, attempted regularly to bring together donors to adopt and work on a common agenda on gender issues. Since the April 2006 crisis the group has not met regularly. In this regard, UNIFEM's position is compromised by a lack of adequate funding. Interaction with donors is coloured by the need to mobilize resource, which may weaken its potential role as a coordinating body. As one donor put it: "We are much more likely to hear from UNIFEM when a project needs funding... than in relation to the coordination of programmes ...or sharing of information". Nevertheless UNIFEM is well respected for its active participation in broader donor coordination meetings consistently raising issues and respond positively to meet donors if requested.

UNIFEM is currently working with the GoTL on a *High Level Gender Coordination Mechanism* (HLCM) to ensure a coherent and coordinated gender strategy for Timor-Leste with sound coordination and communication. The mechanism is intended to meet quarterly and will be co-chaired by the Prime Minister and the UN Deputy SRSR for Governance Support, Development and Humanitarian Coordination, with representatives of government ministries, the chair of the National Parliament Women's Committee for the CPLP, key civil society organizations and key members of the UN system.

Managing for development results

The overall objective of the Initiative has been clearly understood by the different partners involved in the process but that this has not translated into clear targets.

Before the 2001 Constituent Assembly elections an attempt was made to identify the number of women in winnable positions. It was estimated that 30% of seats could be won by women and this “target” was almost achieved. During the 2005 local elections, analysis was undertaken to assess the participation of women. There were only 165 women candidates in the election for 2,228 “hamlet chiefs”. No target was set for the number that could be won, the implied target being “as many as possible”, so it was not possible to say whether the effort to promote women candidates was as successful as expected. In the event 27 women (16.3% of those who stood) were elected. The same comment can be made in relation to the election of local council members. There were 2,355 women candidates; at least 1,342 were elected as there were three seats reserved for women in each council. Of 1,265 women potential candidates trained before the elections through the initiative, 657 (52%) ran for elections and 365 were elected. These numbers allowed a quantification of outcomes and can serve as a baseline for future elections.

Some donors consider that there is inadequate monitoring and evaluation of the quality and impact of the activities under the Initiative. So far the monitoring is based on training needs assessment and post-training debriefing sessions with women participants including electoral candidates and non candidates. Genuine managing for results is likely to mean long-term follow-up of individuals and groups. It should be possible to follow participants to assess the extent they are practicing new skills and the barriers they face. As suggested by a UNDP representative, the effectiveness of women’s election to suco councils could be assessed in terms of their active participation, and outcomes of their interventions, in suco council discussions.

Although all stakeholders in gender equality work recognize the need for sex-disaggregated data to set plan and monitor, it is not systematically collected making difficult to assess progress in many areas. What data is collected, and compiled by the National Statistics Office, seems to be not well known or utilized by line ministries or development partners to increase their understanding of gender issues and influence policy and action.

Mutual accountability

All partners involved in the Initiative are accountable for results within their specific roles and responsibilities: for example, UNIFEM and OPE for ensuring coordination, INAP training and materials, and DNAT coordination with the districts. Caucus is responsible for the implementation of training, contracting out other CSOs and managing the pool of trainers; UNDP provides programming support and monitoring and evaluation assistance and the EC, as the major funder, monitors biannually through regular reporting and contracting out mid-term evaluation missions. It was suggested that UNIFEM needs to strengthen efforts to involve its partners and establish good joint planning, coordination and communication mechanisms between them and provide more capacity particularly in the areas of reporting and financial management skills. This could be particularly important in relation to shared results and monitoring and evaluation frameworks. One bilateral donor representative said that the UN only reports on processes or activities conducted but not on indicators and outcomes in relation to targets.

As there is no coordinating forum involving bilateral and multilateral development partners where the specific topic of promoting women as effective leaders is regularly, or even periodically, discussed it cannot be said that there is any mutual accountability on the part of these partners.

Annex 1: List of people consulted and interviewed

Due to a period of heightened security risk in Timor Leste in early March 2007 the consultant was not able to enter the country to conduct personally the interviews. Development partners were interviewed from Australia by email and/or by phone whereas government officials and civil society organizations were interviewed by a local consultant using interview guidelines provided by the consultant.

Robin Scott-Charlton, Counsellor D.C, Australian Embassy, Dili

Charles Lathrop, Head of Mission Irish Aid

Nicole Siebel, Programme Manager, Democracy and Governance Programme, USAID

Isabel Ximenes, Gender Focal Point, Democracy and Governance Programme, USAID

Eva Irene Tutf, Norway Embassy, Jakarta

Guglielmo Colombo, European Commission Representative

Tina Redshaw, former UK Ambassador, Timor Leste

Antonio S. Franco, World Bank, Country Manager, Timor-Leste

Fionula Cregan, UNDP Gender Focal Point & Programme Officer of UNIFEM PERWL

Milena Pires, UNIFEM County Programme Coordinator

Diana Arboleda, PERWL Programme Manager, UNIFEM

Mize Sanches, Director Office of Promotion of Equality

Florindo Pereira, National Institute of Public Administration (INAP)

Marito de Araujo, Association of Men Against Violence (AMKV)

Manuela Leong, Former Director Fokupers (NGO)

Elda Guterres, UNFETIP (NGO)