

## ASOSIASAUN MANE KONTRA VIOLENSIA (AMKV)

### Organizational Overview and Approach to Gender

Asosiasaun Mane Kontra Violensia (the Association of Men Against Violence, commonly referred to as AMKV) is an East Timorese NGO that focuses on encouraging men's participation in the struggle for gender equality. In particular the organization attempts to urge men to take responsibility for reducing the incidence of gender-based violence.

AMKV formed as a voluntary national network of 20 men in June 2002 and formally became an NGO in 2005. AMKV has voluntary community organisers based in specific *suco* and *aldeia* in seven districts (Aileu, Dili, Ermera, Lautem, Liquiça, Manatuto and Viqueque), while its office and national staff are based in Dili. The community organisers are in regular contact with each other and the national staff, and have autonomy to undertake activities in their immediate environs.

AMKV's formation was inspired by a workshop about violence, gender and masculinity held in three locations in Timor-Leste in 2002. This workshop was delivered by two members of the Nicaraguan men's group Puntos dos Encuentros, and was supported by various organizations based in Timor-Leste, including Oxfam Australia and La'o Hamutuk. It was attended by 38 men from across the country. The 20 founding members of AMKV were drawn primarily from this participant group.

For many of the participants, the workshop represented their first opportunity to critically discuss men's practices of violence against women and to reflect upon their own roles in this. The current executive director of AMKV recollects that prior to the workshop he did not have strong knowledge of gender and associated issues; however, after learning from Puntos dos Encuentros, many workshop participants were able to see that change to violent, patriarchal forms of masculine gender identities is both possible and important. AMKV's founders decided to establish the organization to support one another and other East Timorese men in that process of change.

#### **AMKV's Vision, Objectives and Strategies:**

**The vision of AMKV is to build a democratic, independent, and just society, free from violence and discrimination. It aims to raise awareness 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 bringing together community groups, national non-government organizations and the government.**

Mario de Araujo, "Liberation for everyone, not just men": a Case Study of the Men's Association against Violence (AMKV) in Timor Leste', in Sandy Ruxton, ed., *Gender Equality and Men: Learning from practice*, Oxfam, UK, 2004, p. 2.

AMKV's founders also agreed that it was important to establish a men's organization that could work alongside the numerous active women's organizations in the pursuit of gender equality in Timor-Leste. A broad goal is to change community perceptions that 'gender' is something of singular concern to women and is useless or dangerous for men to engage with. Establishing a men's organization that works on questions of gender and violence in Timor-Leste has meant that AMKV members have often been criticised and ridiculed by other men. Some critics question the manliness of working in the area; others believe that men giving credence to questions of gender undermines male solidarity, precipitates conflict between the

sexes and militates against traditional East Timorese culture. AMKV argues that East Timorese cultural practices and masculine identities do not need to be synonymous with patriarchy, violence and discrimination against women. In the organization's view, East Timorese traditional culture can and should change in order to support the pursuit of gender equality.

AMKV actively seeks out partnerships and connections with other organizations working in the areas of gender and gender-based violence. Oxfam Australia has been one important long-term partner working to support organizational development and program activities. Other partners include OPE and UNFPA, with whom AMKV worked intensively in 2006 to coordinate the national program for the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Violence campaign. During the 2006 crisis AMKV worked with Rede Feto to undertake analysis of conditions in IDP camps.

AMKV is based in the office of the East Timorese monitoring and research NGO, Luta Hamutuk. The two organizations have established a relationship whereby their community education programs at times intersect. Beyond Timor-Leste AMKV has made connections with other national men's movements against violence.

AMKV's primary donors are Oxfam Australia, Caritas Australia and UNFPA. Most commonly, funding is extended to specific programs. AMKV feels that it has yet to secure sustainable funding arrangements, which means that the organization's resources to cover core logistical costs such as transport and office equipment are less than adequate. Until 2006 all AMKV positions were filled by volunteers; now ongoing funding has been made available for the executive director's position.

## **Programs**

### *Internal Reflection and Peer Mentoring*

As a direct flow-on from the workshop with Pontos dos Encuentros, one of AMKV's initial activities was to institute internal reflective discussions between members. These discussions focus on members' own practices, views and assumptions in their daily lives and how these need to be changed to ensure non-violence and gender equality. If a member does not display the behaviour in his own life that he espouses in community education programs, then he can be asked to leave AMKV by other members. On the flipside, AMKV members also recognise that changing their own views and behaviour, often in directions that challenge social norms, requires the support and mentoring of other similarly dedicated men.

### *Community Education*

AMKV's largest program has been to facilitate community education in local communities. Often in their own time, such as weekends, AMKV members bring men and women together to discuss gender roles and relations and specific issues such as gender-based violence. The objective of this program is to encourage and give communities, particularly men, starting points to make immediate changes to gender relations. The discussions are facilitated in a participative fashion that minimises the need for literacy; for example, using drama as a learning technique. Rather than talking at the level of abstract concepts, AMKV also prefers to encourage participants to reflect upon their day-to-day lives and devise strategies of change that are practical and achievable in the immediacy.

AMKV counts as a key success of this program the engaging of large numbers of men in various locales around Timor-Leste. Communities that exist in isolation from the flows of organizational information that typically emanate from Dili are prioritized. When new to an area, AMKV has often found it initially difficult and slow-going to engage men in their discussions of gender. Men often display reticence to reflect upon something that they regard as appropriate only for women, as a negative phenomenon or as something that exists outside of East Timorese culture. To combat this challenge, AMKV has found it important to have community organizers based in the locales and to work closely with other community leaders such as *xefi suco*, *xefi aldeia* and youth leaders. The support of these locally based community figures helps to garner initial trust from communities. Once men are engaged in AMKV community education programs, however, AMKV holds that participants speak positively and enthusiastically of their involvement.

### *Advocacy*

At a national level AMKV involves itself in a range of advocacy issues; for example, input into writing and pushing for domestic violence legislation, and lobbying the Ministry of Education to remove gender biases from school curriculum. In addition, the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence campaign is an important yearly event for AMKV, with the organization playing an increasingly central co-ordinating role alongside UNFPA and the Office for the Promotion of Equality. Examples of AMKV-specific activities in the 2006 campaign include cooking classes for men and community workshops about the prevention of gender-based violence across the Baucau region. These workshops were held in conjunction with Centro Baucau Buka Hatene's Women's Development Program.

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*Excerpt from: Trembath, Anna and Damian Grenfell, Mapping the Pursuit of Gender Equality: Non-Government and International Agency Activity in Timor-Leste, Globalism Institute, RMIT University, Dili, July 2007, ISBN 978-0-646-47770-1, pp. 20-23.*