

CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

Organizational Overview and Approach to Gender

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is a multinational, faith-based humanitarian and relief organization that focuses on reaching the 'poor and disadvantaged' (CRS *Timor Leste Annual Program Summary October 2004 – September 2005*, p. 2). The organization was founded in 1943 by the Catholic Bishops of the United States, and works in over 90 countries across the world. Funding is primarily received from the United States Government, in particular USAID.

CRS has provided assistance to East Timorese organizations since 1979. However, it was not until after the United Nations-facilitated referendum in 1999 that a CRS Timor-Leste in-country program was formally established to respond to the widespread destruction of infrastructure and emergency humanitarian crisis. CRS's main country office is in Dili, with a sub-office located in Baucau. The CRS country team is comprised of 16 national staff and three permanent international staff.

CRS has identified three strategic objectives for its work in Timor-Leste: ensuring that economic opportunity is developed and diversified among Timor-Leste's citizenry; working closely with government to encourage participation in civic life; and contributing to the reduction of child mortality rates. With a focus on developing the capacity of local organizational partners, CRS does little direct implementation except in the area of emergency humanitarian assistance.

The advancement of gender equality, as well as peace and reconciliation, is mainstreamed across the Timor-Leste country program. CRS's approach to gender is influenced by a view that ensuring the inclusion of women in development programs will diversify and increase the benefits. This is especially the case as women are identified as an integral part of ensuring the livelihoods of families and communities.

Women, alongside youth, have been identified as a key target group for 2005 to 2009, particularly on the basis of their ongoing disadvantage in social and economic arenas; however, CRS holds that focusing on women solely in their activities in Timor-Leste would not be beneficial as it has the potential to create resentment and division in communities. Consequently CRS's primary approach to gender is to ensure that women are able to actively participate in and receive the benefits of their country program.

CRS does not have a staff member particularly assigned to the area of gender. Periodically the country team receives technical input and training assistance in this area from their regional support services, CRS headquarter or other specialists.

Programs

CRS currently works across five program areas: agriculture, civil society, microfinance, peacebuilding and health. Encouragement of equitable participation and distribution of benefits between the sexes extends across the program areas.

Agriculture

CRS has worked in the area of agriculture since 1999, particularly in Ainaro, Baucau and Viqueque districts. The aim of this program has been to aid agricultural groups to increase the quantity and quality of yields, develop labour sharing and organization amongst farmers, and to find sustainable markets for products. This program is now winding back, with CRS withdrawing from Ainaro. A new development is the commencement of candlenut enterprises in 2007 as CRS has conducted studies into potential export markets for the product, particularly the cosmetics market.

Civil society

CRS's civil society program operates in Lautem, Viqueque, Baucau and Liquica districts, and will expand into Bobonaro district in 2007. From 2003 to 2005 the focus of the program was to work with local organizations in order to strengthen their organizational management skills and to assist them to conduct effective advocacy campaigns about issues directly affecting their communities. As a follow-on to this project, CRS is currently undertaking a project, *Kmanek*, with joint funding support from UNDP and CRS itself. This project aims to bridge any boundaries and build dialogues between civil society and government at district and sub-district levels. CRS aims to encourage the participation of women in all activities. Ensuring strong levels of women's participation has been particularly difficult at the level of government, given that there are relatively few women who occupy positions within governance structures.

Microfinance

The microfinance program is undertaken in Baucau, Dili and Viqueque districts through a local organization, Tuba Rai Metin (TRM). TRM gives loans to and helps to train groups of women undertaking small business activities such as kiosks, vegetable stalls and coconut oil processing. TRM has progressed sufficiently to begin operating independently of CRS, fully adopting asset and risk portfolios. CRS is gradually winding down this program area.

Peacebuilding

The peacebuilding program is concentrated in the districts of Baucau, Bobonaro, Covalima, Dili and Manatuto. Since 1999 CRS has worked with district Justice and Peace Commissions, inter-religious councils and peacebuilding networks. The objective of this program is to build tolerance and peace between groups that differ in their political or religious beliefs. Youth, particularly in the border districts of Bobonaro and Covalima, are a key target group.

Young men and boys ... have their own social roles to fill ... When they finish their work, many of them have leisure time to socialize with friends. Maliana is a central meeting place for the youth in the border areas. Cliques form and many young men in the region have said that it is often safer to join one group than to not be affiliated with any of them because the different groups compete for control of different areas in the town or region.

(From Catholic Relief Services, 'Daily Life of the Youth in Suai and Bobonaro', *Timor Leste Annual Program Summary Oct 04 – Sept 05*, p. 8.)

CRS has expanded this program to look at peacebuilding, prejudice reduction and reintegration of communities in the wake of the 2006 crisis. CRS worked extensively in IDP

camps in Dili to facilitate dialogue and undertake research about the views and desires of those displaced by the crisis. The results of this study were presented to the government.

Health

This is a more recent program area for CRS, beginning in 2004. It focuses on reducing child mortality rates and is concentrated in the eastern areas of Timor-Leste. The program looks at the impact of malaria upon prenatal, postnatal and lactating women, maternal health, nutrition, diarrhoea and respiratory infections. Partners include the Ministry of Health, Timor Leste Asistencia Integrada de Saude (TAIS) and Basics of Institutionalizing Child Survival (BASICS, funded by USAID).

Contacts

Post: PO Box 45, Dili, Timor Leste

Tel: (670) 332 4641

Fax: (670) 332 4640

Email: crsrep@tl.seapro.crs.org

Address: Rua Dom Aleixo Corte Real, Fomento, Dili

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, and Irish Aid, Melbourne, August 2007, ISBN 978-0-646-47770-1, pp. 24-26.