

CAUCUS FETO IHA POLITIKA

Organizational Overview and Approach to Gender

Caucus Feto iha Politika (Women's Political Caucus) is the only East Timorese NGO that focuses predominantly on promoting women's participation in formal politics. Caucus was formed as a result of workshops held in 2001 by UNIFEM and UNTAET's Gender Affairs Unit. These workshops aimed to encourage women to nominate as candidates for the scheduled Constituent Assembly elections. The formation of Caucus reflected a view at that time that an organization was required to support female electoral candidates as East Timorese women were struggling to find an equal space in the formal political arena. Those involved in establishing Caucus looked at examples of similar organizations across the region, including the Indonesian Women's Political Caucus.

Caucus's overarching vision is for equality between women and men in political decision-making arenas. Given this, Caucus encourages a gender balance between women and men in decision-making positions as well as quality of women's political participation. Non-partisan support for women's political participation is a principle governing Caucus's work; thus the organization works with a wide range of political parties and affiliations.

While its main office is in Dili, Caucus periodically undertakes activities across all districts of Timor-Leste, such as leadership training, working with political parties to ensure gender equality of party structures and platforms, and encouraging women as candidates and voters in electoral processes. Caucus's primary donor is the International Reproduction Institute and the organization is a member of Rede Feto. It works with a range of other organizations, including UNIFEM, UNFPA, Oxfam Australia and the Office for the Promotion of Equality.

Programs

Encouraging Women as Electoral Candidates

Across different electoral campaigns, including the Constituent Assembly campaign in 2001 and the *suco* elections in 2004, Caucus has been instrumental in encouraging and supporting the nomination of female candidates. For example, in 2001 Caucus gave support to those women standing for office in the Constituent Assembly, including by conducting media and communication campaigns.

Following this, in 2003 and 2004 Caucus worked with the Office for the Promotion of Equality and UNIFEM to deliver leadership training across 11 districts in order to prepare women who were facing potential election as officials on *suco* councils.

Support for Female Parliamentary and Council Representatives

The work of Caucus includes providing support to those women who have been elected to formal political positions. In Dili Caucus arranges regular lunches for female parliamentarians and female civil society activists in order to allow relationships to be forged across party lines and to maintain communication flows with civil society. Targeted training for elected officials is also periodically provided to enable skills development.

Socialization of Gender Equality within Party Structures

Caucus attempts to forge linkages with the wide range of parties in Timor-Leste to encourage gender balance within their ranks and the adoption of gender equality principles as part of party missions. To this end, and with the 2007 parliamentary elections in mind, Caucus undertook training with individual parties across 2006 and 2007. Caucus maintains that it has received positive reactions from the majority of parties. Caucus has also facilitated leadership training for female members of political parties. Almost one-third of women who participated in this training have nominated as candidates for the 2007 parliamentary elections.

Popular Education and Communications

Since 2003 Caucus has produced a self-named newsletter about women's political participation. Caucus also facilitates competitions in schools and communities that focus on the history of women in Timor-Leste. These competitions are often run to socialize specific objectives of women's political participation, such as women's ability to stand as electoral candidates, to contribute to party politics or to freely chose which party to support. These competitions have received organizational support from UNFPA and individual support from Maria Alves Domingas Fernandes (Micato), a long-time women's rights activist; the competitions are now named the 'Micato Cup'. Media campaigns are also undertaken, for example radio and television programs to raise awareness of women's participation in the political arena and to educate female voters about the electoral process.

Advocacy

Caucus periodically lends support to advocacy campaigns in Timor-Leste. For example, prior to the formation of the country's Constitution, Caucus and other organizations—particularly Rede Feto and Unifem—worked together to advocate for the constitutional recognition and protection of women's rights.

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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. 27-28.