

## **CENTRO BAUCAU BUKA HATENE**

### **Organizational Overview and Approach to Gender**

Centro Baucau Buka Hatene, commonly referred to in English as the ‘Baucau Friendship and Knowledge Centre’, opened in 2004. Located in a rehabilitated building in Baucau township, Centro Baucau Buka Hatene aims to serve the entire Baucau district. The centre is envisaged as a welcoming space where community members can come together to learn new skills, meet, organize, and obtain information and assistance. In particular Centro Baucau Buka Hatene seeks to attract the participation of young people and women.

Centro Baucau Buka Hatene operates with significant support from its key partner, Friends of Baucau. The partnerships forged between Friends of Baucau and various organizations in the Baucau district, including Centro Baucau Buka Hatene, is one example of ‘Friendship Relationships’ between local communities in Australia and Timor-Leste. Typically, ‘Friends of’ groups in Australia consist of volunteer community networks co-ordinated by local governments. In the case of Friends of Baucau, resources and support are provided by the Cities of Darebin and Moreland in Melbourne.

Friends of Baucau employs the Centro Baucau Buka Hatene’s staff, including the centre’s co-ordinator, an English teacher, a receptionist, a groundskeeper, and the Women’s Development Program co-ordinator. The co-ordinator of the centre is answerable to a management committee comprising elected volunteers from the Baucau community.

The centre provides a range of services and runs various programs. Services include access to a women’s resource centre, a library and computers. Programs include an English language course, a youth program focused on drama and performance, small-business support, computer skills tuition and tourism training. Of specific interest to this report is the substantial ‘Programa Feto no Desenvolvimentu’ (Women’s Development Program). The Women’s Development Program is guided by the principle of empowering women to improve their own lives and the lives of their local communities. The program also has a commitment to being responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable, poor and isolated women in Baucau. This has necessitated substantial work in local communities across the district as well as activities in the Buka Hatene centre itself.

While Friends of Baucau is the key supporter, the Women’s Development Program has also received support from a range of other international organizations. These include Australian Volunteers International (AVI), the International Labour Organization (ILO), New Zealand Aid, the British Embassy and Caritas Australia. The program has also developed relationships with a range of East Timorese organizations such as TimorAid, Baucau-based agricultural NGO LAHO, PRADET Timor Lorosa’e, the Ministry of Education, the Office for the Promotion of Equality, Caucus, AMKV and the Vulnerable Persons Unit, as well as with women and women’s groups across the district of Baucau.

### **Programs**

In addition to the position of a full-time co-ordinator, the Women’s Development Program has also been supported since 2004 by an Australian Volunteer International (AVI) position.

Furthermore, the program receives assistance from the Melbourne-based Friends of Baucau co-ordinator and the voluntary Friends of Baucau Women's Development Working Group. From the outset the Women's Development Program has been determined to position itself as truly community-driven, directly responsive to and guided by the articulated needs of women across the Baucau district. This approach has required the development of meaningful relationships with a broad range of women to enable contextual understanding of local needs and priorities.

With this requirement in mind, in 2004 program staff travelled across the district to meet with community groups and large organizations working in those communities. They sought to forge relationships with existing organizations and to examine what programs and services were already in existence. Areas of need were identified and the program staff worked to ensure that their newly planned programs were not duplicating the efforts of other organizations. Another strategy for gaining the confidence of local communities was the delivery of socially relevant training, such as in the area of health.

To ensure community ownership of projects, the program seeks to engage community members in monitoring and evaluation processes, encourages active communication and gives confidence to community initiative through responding to requests and criticisms. Another key to the program's success in targeting rural and remote areas has been the reduction of the travel required of community groups. However, this has posed challenges for program staff who are without a vehicle and must undertake six monitoring trips beyond Baucau township per month.

While program staff actively build relationships into communities across Baucau district, much work has been put into building relations with a range of national and international organizations based in Dili. This relationship-building has had dual goals. Firstly, it has aimed to link Baucau women into networks that are often purportedly national but remain centralised in Dili. Secondly, it has aimed to ensure Baucau is self-sufficient in terms of women-focused information dissemination as well as program and service delivery. However, this second aim is seen to only be possible by drawing upon the expertise of other organizations, as resources within any one organization remain particularly limited.

An ongoing challenge faced by the Women's Program, and echoing concerns from other non-Dili-based organizations, is the concern regarding access to information and services relating to gender programs. Baucau township is relatively easily reached from Dili, and is serviced by good roads and regular public transport. However, the distance between the Centro Baucau Buka Hatene and Dili-based organizations is still acutely felt. A common concern is that Dili-based organizations rarely travel to Baucau to seek information about local programs or conditions. Instead communication between the Centro Baucau Buka Hatene and other organizations is often limited to invitations to attend events. Even these limited lines of communication can prove tenuous at times. For example during the 2006 crisis it was not safe for program staff to travel to Dili. As a consequence of this, Baucau-based staff faced real challenges in accessing emergency services provided by Dili-based organizations that were also required in Baucau.

The relationship between the Centro Baucau Buka Hatene and the Friends of Baucau has meant that the centre's sense of isolation has been somewhat allayed. Program staff exchange ideas with and receive resources from an organization with a deep interest in the localized conditions facing Baucau, rather than national issues facing Timor-Leste as a whole. This relationship has allowed

a degree of independence to respond to specific community needs, rather than being solely dependent on Dili-based networks for funding, resources and information.

***Rules of Thumb:***

**This list of the ‘rules of thumb’ is the beginning of articulating the methodology and principles of operation of the Women’s Program in Baucau ...**

- 1. Requests for support are always from the women themselves**
- 2. We always monitor, support and review projects through community participation**
- 3. Reporting back and informing on processes and outcomes**
- 4. Clear communication both ways**
- 5. Consult with pre-existing groups**
- 6. Focus on illiteracy, remoteness and poverty**
- 7. The approach has evolved from funding programs to employing staff who can then apply for funding to make projects sustainable**
- 8. Trust and relationship building**
- 9. Important to be open and flexible in the program**

Friends of Baucau, *Friends of Baucau Women’s Program Workshop Report*, 16 November 2005, Melbourne, p. 15.

The Women’s Development Program has several project components: literacy groups; small business livelihood support; training; family and sexual violence prevention and support service; and the women’s resource centre. Periodically program staff produce comprehensive bilingual (Tetun and English) reports about gender-related activities. In the past this has included detailed information on leadership training for young women from the Baucau district and the 16 Days Against Violence campaign activities in 2006.

*Literacy Groups*

This project began in 2004 and has largely focused on the Baucau subdistrict, although over the years 2005 and 2006 the Women’s Development Program extended the literacy program into more remote and under-resourced communities in the Baucau district. The Women’s Development Program argues that women’s illiteracy is very widespread and is a problem that women in Baucau wish to address. Initially, groups are formed that are based in local communities and women learn to spell their own names. The participants then proceed to learning the alphabet, gradually introducing writing and reading. In the course of this activity, other knowledge and skill sets are developed, including about issues such as nutrition and health. The groups are directed by a trained facilitator from the local community.

The literacy groups project has grown substantially since its inception in 2004. In 2005 there were seven groups based in different parts of Baucau subdistrict, and each group had around 16 participants. Since the Ministry of Education has developed its capability to implement literacy programs in districts beyond Dili, the Women’s Development Program has worked to co-ordinate its literacy program with the Ministry rather than continue to work alone.

The literacy groups have provided positive results in direct and indirect ways. In the past, for example, participants used a fingerprint to mark their identities, whereas now they can sign their own names. The Women’s Development Program has noticed that as groups proceed in their

literacy and numeracy skills and become self-directed in their learning, they often start to seek information about small business generation. In light of this, management of money by families and community groups has at times improved substantially, and through this process some of the literacy groups have evolved into small business co-operatives. Program staff also argue that the focus on improving women's literacy has substantial flow-on consequences as women can actively supervise and encourage their children's educational progress.

### *Small Business Livelihood Support*

The Small Business Livelihood Support program extends across the district of Baucau and is focused on aiding the development of rural women's groups' income generation activities. One group makes various kinds of sweets—such as fried cassava, donuts and biscuits—and sells these products through a kiosk to the local community three times per week. Another group produces and packages salt, some of which is sold in the Centro Baucau Buka Hatene and some by Friends of Baucau in Melbourne. Production of tais is the focus of another group's activities, which is again either sold through the Centre or in Australia.

In the past the Women's Development Program also worked with a cluster of women's groups at the suco level who grew and sold peanuts. These groups have since become self-sufficient and profitable, and have expanded their activities into mulberry production to enable a consistent flow of income during the peanut offseason.

Groups receive periodic training support from the Women's Development Program, both on-site and at the centre. They also have access to small grants and other forms of material support. The Co-ordinator of the Program visits each group once a month to monitor their activities and to provide groups with assistance and encouragement. Program staff have found that one of the greatest challenges facing women's enterprise groups is jealousy and criticisms from other community members. Groups sometimes need to be given confidence by the Women's Development Program in order to continue their activities in the face of such negative reactions from their local communities.

### *Training*

The Women's Development Program has facilitated various kinds of training including health, leadership for women, and training for selected local community facilitators. One of the program's first activities was a series of workshops in villages across Baucau about specific health issues, including general hygiene and malaria prevention. As well as disseminating health information, the workshops were designed to aid community members' awareness of and trust in the Centro Baucau Buka Hatene.

The Women's Development Program has also partnered with the Office for the Promotion of Equality and Caucus to provide three-day leadership training sessions for women from the Baucau subdistrict who are youth representatives on suco councils. The objective of the training was to encourage these women to develop structures of women's leadership (for example women's organizations) within their villages and to encourage their active leadership within the suco councils.

Utilizing a kind of ‘Train the Trainer’ model, the Women’s Development Program provides ongoing support to a number of women to enable them in turn to facilitate training within their own community. This activity is seen as complementary to the literacy program where local facilitators help ensure progress and largely avoid the difficulties of groups’ travel to and from Baucau township.

### *Family and Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Service*

The Family and Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Service project has evolved in direct response to community needs and the limitations of other agencies. For example, the police in Baucau are sometimes unable to respond adequately to cases of domestic violence and sexual violence due in part to having highly limited access to vehicles. Moreover, other national NGOs providing support services for victims of sexual abuse tend to be centred in Dili with more limited presence in the Baucau district. In this context, the Women’s Development Program staff found themselves to be a first point of contact for women who experienced domestic violence or sexual assault.

In light of their growing recognition of the depth of this problem, in 2005 program staff—in conjunction with Caritas Australia and PRADET Timor-Leste—decided to hold a workshop to train local leaders to respond effectively to cases of violence against women. Following this, in 2006 the Women’s Development Program worked with AMKV to hold a series of workshops in villages across Baucau district to coincide with the annual 16 Days Against Violence campaign.

In the instance of acts of sexual or domestic violence, various forms of support are extended to victims who are linked to existing local and national support services. For example, the Women’s Development Program staff may contact JSMP’s Victim Support Service for legal assistance, and PRADET Timor-Leste for counselling and medical support. Program staff have identified that the building of relationships with organizations such as JSMP’s Victim Support Service, PRADET Timor-Leste, Caritas Australia, the Vulnerable Person’ Unit, FOKUPERS, local police and local health services has been a critically important aspect of ensuring the success of this project.

The latest development in this project is a shelter—managed by the Women’s Development Program—for women who have experienced domestic violence or sexual assault. The new building has been funded by Caritas Australia and is scheduled to open in 2007. The shelter responds to a lack of appropriate accommodation and an absence of a focal point for victim support services in the Baucau area. Program staff envisage that this shelter will provide accommodation, respite, protection, and access to legal, counselling and medical services.

### *Women’s Resource Centre*

The Women’s Resource Centre, located at Centro Baucau Buka Hatene, provides a focal point for the Women’s Development Program’s advocacy, policy development, resources and information dissemination. Women from across Baucau can access resources, use the space to meet, make requests such as for specific workshops, and come into contact with each other. The space seeks to operate as a space for networks for women across Baucau.

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