

CONCERN WORLDWIDE

Organizational Overview and Approach to Gender

With headquarters in Ireland, Concern Worldwide is an international NGO that has been working in Timor-Leste since 1999. Reflecting its commitment to working with the poorest and most vulnerable communities, Concern Worldwide runs programmes in 28 locations across the globe. Broad organizational objectives include the combating of poverty and the promotion of 'livelihoods security'. Concern utilises the term 'livelihoods security' to link the means of living (livelihoods) with access to food (food security). The interaction between these factors is particularly strong in communities based on subsistence agriculture, where a cash economy does not dominate the production and exchange of food. Concern envisages a world where poor communities have long-term and continuous access to income and food.

Concern is not only interested, however, in encouraging change to communities' material conditions. It is also guided by the humanitarian principles of ensuring dignity, respect, freedom from oppression and opportunities for a fulfilling life for all individuals. Moreover, Concern does not want to be a service provider; it seeks to ensure communities themselves develop the skills and knowledge to ensure their livelihoods security. Typically Concern provides technical and material assistance, planning support, and monitoring and evaluation. However, community groups identify problems and solutions and undertake implementation themselves.

Concern's work in Timor-Leste has moved from emergency programming (1999 to 2002) to longer-term development programs (2003 to present). The focus for these programs has been two subdistricts, Turiscai in Manufahi and Luro in Lautem, as these areas were considered to be experiencing very high levels of poverty. From 2003 to 2005 Concern's regional offices were staffed by fieldworkers permanently located in Manufahi and Luro. At the end of 2005 Concern moved its regional offices from these subdistricts to the respective district centres of Same and Lospalos. Concern maintains that this allows continued long-term partnership with communities without creating a culture of dependency.

This geographically targeted approach is not necessarily typical of NGOs operating in Timor-Leste. Concern has found that the Timor-Leste context demands that in order to achieve sustainable change, NGOs must be careful to build strong foundations of trust with communities over a long period of time. For Concern this necessitates working intensively with specific communities and, due to those communities' isolation, basing regional operation in those areas. Concern also ensures that some of their staff are from those communities, thus equipping the organization with local knowledge and languages.

Concern has already mainstreamed gender analysis across program design, implementation and monitoring. Further, it encourages meaningful participation of women in community-based projects. Some challenges have been experienced in achieving these objectives and as a result Concern has trialled various strategies. These include: extensive gender training for staff; gender balance in staffing numbers; a Gender Focus Group consisting of staff from Manufahi and Lautem; the establishment in 2006 of a Gender Support Officer position based in the Dili head office; program revision; and annual gender planning with associated indicators. In 2004, with the aid of a consultant, Concern undertook organizational reflection about its work in the area of gender.

Concern counts among its successes in the area of gender the high incidence of female participation in community projects (from 2003 to 2005 women comprised 55 per cent of participants) and the accomplishments and self-sufficiency of a number of women's groups in Turiscai and Luro.

Programs

All stages of Concern's program development, planning, implementation and management are guided by seven organizational approaches: Social protection, Rights-based approaches, Equality, HIV and AIDS, Partnership, Disasters Risk Reduction and Advocacy. Concern's primary programs are Livelihoods, Disaster Risk Reduction and Nutrition.

Livelihoods

Improving food security, raising access to clean water and encouraging small enterprise generation forms the basis of the Livelihoods program in Manufahi and Lautem. Concern and Local NGO partners work with local community groups and suco councils to identify problems using participatory rural appraisal tools and solutions as well as to plan and divide responsibilities. Between the years 2003 and 2005 Concern worked with over 20 livelihoods partner groups in Luro, six of which primarily consisted of women. Concern assists such groups to develop a range of relevant capacities; for example, better knowledge of agricultural techniques and literacy skills. While working intensively with local communities, Concern's efforts are directed towards ensuring community self-reliance and the ability of communities to direct, monitor and evaluate their own activities.

From January 2007, Concern has initiated the 'Options for Food Security Transformation program for Lautem and Manufahi (OFFSET)' with support from the European Commission. The OFFSET program is designed to contribute to addressing rural poverty, enabling poor and vulnerable households to achieve secure and sustainable livelihoods at the end of the program period (2010). Specifically, the program has been designed to address the inadequacy and poor quality of food supplies, especially during the lean months of the year, which occur on an annual basis from November to March.

This will be addressed through the active involvement of target groups in participatory technology development, which is seen to spread from the Community Learning Sites (CLSs), farmer-to-farmer training, and technical assistance. The integration of health and nutrition interventions will address issues around poor post-harvest practices; inefficient storage; inadequate knowledge and awareness of the nutritional values of food, including traditional food; malnutrition; and poor health and hygiene practices.

The main target groups of the program are 3,000 food-insecure and vulnerable households comprising upland/lowland farmers, women (especially head of households, pregnant and lactating women) and children (especially under five years of age). To implement the program, Concern works with suco councils, community-based organizations (CBOs), local partners, and counterparts in Lautem and Manufahi.

Contacts

Post: PO Box 211, Post Restante, Correlos de Dili
Tel: (670) 331 2035
Fax: (670) 331 2039
Email: clare.danby@concern.net (Country Director)
Website: www.concern.net
Address: Rua Governador Lacerda de Maia, Vila Verde, Dili

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