

## FETO KIIK SERVISU HAMUTUK (FKSH)

### Organizational Overview and Approach to Gender

Feto Kiik Servisu Hamutuk (FKSH or Young Women Working Together) is an NGO staffed by five women based in Dili and one male field officer in Same district. The organization was established in 2002 and was voluntarily run until it received its first funding in 2004. The inspiration for FKSH's creation arose from the experience of its founding members in an international NGO, and from a need expressed through the Second National Women's Congress of Timor-Leste for women's groups to have better financial management skills.

FKSH's activities chiefly focus on developing the organizational capacity of small enterprise groups—including women's groups—concentrating on areas beyond Dili (specifically Same and Aileu). Small enterprise groups are assisted to build proficiency in the following areas: financial management, small business administration, leadership, organizational management and particular types of skills pertinent to particular business activity, such as sewing, baking and literacy.

Beyond its mission to increase the capabilities of such groups, FKSH envisages a society that enables peace, women's equal rights, economic independence and freedom from discrimination (FKSH, *Strategy Planning Results*, 2007).

#### **FKSH's Objectives:**

- **To increase women's skills to develop and manage viable small business;**
- **Together with the national women's organizations, to strengthen and develop the institutional capacities of local women's organizations;**
- **To increase awareness among women and men of women's rights and roles in decision making and to build leadership skills with women and youth in the community;**
- **To increase women's knowledge of community organizing and especially of how to involve other women in community groups.**

Gizela De Carvalho, *Interim Report—6 months (January–June 2006)*, Provided to the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, FKSH, Dili, July 2006.

FKSH works from a view that Timor-Leste's independence provides a significant opportunity for the advancement of women's rights and participation in society, but that to fulfil this opportunity will take significant and deliberate effort. For FKSH the Indonesian occupation exacerbated women's subordination to men, but a patriarchal social system in Timor-Leste existed prior to this period and has continued since Timor-Leste's independence. In these circumstances it cannot be taken for granted that national freedom also means freedom for women.

**In East Timor today the patriarchal mentality still prevails and women do not have equal access to decision making. If women are resourced according to the women's capacity and women's empowerment becomes a key focus for national development, then women will have a large part in shaping East Timor for the future generations.**

FKSH, Organizational Brochure, 2006

FKSH's stated approach to gender-based change is to encourage women's self-reliance, active decision-making and collective organising, and to ensure women's participation in a development process that more genuinely encompasses the geography of the entire nation.

FKSH has forged relations with a range of other organizations, from small community groups to government offices and international organizations. These included the Alola Foundation, Rede Feto, the Office for the Promotion of Equality and the YWCA. Currently FKSH's major donor is the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, which began supporting FKSH's Same program in September 2004. Terres de Hommes, a Netherlands-based organization focusing on the needs of homeless people, has funded FKSH's Dili program in the past. For other aspects of their work, FKSH relies on small donations procured through fundraising by individuals and community groups largely based in Australia (for example Friends and Partners with East Timor, based in Brisbane), and donor support for one-off or short-term projects.

## **Programs**

Following its inauguration in 2002, FKSH began distributing cloth and gave sewing training to selected women's groups in Same. This generated interest from other groups in the district, and initial activities undertaken in Same effectively became a pilot for future programs. Since 2002 FKSH has expanded its activities to Aileu and Dili districts, now focusing primarily on small enterprise groups in Same and Aileu (funding for the Dili program has recently ended). FKSH has found it very beneficial to have a project officer based permanently in Same and to have reference committees in Same and Aileu made up of local representatives. These committees ensure local input into FKSH activities, help to maintain transparency and accountability, and aid FKSH to monitor and make decisions about supporting new local groups.

In 2006 FKSH introduced a micro loan program, the 'Revolving Loan Fund', which aims to provide groups with whom FKSH has an existing relationship a small amount of capital to begin or improve their business activities. After extensive contact and training with FKSH, groups submit a business proposal, and if successful are granted between \$US 50 and \$US 200. They are expected to repay these loans with a nominal interest rate of one per cent per month. Participating groups know that if they do not repay their loan this will prevent FKSH lending to other groups, with whom the borrowing group will often have close relations. A successful pilot program was run in Same, with all four participating groups completely paying back their loans. The program was then extended to nine groups in Same, who repaid their loans by December 2006. Examples of business activities funded through this program include making and marketing local handicrafts, setting up kiosks and small restaurants, selling fish and selling cakes.

Since their formation, FKSH has undertaken various other activities. For three years FKSH worked with the Alola Foundation to support *tais*-weaving co-operatives in eight districts. The co-operatives received ongoing training and technical assistance in designing and producing high-quality *tais* products, such as handbags and clothes, as well as improving the quantity of product output. FKSH has also facilitated community education—particularly in the areas of gender and HIV/AIDS—provided secondary school and university scholarships to girls and young women, and supported cultural activities through partnerships with traditional music groups.

## **Beyond Dili: A Glimpse into FKSH's Gender Work**

FKSH staff journey monthly to Same town to monitor and evaluate their community partners' activities, and on occasion to provide training. In Same FKSH normally holds meetings with

representatives of the various community groups, including one meeting with the Revolving Loan Fund committee and one general meeting. These meetings are held in an informal setting where FKSH bases itself while in Same. FKSH will also meet with groups individually, usually in the place where the group undertakes its activities. Most of the nine active community-group partners are based in Same town and undertake their activities primarily in the local market. Other groups are based in the Manufahi sub-district of Fatuberlihu.

Groups in Same undertake various activities, most commonly managing small kiosks and selling particular goods—such as petrol, candlenut, vegetables, cakes and second-hand clothes—in the market. Other group activities are *tais* production and selling, tailoring and sewing, a restaurant and catering service, and procuring and selling Same coffee to a Dili-based company. Membership of these groups tends to be drawn from kinship or familial relations and then extended over time to friendship networks, and all groups know each other well through being based at the market.

Most of these groups existed in some form prior to contact with FKSH, though membership and activities may have changed over time. Many of the groups have had experience with other donors, such as other NGOs, United Nations agencies and government ministry programs. These past experiences were not positive overall. Donors had loaned some groups reasonably large sums of money but by their own recounting the groups did not possess the skills to manage and track this capital, with the result that they were not able to repay. This caused the groups great stress, shame and social pressure. Other groups had experienced very little follow-up or training from donor bodies, and felt that their group had not improved through these interactions.

Groups were keen to draw a clear distinction between their past experiences and their experiences with FKSH. They appreciated FKSH's continued attention and training over a number of years, preferring a slower, step-by-step approach. Moreover, FKSH's small loans were regarded as more helpful and better suited to the groups' conditions than large loans. Personal relations between the group members and FKSH staff also appeared to be integral to the strength of these partnerships. While working from Dili, FKSH has been able to ensure this personal connection through the commitment to monthly visits and through the presence of the field officer, who visits each group at least once a week.

FKSH recently formed community partnerships in Aileu, with groups more geographically dispersed than in Same. Deolinda Mendoza is the founding member of a five-woman co-operative, *Moris Rasik* (Own Life). Deolinda decided to form a co-operative with her female neighbours, and together the women successfully work her land and manage a roadside kiosk to sell the varied seasonal vegetable produce. With FKSH support Deolinda has learnt sufficient literacy and numeracy skills to accurately document the group's business activities. Deolinda holds that the women's motivation for beginning *Moris Rasik* was that they did not want to look to government institutions to improve their lives but rather to take control of their own lives.

While *Moris Rasik*'s membership may be female only, from an observer's point of view the gender dimension of FKSH's work with groups in Same is much more subtle. Groups generally have mixed membership and when groups discuss the processes and outcomes of their work, notions of gender or women's empowerment are not mentioned. For FKSH this is a deliberate and strategic approach. The women of FKSH argue that to be able to influence

real change to gender relations, particularly in communities outside of Dili, an approach must be adopted that works from the true circumstances of Timorese communities and at a pace set by these communities. In FKSH's perspective, for women to be granted the space, gain the confidence and be given the support to be involved in small enterprise activities, it is integral that men, families and communities are seamlessly engaged in the process. Holistic community engagement is necessary prior to gradually building up women's involvement.

Some of the groups in Same are made up predominantly of women who have been encouraged to start their own business activities after being involved with their husbands' business activities for some time. One example is the case of the 'Comite Cooperativa Halibur Maun-Alin' (CCHM or the Co-operative Committee of the Coming Together of Brothers and Sisters) and *Rahun Diak* (Good Fortune) co-operatives in Same. CCHM had been operating a kiosk for some time with the support of FKSH. Women were involved in this co-operative through their husbands. After some time, these women decided to form their own co-operative to begin a restaurant and catering business. The women of Rahun Diak saw a restaurant business as a new opportunity involving work that in their eyes is particularly suited to women and had the support of their husbands. The familial and friendship nature of FKSH's community partners appears to facilitate greater involvement of women in Same than some more formalised co-operative structure relations may.

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