

FONGTIL (Forum ONG Timor Leste)

Organizational Overview, Approach to Gender and Program Activities

FONGTIL (Forum ONG Timor Leste, or the East Timor NGO Forum) is the peak East Timorese umbrella body for NGOs. FONGTIL estimates that there are over 500 NGOs (both international and national) operating in Timor-Leste, and 342 of these are current FONGTIL members. To be a member of FONGTIL an organization must be legally registered as an NGO and must be approved as active by FONGTIL.

Changes in East Timorese civil society across the 1990s saw the emergence of a range of new organizations and these organizations identified a need for an umbrella body that could assist the development and co-ordination of their activities. Originating from a collaborative initiative between Yayasan HAK and Biahula, FONGTIL was founded in 1998.

Beginning with around 14 member organizations, FONGTIL's role has grown quickly in the period of independence. The organization now has approximately 30 staff members and four board members. FONGTIL's current vision sees NGOs as integral to a healthy, functioning democracy, as civil society organizations able to provide a bridge between the people and governing institutions through advocacy and collaboration. FONGTIL also seeks to support service provision by NGOs, as governing institutions have not provided key services to many geographic areas and constituencies within Timor-Leste.

FONGTIL's major activities include facilitating monitoring and evaluation, training in various skill sets, and technical assistance for member NGOs. FONGTIL is concerned that as many NGO activities are concentrated in Dili, there is a need to target its activities in rural and remote communities. In order to assist this process, FONGTIL has assigned a District Liaison Officer to each of the districts.

In the advocacy arena, FONGTIL has developed four Working Groups with representatives from various NGOs. These are the National Unity Campaign group, the Child Rights Protection group, the Humanitarian Activity Effectiveness group and the Environment Safety Monitoring group. Current activities include the co-ordination of civic education campaigns focused on the 2007 elections. FONGTIL is also instrumental in surveying the status and condition of NGOs in Timor-Leste through its registration database and monitoring, evaluation and research activities.

Key FONGTIL funders include the Office of Co-ordination for Humanitarian Aid (OCHA), Oxfam Australia, CAFOD, Caritas New Zealand, Irish Aid, Concern Worldwide, KAS German, Trocaire and SEACA.

Previously, gender has not been a major focus for FONGTIL. However, the organization is committed to giving gender more attention in the next stage of its development from 2007. In particular the organization will focus on supporting gender equity within organizations, through staff gender balance and encouraging women's participation and leadership in all facets of NGO work.

For example, FONGTIL has noted that NGOs, particularly those based outside of Dili, rarely send female representatives to FONGTIL trainings, except when the training is in the areas of administration and finance. To combat this under-representation of women, FONGTIL gives

preference to those organizations wishing to participate in training sessions who nominate female representatives. In this way FONGTIL sees its gender emphasis as significantly differentiated from that of Rede Feto, a network specifically made up of women's organizations. While Rede Feto concentrates on building the capacity of those NGOs with a significant focus on gender in their missions and programs, FONGTIL wishes to encourage gender equity within the organizational structures across all NGOs irrespective of focus.

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