

GFFTL (Grupo Feto Foinsa'e Timor Lorosa'e)

Organizational Overview and Approach to Gender

GFFTL (Grupo Feto Foinsa'e Timor Lorosa'e, or East Timor Young Women's Group) originated in 1998 as a student organization to support the independence movement. Initially it was part of the Konselu Solidaridade Universitariu Timor-Leste (the East Timor Student Solidarity Council). GFFTL's formation was inspired by other groups that engaged specific constituencies so as to ensure their participation in the independence struggle, such as OPMT (Organizacao da Popular da Mulher Timorese or the Popular Organization of East Timorese Women) and OPJT (Organizaçao da Popular da Juventude Timorese or the Popular Organization of East Timorese Youth). The founding members of GFFTL saw a need for an organization run by young women that could work with women in rural areas.

After the popular consultation on 30 August 1999, GFFTL members decided to continue the organization. This was particularly important because, while national independence had been achieved, GFFTL members saw that the independence of women would be a long and continuing struggle.

The vision of GFFTL is for an independent Timor-Leste, which in turn necessitates the liberty of women. The hope of GFFTL is that, if many organizations and communities work together, in 50 years' time women will be able to experience freedom in a range of ways. For example, all women will be literate, have access to quality education and will experience good health. For GFFTL, factors hindering women's liberation are exacerbated by the distance of many communities from Dili, where many services, organizational programs and information dissemination processes are concentrated. Thus there is a persistent organizational commitment to the advancement of women in rural areas.

GFFTL's model of gender change envisages women and men working together in their everyday lives in ways that support the empowerment of women and an equal balance of responsibilities. For GFFTL, it is important that local communities and families understand and are involved in the process of changes to gender roles, rather than marginalizing men by dealing only with women. GFFTL has found that many communities, and particularly male leaders, are suspicious of gender discourse. Often they understand 'gender' to necessarily mean the revolt of women against men, which in turn they see as leading to community and familial disharmony.

GFFTL encourages communities to understand how particular ideologies, for example cultural or religious ideologies, are used to perpetuate certain gender relations and discrimination against women. Change is necessary, for example, when such ideologies prevent women from experiencing the same educational opportunities as men.

GFFTL became an independent NGO in October 2001. Its main office is in Dili but staff members are often based in Baucau. This allows the staff to work more easily in the districts of Baucau, Viqueque and Lautem, where GFFTL currently focuses its activities. There are seven permanent staff members, five of whom are allocated specific locations to which they travel twice a month. GFFTL's current donors are APHEDA, the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), the British Embassy and UNDP. Other donors have included the Carter Center, the National Democratic Institute, UNOTIL and UNIFEM. GFFTL does

not yet feel it has secure funding sources, with programs being typically funded by organizations on yearly or short-term bases.

Programs

After forming in 1998, GFFTL worked with other women's organizations to hold the first conference about East Timorese women, the *Conference on the Image of East Timorese Women*. GFFTL's major activity prior to the popular consultation was to educate women in rural areas about the popular consultation process. This was in order to encourage women's participation in the voting process and to ensure that they clearly understood their options: self-rule or special autonomy within the Indonesian nation-state.

From 2000 GFFTL's primary activities have been literacy and numeracy programs for rural women, and social training in the areas of gender, human rights, democracy and domestic violence. GFFTL attempts to identify locations that may benefit from their programs. Staff then approach local leaders—for example the *xefi suco* or *xefi aldeia*—youth leaders and leaders of local organizations to explain their programs and gain consent. While this process is typically straightforward for the literacy and numeracy program, GFFTL have found much greater initial resistance from community leaders about undertaking their social training. Given its emphasis upon gender, GFFTL takes a long-term approach to gaining consent, explaining particularly that they do not want to create conflict but rather help communities find more beneficial ways to share their work.

Women's Literacy and Numeracy Program

GFFTL decided to make rural women's basic literacy and numeracy one of their key program areas for a number of reasons. GFFTL's analysis is that systems of colonialism and patriarchy have combined to severely limit women's educational opportunities, particularly for poor women in subsistence agriculture environments, resulting in high rates of female illiteracy. The impact of this is not only limited to the educational arena. GFFTL regards education as necessary for participation in a meaningful democracy. Literacy and numeracy is regarded as a basic precondition for women to be able to understand and utilise their democratic and human rights, as well as to have access to the sources of information that circulate within the nation.

Moreover, GFFTL sees that mothers are key factors in the educational success of their children. If a mother can imagine a different and better future for her children by understanding the educational process and its outcomes, she is more likely to encourage and support her children's educational endeavours. Mothers with basic literacy and numeracy skills are also able to accompany and monitor their children's study, improving the development of both child and mother.

The desired outcomes for participants of this program are to recognize, read and write the alphabet, recognize the numbers one to 100, count enough to sufficiently manage household affairs, and be equipped with strategies to support their children's education.

Since 2000 GFFTL has run its literacy and numeracy program in over 50 *sucos* in ten districts (Ermera, Dili, Aileu, Manatuto, Liquica, Lautem, Ainaro, Bobonaro, Manufahi and Baucau). Typically, the program would run for at least six months in each location and each class would have around 15 participants. Currently the program is concentrated in Baucau,

Viqueque and Lautem districts, in five specific locations where literacy and numeracy centres have been established. Two of these have been operating for six months, while the other three have received GFFTL support for over 18 months. GFFTL will work with these centres on an ongoing basis, with a GFFTL staff member working in the community for an average of six days per month. Their main tasks are to lend support and skills development to the groups and also to local facilitators. In the centres where GFFTL has run its program for 18 months, around one third of participants are already able to read materials such as *Lafaek Ki'ik* magazine series.

Social Training Program

GFFTL has run its social training program about gender, human rights, democracy and domestic violence with women and men across multiple locations in each of the 13 districts of Timor-Leste. Around 25 people attend each training session. These workshops run for three days and GFFTL uses various facilitation techniques, including drama. When working on topics such as gender and domestic violence, GFFTL encourages husbands and wives to attend the training together so as to dispel any potential conflict in the home and to promote working together to achieve social change. For example GFFTL has found that if only women attend the trainings, men are suspicious of the programs and accuse their wives of lying to avoid responsibilities such as cooking.

Social training is a priority area for GFFTL because the organization feels that many communities located far from Dili have had insufficient access to clear information and socialization processes about these particular subject areas. This in turn has limited the realization of a democratic nation, with communities feeling estranged from the governing institutions and from socio-political processes emanating from the centre. The lack of access to information and programs based in the capital has also caused much confusion and misunderstanding about topics such as gender and democracy within communities. GFFTL finds that while there can be some initial resistance to learning about gender, particularly from men, many communities strongly desire clarification and information about these subject areas, and ask probing questions such as about the relationship between rights, laws and justice mechanisms.

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