

OXFAM AUSTRALIA

Organizational Overview and Approach to Gender

Oxfam Australia, previously known as Oxfam Community Aid Abroad, is an Australian aid and development NGO. Its Timor-Leste program office is in Dili with sub-offices in Suai town and Oecusse. The majority of Oxfam Australia's 45 staff are East Timorese.

The original predecessor to Oxfam Australia, 'Food for Peace', was established in 1953 as a network of community groups. In 1962 'Food for Peace' became 'Community Aid Abroad' (CAA), with community groups undertaking fundraising for projects overseas. CAA became actively involved in supporting a free East Timor prior to Indonesian military invasion in 1974, primarily undertaking advocacy from Australia until 1991. In that year a CAA Dili office was established. Key local partnerships were formed by the late 1990s, including with the women's organization FOKUPERS.

Oxfam Australia currently works in over 30 countries and is part of an international association of 11 organizations founded in 1995. Funding is sourced from AusAid and Oxfam Australia's own revenue. The organization collaborates closely with other Oxfam NGOs that have Timor-Leste programs, specifically Oxfam New Zealand, Oxfam Hong Kong, Oxfam Belgique, NOVIB (Oxfam Netherlands), and previously Oxfam Great Britain. All Oxfam NGOs are united by a common mission to eradicate poverty, to realise effective social justice and to achieve environmental sustainability. The Oxfam perspective is that poverty, injustice and environmental degradation are symptoms of structural causes that systemically create inequality and powerlessness within and between populations.

Gender and Diversity Objective:

To increase the capacity of and empower women in Timor-Leste to participate more actively in social, political and economic processes at local, district and national levels, including working to ensure that women and children in Timor-Leste live free from gender-based violence and promoting the institutionalization of gender issues in policy development, planning and budgetary processes.

Oxfam Australia, *Oxfam Timor-Leste Program Overview*, May 2006, p. 3.

After working in an emergency response model across 1999 and 2000, Oxfam Australia and other Oxfam offices present in Timor-Leste came together to plan for longer-term development work. Since this time Oxfam Australia has consolidated its geographic focus, working at both the national level, for example in advocacy or policy development, and at the district level in Covalima, Liquiça, Oecusse and Manatuto. Oxfam Australia in Timor-Leste primarily works with local partner organizations rather than undertaking direct implementation.

Oxfam Australia in Timor-Leste places a high degree of emphasis on gender and seeks to mainstream gender issues across its programs, as well as to give gender a specific focus in its own right. There are five key aims that guide Oxfam Australia's work in Timor-Leste. These are: 'right to a sustainable livelihood', 'right to basic services', 'right to life and security',

‘right to be heard’, and ‘gender and diversity’. The first four aims encompass gender considerations as a key component, while gender is the basis of the final aim.

Guiding the organization’s work in the area of gender is the notion that the nation building process in Timor-Leste has not sufficiently engaged various marginalized sectors of the population, including women, and that for women this is compounded by traditional systems of patriarchy. Thus Oxfam Australia attempts to work at various societal levels to ensure the participation and consideration of women in national development processes.

Programs

Oxfam Australia, in conjunction with local partners, carries out a wide range of program activities that incorporate gender. Current activities can be grouped under the following themes.

Encouraging Grassroots Women’s Participation, Leadership and Community Organizing

Oxfam Australia works to support the participation in national processes of women in local communities. It has, for instance, promoted women’s participation in *suco* elections and councils. Oxfam Australia is also looking to support women as candidates and informed voters in the 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections. In this domain the organization works with civil society organizations (CSOs, defined by Oxfam as NGOs, community-based groups, networks and associations), government bodies (such as the Office for the Promotion of Equality) and selected United Nations agencies (such as UNIFEM). Key CSO partners include FOKUPERS and Caucus.

Supporting Gender Mainstreaming and Equity at a National Level

Policy, legislation and government programs and structures are key areas in which Oxfam Australia works with partners. The drafting of and advocacy for the domestic violence legislation as well as gender rights in the Constitution and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has been a major area of focus for Oxfam Australia. Partners include United Nations agencies, OPE, and CSOs such as Rede Feto. Another example in this area is the UNIFEM and Oxfam-funded, ‘East Timor Peace Building and Gender Justice’ project, which ran from 2002 to 2004. A key component of this project was to work with CSOs to promote women’s involvement in nation-building processes. Many of the CSO partners—such as the Alola Foundation, Asosiasaun Mane Kontra Violensia (AMKV), Caucus, FOKUPERS, Rede Feto, PSMTL, La’o Hamutuk, the Sahe Institute for Liberation, Dai Popular, Feto Ki’ik Servisu Hamutuk and GFFTL—undertook community education and advocacy campaigns.

Strengthening Initiatives that Work to Eliminate Violence and Discrimination against Women

Oxfam Australia has been actively involved in supporting networks that work to prevent violence and discrimination against women in Timor-Leste. The organization was instrumental in facilitating an exchange of activists from Nicaragua working on links between masculinity and violence that consequently saw the formation of AMKV. Oxfam Australia continues to support AMKV’s activities and organizational development. Other recent activities in this area include support for the annual 16-day campaign against violence and working with local community radio stations to broadcast pertinent educational programs.

Training and Assistance to Oxfam Staff and Partnering CSOs

Oxfam Australia works with local CSOs with a gender focus to build general organizational capacity and to provide support for particular activities. Partners have access to small grants. Oxfam program staff and CSO partners also receive training about gender, particularly gender mainstreaming, gender and health, and utilising gender awareness when working with local communities.

Research to Support Program Innovation

Several research projects have been undertaken to inform Oxfam Australia's programs in the area of gender. Research reports include *A Gender Analysis of Permaculture in Timor-Leste* (2003), *Underlying Causes of Gender Inequity in Covalima, Timor-Leste* (2003), and *Obstacles to the Effective Participation of Women in Adult Education Program: Focus on Socio-Cultural Factors* (2004). In recent times Oxfam has undertaken research about women's lives in post-conflict environments including Timor-Leste. This research also seeks to appraise the effects of Oxfam's work upon such a constituency.

Contacts

Post: PO Box 152, Dili
Tel: (670) 331 2605
Fax: (670) 332 1792
Website: www.oxfam.org.au
Address: Estrada de Balide, Matadouro, Dili

Excerpt from: Trembath, Anna and Damian Grenfell, Mapping the Pursuit of Gender Equality: Non-Government and International Agency Activity in Timor-Leste, Globalism Institute, RMIT University, and Irish Aid, Melbourne, August 2007, ISBN 978-0-646-47770-1, pp. 57-59.