

PROGRESSIO

Organizational Overview and Approach to Gender

Established in 1940, Progressio (formerly CIIR or the Catholic Institute of International Relations) is an international faith-based NGO with headquarters in the United Kingdom and another major office in Ireland. The organization has country programs in 11 sites across the world's 'global South'—Yemen, Somaliland, Namibia, Zimbabwe, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Peru and Timor-Leste. Progressio's largest donor is the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). Since the 1970s Progressio has found resonance between its radical Catholic underpinnings and liberation struggles across the world, and from 1976 advocated for a free Timor-Leste.

The achievement of social justice and the elimination of poverty are Progressio's primary objectives. Progressio looks particularly to working with poor and marginalized sectors of communities; however, Progressio does not simply concentrate on fomenting change to material conditions. The organization's major interest is to ensure that disadvantaged community sectors achieve a status within society whereby they can have more control over the processes and decisions that impact on their lives. Gender equity in relation to access to resources and power forms part of Progressio's vision for social, economic and political transformation.

Gender Justice:

A commitment to gender justice is central to our work. To overcome gender discrimination we work with boys and men as well as women to analyse the roots of gender relations and challenge gender stereotypes. We have developed a methodology of masculinity, which we plan to build on. As a faith-based organization, we will seek to promote positive images of women of faith.

Progressio, A Strategic Framework 2005-2010, 2005, p. 11.

Within the broad framework of Progressio's vision, the three development themes that form the principal content of the organization's work are: civil society participation, HIV and AIDS, and a sustainable environment. Seeing the recognition of faith and interfaith dialogue to be important to development work, Progressio works with communities from varied faith backgrounds.

Typically Progressio's country offices, headed by a foreign representative and staffed by local employees, liaise with various local partners. Progressio combines advocacy with what the organization refers to as 'skills sharing' between Progressio staff and civil society partner organizations. In instances where a clear need is identified Progressio places experienced development workers with local civil society partner organizations. The recruitment process for these development workers is international and is intended to attract personnel with varied expertise, personal histories and cultural backgrounds. Beyond skills sharing, the role of these development workers is to encourage an interlinked, intercultural global civil society whereby lessons learned in different development contexts are exchanged.

Following Progressio's support for East Timorese independence, Progressio established an office in Timor-Leste in 2002. While Progressio has various local partners in Timor-Leste, the bulk of Progressio's gender-related work is undertaken through a partnership with Rede Feto.

Programs

Working with Rede Feto Timor-Leste

Progressio began informal involvement with women's networks in Timor-Leste in 2000. At this time Progressio member Milena Pires worked with other interested individuals and organizations to create a unified East Timorese women's network, which became Rede Feto. In 2002 Progressio formed the position of 'Capacity Building Advisor' to Rede Feto. This is a multifaceted role that includes program development, administration and financial management, the elevation of Rede Feto's profile through effective networking, fundraising, and assistance with Rede Feto research and advocacy.

While working across Rede Feto's structure of organizational members, a board of directors and a secretariat, the current Progressio Capacity Building Advisor (in the position since 2005) initially focused on the secretariat. The secretariat facilitates, co-ordinates and administrates Rede Feto's activities, and thus Progressio deemed the secretariat's development to be central to the effectiveness of the network as a whole.

The Progressio advisor has put in place administration and financial systems, defined individual job descriptions and responsibilities, developed staff management and supervision, and honed the role of the secretariat itself. With Progressio's aid in working on Rede Feto's structure, the secretariat has gradually become more of a co-ordinating rather than an implementation body. The Rede Feto secretariat is encouraging organizational members to carry out the implementation of network activities (such as advocacy campaigns and work in IDP camps), with the secretariat's co-ordinating support. The secretariat's current focus is to develop advocacy activities, to encourage gender mainstreaming in member organizations' programs, and to build the capacity of members. An overarching objective of the secretariat is to ensure the integration and efficacy of the Rede Feto network as a whole.

Beyond working with the secretariat, the Progressio Capacity Building Advisor also collaborates closely with Rede Feto Executive Director, member organizations and the board of directors. For instance, the Progressio advisor has attempted to encourage more activity and regular meetings of the board. Alongside Rede Feto's Executive Director the Progressio advisor has undertaken an institutional assessment of each of the member organizations, classing them according to level of functionality. It was found that six out of 17 Rede Feto member organizations existed in name only. Through facilitating development of organizations' structures and missions, providing opportunities to become involved in network activities, and opening up possibilities for funding, Rede Feto and Progressio are aiding these organizations to become more active.

In line with its broad vision, Progressio has also encouraged Rede Feto to be more open to interfaith dialogue and membership. Many of Rede Feto's member organizations are overtly Catholic or have implicit Catholic underpinnings. Progressio hopes that new membership drives may broaden the network's faith base, for example to Muslim women's associations in Baucau.

Other

Progressio, under its former name CIIR, has published in both English and Indonesian an historical account of women working for social change in Timor-Leste, from Portuguese times to the present. *Independent Women: The Story of Women's Activism in East Timor* (2005) is written by Irena Cristalis and Catherine Scott, who worked with Progressio staff and partners in Timor-Leste to undertake relevant research.

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