

Workshop One Summary

The workshop was opened by Robyn from the Institute of Cultural Affairs who welcomed everyone to the session and explained her role as a workshop facilitator. Robyn described the purpose of the morning workshops within the context of the conference as a means to gather draft principles to guide work with women in East Timor. These draft principles would then be collated from all 6 workshops and be condensed to form a set of draft principles that represented all the themes and concerns brought up in the workshops. In the afternoon, each workshop would then examine in detail 2 or 3 principles and finalise their wording. Finally these would all be brought together to form the final set of draft principles.

The role of reflection was highlighted as essential to the day's proceedings and central to the way the facilitation process operates. Robyn emphasised her role as a facilitator rather than as a participant. Her role was simply to make it easier for the group to share their experiences and gain the learnings from them. The workshop, like the conference, was intended to be a process that encourages participation and works to harness the knowledge from all those attending.

Robyn brought the participants' attention to the guiding question for discussion; *What principles will inform our collaborative work with women in East Timor?* The workshop was intended to give participants the opportunity to share experiences, ascertain the learning from these experiences and use these learnings to produce draft principles that could guide work with women in East Timor in the future.

Participants within the workshop came from a variety of backgrounds. These included local and international NGOs within East Timor, East Timorese government, NGOs in Australia with connections to East Timor, employees from councils in Victoria and New South Wales, AusAid employees, visual artists, journalists, educators and postgraduate students. The group reflected upon who they were as a group and why they were there. It was noted that within the room there was a myriad of experiences and extensive knowledge of working with women in East Timor. Some group members suggested

everyone came together due to a shared interest in and passion for East Timor and/or women. Another described the group as a people who want to have relationships with each other. Others were surprised that within Australia there were so many people that held an interest in East Timor. Many commented on the high level of skill and talent in the room. The likelihood of a diversity in viewpoints in regards to what issues needed to be addressed was acknowledged. This prompted the suggestion that it was likely most people in the room held strong political and ideological views. In light of this the participants recognised the need to be clear about the process of the workshop and ensure discussion remained relevant to the guiding question if it was to be effective.

In order to illustrate the way to gain learnings from experience, Robyn told a story of a friend who had been involved in an unsuccessful development program in East Timor. The program had intended on implementing a food waste-recycling program in a village, only to be told by community members on arrival that there was no food wastage within the community. A participant identified the problem in this situation to be the imposition of projects upon the East Timorese. Participants suggested a possible learning from this story could be the need to ask and address the needs of the people with whom any development program is working.

Workshop participants began to share stories of their experience working with women in East Timor. One participant expressed concern about instances when AusAID had not listened and hence they felt the organisation was arrogant. This led to a discussion about the role of donor agencies. Some felt that because donor agencies are so far removed from the reality on-the-ground that it can be difficult to gain support from these agencies for programs development workers and local communities feel are important. Some participants felt this occurs more frequently the larger the donor agency becomes. Many asked the question, 'How can we get donors to listen?'. There was a concern that politics often determines where the funding goes, not the needs of the East Timorese people. One participant highlighted the fact that all donor agencies have many competing interests. For example, AusAid is responsible to the Australian people and they must remain accountable to them. Some participants were of the belief that we need to look beyond

the organisations and laying blame and think about the individuals in the organisation, because it is at the individual level that change occurs.

Other participants expressed concern at the ease by which the needs and wants of the East Timorese are overlooked. International organisations go into East Timor with a set of expectations and in their excitement forget about the people. For instance, the East Timorese government-model was used as an example of this. Some acknowledged that while this is an excellent Western structure it now needs to be translated to make sense within the context of East Timor. A possible learning from this was identified as the importance of consulting with the East Timorese and recognizing that the people best able to come up with solutions are those who experience the problems.

Participants then broke up into small groups to share stories and gather the learning from them. Robyn reminded everyone of the need to find the learning in our experiences and to focus on coming up with principles that could guide collaborative work with the East Timorese women.

After ten minutes of small group discussion the groups came back together to share the stories they had heard and the learnings they had gained from these. One participant told of their experience as an East Timorese refugee in Australia. From this experience the group learnt that a diversity of histories and experiences exist for East Timorese women. They proposed a possible principle from this could be to learn of and value the diversity of experiences and cultures in East Timor.

Another participant talked about how much she realised she had to learn when she went to East Timor. She felt this forced her to realise how important it was to listen and to keep an open mind.

Others mentioned that while in East Timor they had been overwhelmed by the stories of trauma many of the local people shared with them. The learning gained from this was the need to be aware that one must address this form of vicarious trauma without imposing it back upon the people one is working with. A commonality in the experience of women in

Australia and East Timor was recognised by some participants although this did differ in severity.

Many participants stressed the importance of openness and working in a spirit of friendship. This was of particular importance to the East Timorese women in the room. Others in the group felt that the word friendship was not appropriate and should be replaced with partnership. The need to respect the cultural background of the East Timorese and not impose ones values upon them was also stressed. One participant commented that being prepared to adopt and learn the ways of the culture one is working within was of utmost importance.

Participants then broke off again into smaller groups and worked on writing down the learnings from the discussion. These were then shared with the whole group and there was an attempt to consolidate them into similar themes as they were shared. These learnings were as follows:

- Walking with the Timorese
- Friendship in the workplace
- The importance of friendship

- Openness is the key
- Open communication needed early and often

- Understanding intricacies and local gender relations
- Sensitive to learning culture
- Acknowledge different conceptions of time but do not dismiss the possibility of change
- Respect for different working styles /cultures

- The attitudes and values of donors may be patronising and not constructive
- All parties should compromise in a donor relationship
- Sensitivity and providing help when needed
- Provide basic needs of people

-Provide opportunity to express the needs and wants of the East Timorese

-Commonality of women's issues

-Opportunities to express needs and wants of women

-Formalizing actions on women's issues

-Finding out what the local histories are

-Different histories

-Task orientated

-Effective management

-Time continuity to reach understanding with people

From these learnings the group identified the principles that could guide them in their work in East Timor. Robyn stressed that the exact wording was not of great importance at this stage as they would be brought together with the other workshops and discussed in detail later in the day. These 10 principles were formed by roughly consolidating the learnings above.

1. Developing equal, respectful, friendships, trusting and partnerships
2. Clear and agreed shared goals
3. Mutual openness in communication
4. Mutual sensitivity and cross-cultural awareness
5. Mutual sensitivity to individual capacity and infrastructure capacity
6. Considering the implications for women in whatever we do
7. Ask the East Timorese people what they want and listen and act on what they say
8. Acknowledging the innate existence of human capacity
9. Ensuring sustainability – triple bottom line
10. Knowledge of collective and personal histories is essential to effective relationships

These principles were combined with those produced in the other 5 workshops to produce 11 draft principles. Workshop 1 was assigned to work on principles 10 and 11. At the beginning of the workshop these principles stood as follows.

- 10. Understand and work with the current social political reality
- 11. Ensure broad geographical coverage beyond Dili

In response to discussion that had occurred in the main conference forum, many participants expressed a need to include a commitment to the East Timorese Government Development Plan in the principles. This was seen of extreme importance by many in the room, especially the East Timorese. The need to recognise both the National Women's Congress' was stressed by many participants. Many were also of the opinion that the national policy of the OPE should be highlighted in principle 11.

Some in the room were concerned with the use of the terms 'us' and 'we' in the principles. They felt there was a need to address the actor the principle is referring to, be it the East Timorese, Westerners in East Timor or just those in the workshop. Some also felt that the term 'principle' was too authoritative, they suggested this term be replaced with 'guideline'. Some were of the opinion that performance indicators needed to be included to measure if the principles produced were still effective in 5 years time or at all.

Once again participants stressed the importance of prioritising the needs of the East Timorese rather than the logic of governments and organisations. They were of the opinion that the interests of government were often incompatible with those of the local people and suggested that while NGOs can try to work across these, sometimes they remain in conflict and are not at all compatible.

The workshop then divided into 2 groups to finalise and amend principles 10 and 11. The final outcome of these were as follows:

PRINCIPLE 10

Understand and improve Timor-Leste's political and social realities.

- Acknowledge NDP within this process
- Acknowledge civil society.
- Acknowledge collective and personal histories.
- Acknowledge existing state, church, and traditional structures.

PRINCIPLE 11

Commit to a just distribution of services and resources across Timor-Leste

- Foster new projects in districts because there are many opportunities for new initiatives in the rural districts.
- Ensure that resources and services reach the poorest poor and the most vulnerable.
- Provide resources to ensure that women from the districts can participate in and be represented at decision-making forums and capacity building programs.