

Workshop Six Summary

The discussion and dynamics of group 6 were very productive. The awareness and patience of group members through the translating process was appreciated by all. It allowed a smooth flow of interesting topics and varied experiences to be expressed. Most members of the group had spent a significant amount of time working in the field in Timor Leste, creating a wonderful exchange of ideas and experiences.

In the first part of the morning the group divided into 4 smaller groups enabling a more efficient way of communicating and generating a plethora of ideas. Each person was able to express and share their experiences, which were followed by each group presenting their key issues and topics to the whole group. This proved to be very successful when bringing all the 4 groups together, formulating a platform of ideas to then spring from.

The discussion highlighted evident trends drawn from previous projects, in particular, that too often the focus of projects is short term and no follow up or monitoring is on the most part not enforced. As a result of this the integrity of projects and its objectives can be lost.

Another trend also discussed was the tendency to just throw money at women's issues without considering the impact and gravity of the issues. The integrity of the projects was criticized also for the lack of foresight into ongoing management and sustainability. The focus then progressed to personal values of the individuals within the international organizations. These stressed that as a foreigner you need to be aware of your own ideologies and expectations and have the ability for self reflection and to understand that, in effect you are impacting on the people you are working with. Moreover, your focus should be on what the Timorese want not your organizational needs. This then lead to the discussion of how crucial it is to enable and empower the community to participate in assessing their own needs.

The importance of acknowledging and understanding the cultural barriers to participation was explored. In particular, the different dynamics of participation of community meetings when held with the presence of men was compared to meetings involving only women. The group then recognized the need for appropriate steps to be taken towards allowing forums for women only.

Other topics also addressed were the influences and parameters of existing institutions and how crucial it is for international organizations to recognize, consider and involve these structures when designing projects. An example given reinforced the fact that if the organization does not work or involve the government in their proposal or design, the project will be inherently unsustainable. A balance is fundamental. The discussion of the church and other existing power relations involved in traditional structures was extremely interesting and the need for briefing and debriefing members of the international organization when involved in projects was also brought to the table.

Three major obstacles were outlined by the Timorese women, which they believe international organization projects are confronted with when working in East Timor; Culture, Human resources and Money. These obstacles seemed to be essentially the underlying themes of our discussion.

By the end of the morning session the group had created eight key guidelines that could help in collaborating in regard to future work by international organizations with Timor (see 'Initial Draft Principles' Document in this report).

After lunch, the dialogue of the group was even more fluid, perceptive and integrated. The main focus was capturing the different perceptions and thoughts in relation to what extent and capacity men should be involved. The integral role of engaging men and for them being a part of the positive development of women was articulated and their awareness and sensitivity towards traditional structures that may inhibit women's potential, participation and growth towards independence was explored. The group also had to refine one of the principles that had been created in the morning session,

"Focus on education and capacity as fundamental to develop status of women."

As a whole group there was a common aversion to the word 'capacity,' that it seemed too general, loaded and not conducive to the context. A brainstorming session produced the refined principle as,

“Focus on education and maximizing and developing skills which enable women to achieve their full potential.”

A truly wonderful weekend of reflection, dialogue and collaboration. Not only was the networking of ideas and concepts successful but also networking on a social and professional level.