

Workshop Three Summary

Themes, Debates, Ideas And Experiences

Workshop 3 began with each participant briefly introducing themselves. From this first activity it was clear that in the room was a wealth of knowledge, experience and resources in the fields of development, gender and East Timor.

The guiding question of the conference “What principles will inform our collaborative work with women in Timor Leste?” was considered and analysed next. One of the workshop members believed that this question would “help to shape actions and outcomes,” of future work between Australia and East Timor. Some members of the workshop believed that the question and the principles referred to would provide a great “opportunity to share ideas between Australian women and East Timor women.” Overall there seemed a genuine consensus that by participating in the conference and considering these topics, development was headed in the right direction.

Small Group Discussion One

At this point, after briefly considering the guiding question, the workshop was divided up into small groups so that discussions could be had. In these groups, the participants were asked to consider the questions “What have we done?” and “What worked well?” From this reflective activity the workshop was drawing on the participant’s knowledge and experience. This produced some valuable insights, the first of which was that previously internal East Timor agencies and NGO’s, primarily the smaller ones, had often been used by international agencies simply as an entry point into both East Timor and the development field. Workshop members reported that often international agencies had worked for their own benefit, rather than for East Timor’s and the East Timorese people’s benefit.

Another very important view that came out of this first small group discussion was a comment about agencies and individuals coming into East Timor to work. This comment came from someone living in East Timor who had decided that there were three important things that people coming into the country to work should do. These were “preparation, willingness and ability to adjust to the culture and climate, (and an) appreciation of the East Timorese people.”

Small Group Discussion 2.

After this first reflective discussion, a new question, “Learning attained?” was presented and the small groups each had to produce several principles that they individually had attained. From this, twenty-four principles were produced. While some of these overlapped, all had merit, were important and informed. Some of the themes these principles covered included:

- Transparency and honesty
- Being willing to adapt/adjust to the cultural and physical differences that occur in a foreign country
- Respecting each other, our cultures and our differences
- Beginning with the experience and knowledge that the East Timorese people already have and possess
- Openness and flexibility
- Valuing relationships
- Coming with a smile
- Being prepared to go slowly and be patient
- Ensuring proper understanding and communication, particularly in respect to the language and cultural divide
- Ongoing learning and reflection
- Ensuring activities, programs and initiatives are complementary and not overlapping

After this the group refined these themes and primary principles into eight principles. These are:

- Value practical learning and insight
- Mutual respect of difference
- Sharing and learning from stories
- Appropriate programs
- Valuing relationships
- Build upon our experience
- Slowly but surely
- Ensure clear, two way reciprocal communication

Afternoon Session

In the afternoon workshop session, the participants were assigned two of the main themes to be refined into final principles. The aim of this was to ensure that the final principles reflected the primary principles from which they were drawn.

The first principle that workshop three was given was:

“Build on skills/capacity already present.”

This principle had been drawn from the morning session, specifically from the primary principles:

- “Build on skills/capacity already present.”
- “Mutual sensitivity to individual capacity and infrastructure capacity.”
- “Appropriate programs.”

From this the participants decided that to improve upon the principle, it was highly important to identify that skills/capacity is already present within East Timor. Further with this viewpoint was emphasis upon the fact that starting afresh and believing that

there is nothing already to work with is to completely lose sight of the capacity already present. After much deliberation, it was decided that the final principle would be

“Identify and build on skills and capacity already present.”

The second principle that workshop three was allocated was:

“Develop mutual openness/trust in communication.”

This was derived through the primary principles of:

- Ensure clear two way communication
- Sharing and learning from stories
- Build our experience
- Developing partnerships through 2 way dialogue
- Creating trust through honesty, openness, transparency and flexibility.

To improve upon this principle the workshop considered that it is important to place emphasis upon how we communicate and work together both within East Timor and within Australia. One participant highlighted the need for regular communication, whether it is formal or informal as being key to success. By doing this they spoke of being able to more successfully collaborate and being able to avoid the overlapping of projects. Another participant spoke of communication representing a broad spectrum of interaction. Overall, the principle decided on was:

“Ensure mutual, open and honest communication together in East Timor and in Australia inclusively at the family, community and government levels.”