



Submission No 21

Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Timor-Leste

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Organisation: East Timor Women Australia

Submission to:

The Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Regarding:

The Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Timor-Leste

25th March 2013

by:

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This submission was drafted by Debra Salvagno, Co-Founder and Committee member of ETWA. It is directed at Items 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.¹

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2. aid, including support with governance issues;
 3. economic issues, including trade and investment;
 4. cultural, educational and scientific relations and exchanges;
 5. people to people links

Aim

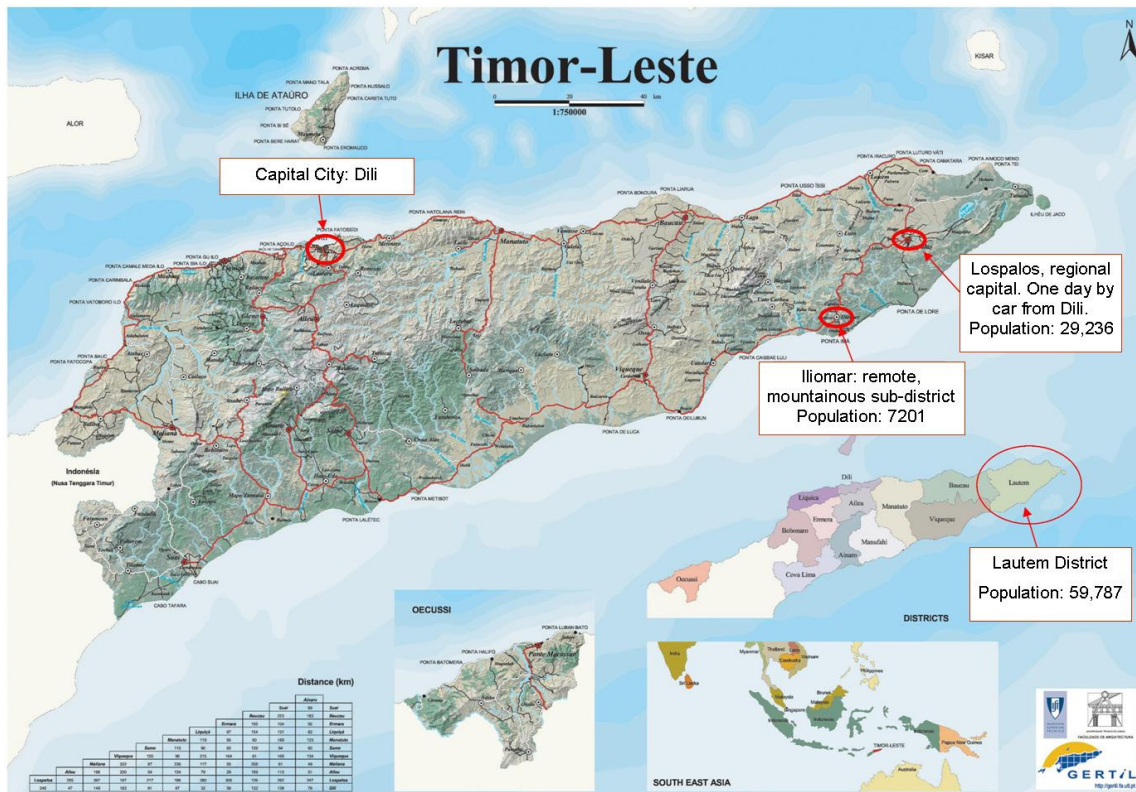
The aim of this submission is to draw the Committee's attention to the conditions affecting women and girls in Iliomar, a remote area of Timor-Leste. Consistent with Australia's declared commitment to deliver aid where it is most needed and most effective, the submission makes specific recommendations to reduce poverty in an area that is often overlooked in overseas developmental assistance strategies.

East Timor Women Australia (ETWA)

ETWA is a not-for-profit organisation founded in 2004 for the specific purpose of supporting women living in the Lautem District of Timor-Leste through various programs, particularly in the handcrafts industry. ETWA's relationship with three women's groups located in the sub-districts of Lospalos and Iliomar formally began in 2005. Our work benefits more than 1,000 people in this community, half of whom are women and girls. As the largest percentage of members live in the sub-district of Iliomar, our collaborative work is improving living conditions there and contributing to the Australian Government's commitment to eradicating poverty in Timor-Leste.

Iliomar

The isolated and mountainous sub-district of Iliomar is situated on the south-east coast of Timor-Leste, 272 km from Dili, and 46 km south west of the district capital of Los Palos.



Although less than 50 km from the district capital, the difficult road conditions mean that travel within the district is arduous and communities remain isolated. Data from Timor-Leste's National Statistics Directorate² show that the population is 7,201 (3,440 men and 3,761 women) with a median age of 16 years. With a rugged and rocky land area of 302 sq km (16.67% of the country's total land area), most people live in one of six small villages separated by an average of 4 km. The area is highly undeveloped and the one road leading into the area is in poor condition and impassable in the rainy season between December and June.

² <http://dne.mof.gov.tl/publications/index.htm>



Above: the state of the roads in Iliomar.



Above: One hour was needed to push this truck out of a serious bog.

The months between August and November – known as the “hungry months” due to food shortages – are hot and dry. Eight in ten families are engaged in subsistence farming activities and only 39% are engaged in economic activity, compared to the national average of 46.4%. Even this economic activity is not the same as paid employment, however.

Importantly, official statistics demonstrate the burden that poverty places on women and girls in the area. Only 19% of women are engaged in economic activity (compared to the national average of 31.3%). The difficulty of accessing the closest hospital seriously inhibits good health; for example, only 43 of 1,565 births (3%) occurred in a hospital in 2010. One in four women are illiterate, less than 3% of girls are enrolled in secondary school (compared to the national average of 17.9%), and half the female population has never attended school at any level. Of the 1,420 houses in Iliomar, 83% do not provide sufficient protection against the elements. 96% of families still cook with wood. Only 23% have sanitation and only 17% have electricity.



Above: typical housing for the poorest community members



Above: typical cooking and kitchen facilities

In summary, the last decade of economic growth and Dili-centric development has not improved the quality of life for women and girls in Iliomar. They lack basic infrastructure and services, and access to development opportunities is prohibited by their isolation, illiteracy and formal education. Malnutrition, mortality and the burden of disease are also high in comparison with the national average.

Recommendation: Given that Australia has a commitment to deliver aid where it is most needed and can be most effective, Iliomar should be a priority area for Australian developmental assistance.

Our Work with Women in Iliomar

The women we work with have identified income generation and education as integral to improving their quality of life and their children’s futures. ETWA responds to their request by supporting small business development for the women in our three partner groups. This enables them to pay for school fees and provide for their families. Since 2005 our collaborative work has delivered a range of _____

positive impacts for these women. The two years between 2010 and 2012 in particular demonstrates the importance of Australian government support for local people-to-people community development in line with Items 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

An Australian member of ETWA lived in Timor-Leste for two years, supported by Australian Volunteers International. Between 2010 and 2012, this member worked directly with our partner groups. Other ETWA members and volunteers visited during that time, contributing to the valuable community impacts outlined below. Along with our own fundraising, small amounts of funding were secured from AusAid (East Timor Community Assistance Scheme and Direct Aid Program), Rotary International, Country Women's Association and the Associated Country Women of the World.

Women-centric Activity – The first Rural Women's Centre in Timor-Leste

The women's centre was completed in 2010 and is the first of its kind in rural Timor-Leste. With high powered solar panel, directional LED lighting and 500lt water tank, the building was completed by five self-funded Australian volunteers and a team of 18 local and international volunteers.



Above: Australian and Timorese volunteers installing the solar panel



Above: The completed Women's Centre, Fuat Village, Iliomar

Community Impact of ETWA's Activities

- \$26,000³ direct income for 51 women, equal to 19 full-time jobs at National Minimum Wage⁴
- \$65,000 invested in local community through programs and events
- Formal and informal placement of 15 self-funded, skilled Australian volunteers resulting in improved capacity of local staff and volunteers (small business management, data collection, problem solving, planning, hospitality, basic computer use and English language training and tourism service delivery)
- Stronger leadership and management capacity of young women through on the job training
- Improved governance and administration of all three women's groups
- Production time trials resulting in fair trade pricing for hand-weavings
- Comparative research into pricing of hand weavings nationally (see discussion below)
- Strong partnerships with a range of respected international and national NGOs
- Unique range of textiles and textiles products and increased sales

In an area where very few tangible opportunities exist for women, these critical development outcomes will have lasting effects in the region. Importantly, younger women are engaged in the modern economy while preserving practices that are important to their culture.

However, activities have also benefited the many Australian volunteers who have engaged in this important work. Designers, builders, language teachers, business trainers, university students and

³ This figure equates to an average income of \$3.59 per day per woman, way above the national average of 41% of the population living on less than \$0.88 per day (national poverty line) (2009), see <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/countries/eastasia/timor-leste/Pages/statistics-east-timor.aspx>

⁴ National Minimum Wage \$115 per month, June 2012 see <http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=6964&lang=tp>

researchers have gained unique learning experiences. These skills exchanges have built their professional and personal confidence. As these volunteers were immersed in the different cultural landscape of rural Timor-Leste, their experiences and understanding enrich the landscape of multicultural Australia. The next phase of our collaborative work will commence in April 2013.



Above: Signature photo for our collaborative textiles range to be released in late 2013



Above: Celestina and Mariana, two young leaders from Iliomar

The Fair Trade Network of Timor-Leste

ETWA is a key partner in the Fair Trade Association of Timor-Leste, launched in 2012. The network provides a forum for discussion so that producers, suppliers, buyers, sellers and policy-makers in Timor-Leste have an opportunity to explore how Fair Trade can support trade justice, protect the environment, preserve cultural heritage while also supporting economic growth. The Australian Government should support Fair Trade in Timor-Leste. A high percentage of women rely on hand-weaving as their main livelihood. However they remain unprotected and vulnerable to exploitation. While working standards are increasing for women in other sectors nationally, our research in 2011-2012 shows that hand-weavers earn less than 30% of the National Minimum Wage, with some women earning as little as three cents per hour. Women are made poorer by these practices as income often does not cover production or living costs. They have no representative body and no influence in national debates.

Recommendation: In cooperation with the Timor-Leste Government and civil society organisations, the Australian Government should invest in further research to explore the labour rights of hand-weavers in Timor-Leste, support the Fair Trade Network and develop a fair trade labelling system for products imported from Timor-Leste.

Our Investment in Timor-Leste's Future

In addition to providing tangible benefits to women and girls (and their families) in our three groups and their communities, our work will contribute to sustainable sector development that meets the socio-economic, environmental and cultural needs of future generations. Our support for the Fair Trade Network of Timor-Leste and our whole of supply-chain approach will continue to improve access to inputs, promote recycling, combat the use of toxic dyes, promote local knowledge and establish fair trade standards in an industry which is critical to the livelihoods and cultural practices of more than 90,000 hand-weavers in Timor-Leste. Commitments include:

- Ongoing partnerships with Australian Volunteers International and AusTraining for further capacity building exchanges in Iliomar and Lospalos
- Intensive business and governance training for women using digital technologies and Skype
- Phase two of *Ready for Market by Design* Project to support sustainable business growth for our partner groups
- *Fair Future for Hand-weavers* Project, focussing on sustainable sector development, particularly for hand-weavers

Summary Recommendations

In line with Item 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, ETWA proposes the following recommendations:

Item 2: Aid, including support with governance issues

Iliomar should be a priority area for Australian developmental assistance

The Australian Government should:

- invest in formal research to further explore the unfair practices in the hand-weaving sector in Timor-Leste;
- invest in and officially support the Fair Trade Network of Timor-Leste;
- make Iliomar a priority area for Australian developmental assistance; and
- invest in AusAid's East Timor Community Assistance Scheme and provide capacity building training to support compliance capacity of local organisations

Item 3: Economic issues, including trade and investment

In cooperation with the Timor-Leste Government and civil society organisations, the Australian Government should:

- invest in further research to explore the labour rights of hand-weavers in Timor-Leste;
- support the Fair Trade Network; and
- develop a fair trade labelling system for products imported from Timor-Leste

The Australian Government should acknowledge and support continuity of development by investing in ETWA's existing programs in supporting small scale enterprise development for women in Timor-Leste

Item 4: Cultural, educational and scientific relations and exchanges

The Australian Government should acknowledge and invest in ETWA's initiatives to further facilitate cross-cultural engagement, dialogue and exchange

Item 5: People to people links

The Australian Government should support continued people-to-people and community-to-community links between Australia and Timor-Leste.



Signed:

23rd March 2013

Debra Salvagno, East Timor Women Australia

