

**Intervention by the
Catholic Institute for International Relations**

This is a welcome opportunity to discuss possible assistance which will enhance peace-building in East Timor in the forthcoming rather uncertain period. Whilst it remains difficult to plan when the situation is in flux and events are still unfolding, it is nevertheless essential to begin as far as is possible to put together a realistic picture of East Timor's needs both for the immediate as well as for the long-term. This short paper aims to outline some contextual concerns, lessons learned, and point out some priorities for future approaches to both development and peace-making, but does not attempt to present a detailed set of project proposals.

CIIR has monitored events in East Timor since 1975. It is our concern that solidarity and developmental efforts both in the past and at the present time, whilst well-intentioned, are not being maximised to their full potential. There are various reasons for this.

1. Piece-meal, a-political approach

Development problems, human rights violations and self-determination are intimately linked in East Timor and require holistic solutions. For western organisations, governmental and non-governmental, it is a classic test of ethical foreign policy - where the weak must not be allowed to fall outside the protective walls of values and safeguards that we take for granted ourselves. In lieu of determined efforts to resolve the underlying problems of East Timor, the temptation, on the part of the west has been to throw money at East Timor in the form of aid. This may have salved consciences, but has been short-sighted and self-defeating. Whilst some form of development is possible during conflict, meaningful, lasting and sustainable development in East Timor cannot take root until the people feel free, and have worked through the enmities and dislocations which to which their spirits, individual and collective have been subjected for 23 years.

There has been a long-standing failure on the part of development organisations to address development issues in East Timor holistically. Many development interventions have failed to take into consideration the political realities inside East Timor, and have targeted single sectors, whilst not addressing the over-arching realities germane to an occupied country, and a polarised society. This is largely because of the difficulties in the past of doing development work in East Timor whilst circumventing the Indonesian government because of the question of sovereignty. CIIR would not wish to downplay those difficulties, but generally aid has been administered in a very cautious manner. A more holistic approach which takes into account experience of occupation, a polarised society whose very social fabric has been displaced as a consequence of the military occupation, political divergences, and continuing human rights abuses is now urgently needed.

2. Lack of Coordination

As serious, is the lack of coordination, duplication, and lack of inter-governmental consultation around interventions. NGOs are also guilty of this, both inside and outside of East Timor. Much better coordination is necessary, especially now that more and more governments and NGOs are offering assistance. There is a recognition that the absorptive capacity of local East Timorese NGOs is low, and 'capacity-building' is the latest term used for what is needed. But this term covers a vast terrain of skills and needs, and careful planning is needed so that the right 'capacities' are addressed. As the National Council of Timorese Resistance is itself elaborating its development plan for East Timor at a series of meetings and conferences this year, perhaps this could become a focal point for cooperation and coordination to take place.

3. Gender-Blind

Amongst the poorest East Timorese are the women. Women have been badly victimised by conflict in East Timor, with high incidences of rape and sexual abuse. Women also lack status in East Timorese society, and have been largely marginalised from its political life. The diplomatic moves and negotiations over the years have also been conducted almost exclusively between men. Women's concerns and women's lives have had little impact so far on discussions about how East Timor will now go forward. In spite of this, East Timor has struggled on **because** East Timorese women are strong and determined not to be beaten and suppressed, by Indonesian soldiers, or anyone else. Women are now organising into new groups and networks in order to address the huge disadvantage they suffer. Development assistance to East Timor has rarely dared to shake the status quo, and the majority of male East Timorese political activists and development specialists have pushed women's issues aside as low priority. Selected development projects have often been *targeted* at women (Sewing coops, health care schemes, etc) rather than a gender approach being taken to all development projects, with proper assessments of how the two genders will be affected differently by each intervention, with in-built plans for participation, consultation and involvement of both sexes.

Proposals in relation to 1,2&3 above, for discussion

1. *Holistic Approach to Development & Peace Making*

Initiatives are now urgently required in the fields of conflict resolution, peace-making and reconciliation. Such initiatives need to take account of ongoing diplomatic moves, human rights violations, a polarised and deeply traumatised community, development priorities, and the fact that war and peace-building are differently experienced by women and men. Work with the churches would be appropriate, as the Churches as international institutions, can be regarded by opposing sides as neutral ground. Bishop Belo has already begun such work, bringing together people of opposing views and encouraging them to engage with each other in rebuilding East Timorese society.

2. a) *A donor's forum*

So far as we are aware, aside from the inter-state coordination which happens with the small amount of EU Aid to East Timor, the only regular coordination of development assistance at present is between Catholic Agencies: Caritas Dili chairs a forum of the major Catholic and Caritas agencies which support development initiatives in East Timor. A donor's forum

comprised of governments, UN agencies and NGOs, even if in a series of tiers is essential. If established, a donor's forum would naturally need a strong input from the East Timorese and should include credible East Timorese development NGOs as well as a gender balance. Canadian aid could be strategically directed at establishing and facilitating such a forum.

b) Support for an East Timorese Development Department

Perhaps the most powerful and strategic way development could be supported in East Timor would be for substantial funding to be made available to set up an East Timorese Development Department. At present East Timorese academics both from the diaspora and East Timor are trying to work out a comprehensive development plan, but lack even the most basic funding to get themselves together in one place to meet. If this initiative could be given more support, it would be an empowering way of ensuring that East Timorese expertise is maximised in the service of rebuilding East Timor. This would also be a strategic way for Canadian funding to be directed in the area of capacity-building: building up the institutional capacity of this department in areas of advocacy, policy research and analysis, gender sensitivity, monitoring and evaluation, participatory development and so on.

3. Gender-Sensitive Development Work, Peace-Making & Institution-Building

With gradually increasing political space, women are beginning to organise in East Timor, and now is a good time for development assistance to take account of these new organisations, and support and work with them. Women have a central role to play in reconciliation and peace-building initiatives, and should be centre-stage rather than tacked onto the end of projects. Again, for gender-sensitive development work to be effective, proper coordination between projects and initiatives is of vital importance (see 1 above). And again, the holistic approach is crucial so that gender considerations of all development and peace-making is mainstreamed rather than 'targeted'. East Timorese women's **rights** must be addressed in the context of challenging the underlying causes of their inequality and poverty so that priority is accorded to eliminating gender-based obstacles such as access to, and control over, economic resources and decision-making.

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