



Evaluation Report

Evaluation of the Socio-economic Empowerment Project Timor-Leste 2019 – 2022

Project and evaluation funded by the Australia Government and people of Australia via Australian NGO Cooperation Program

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Cover image: Prison support for literacy skills

Executive Summary

Project Name:	Socio-economic Empowerment Project
Country:	Timor-Leste
Donor:	Australian Government (Australian NGO Cooperation Program) and donations from the people of Australia
Duration:	July 2016 – June 2022
Beneficiaries supported during the period evaluated (estimated):	281 direct participants. 1553 direct beneficiaries.

Introduction and context

Timor-Leste's economy remains unequal in terms of gender, with women's income-generating potential disadvantaged to men. Domestic and sexual violence against women is high. Women who experience domestic violence are often financially dependent on their abuse. There are also issues with the prison system in Timor-Leste, which does not meet international standards.

Project design

Since 2016, Action on Poverty (AOP) has been working with Psychosocial Recovery and Development in East Timor (PRADET) to implement the Socio-Economic Empowerment Project, which includes two components. The economic empowerment component provides training and support to survivors of domestic violence and abuse to assist them in gaining their financial independence and the prison support component works with inmates in two prisons to provide training in livelihoods and literacy, psycho-social counselling, support, and access to legal support.

Evaluation

The overall purpose of the evaluation was to assess if the project is achieving what it sets out to achieve and provide recommendations to improve on areas that are not working well. The project was last evaluated in 2019, so this evaluation focused on the period from July 2019 to June 2022. The evaluation used a mixed-methods design, including a review of project documents, key informant interviews and focus group discussions with beneficiaries, project partners, and staff, and surveys with beneficiaries.

Results

Relevance

Evidence demonstrated that the project's design and activities were relevant to locally defined needs and priorities of vulnerable women, children, and prison inmates in Gleno and Becora prisons. Evidence also showed that the project aligned with international, national, and community partners' priorities and policies. There was also evidence the economic empowerment component was responsive to the changing needs of the beneficiaries through needs assessments and refresher training. The project was also responsive to the changing context in Timor-Leste due to the COVID-19 pandemic, adapting its support and coordination activities during this period.

Effectiveness

Project documents and monitoring reports showed that the project had successfully achieved or exceeded its planned outputs for the three years covered in the evaluation. This evidence was supported by key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus groups discussions (FGDs) with beneficiaries and partners. Evidence also showed that the project has contributed to its three outcomes: increased safety and financial independence among women and children who had experienced domestic violence, increased access to support and training for inmates in Gleno and Becora prisons, and increased technical support. However, data showed that the lack of

women's safety in the community remains a challenge, with participants recalling that domestic violence continues to occur. Participants called for increased efforts to change community attitudes towards women. Inadequate housing also remains a crucial vulnerability to women and children who have experienced domestic violence.

Ownership & sustainability

Data showed that the economic empowerment component had progressed towards sustainable outcomes for beneficiaries and their families, with female beneficiaries investing their business incomes into their children's education. There was also evidence they reinvested their incomes to scale up and diversify their business. The prison support program also showed signs of sustainability, with activities continuing during COVID-19 lockdowns without PRADET's direct implementation. Data also showed that the PRADET had developed strong partnerships to deliver the project activities, from the national to the community level. These partners described their interest in continuing to collaborate with PRADET.

Equity

Project documents and primary data showed that the PRADET had contributed to equitable outcomes. For instance, data showed that people living with a disability had been accounted for in the design and implementation of the project and people living with disability had received support and business training, which they had used to develop businesses. However, further efforts are required to identify and reach people living with a disability. Partners also stated that further efforts are required to reach remote communities.

Value-for-money

Project documents and financial reports showed that the project had achieved value-for-money, including an appropriate balance between economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. This evidence was also supported during KIIs with project partners and staff.

Recommendations

Several recommendations were revealed through the evaluation. These recommendations include:

1. Support female beneficiaries to adapt their business throughout the project
2. Increased community education on gender equality and domestic violence
3. Focus on housing support
4. Develop inmates' skills for use once released from prison
5. Increase efforts to outreach and include people living with disability
6. Create opportunities for people living with disability to share their training and business success stories
7. Increase technical support to government partners on disability access.

Further details are presented below.

Conclusion

During the evaluation period, the project has achieved its planned outputs and contributed to its three outcome areas, including improved quality of life for female survivors of domestic violence and their families, increased access to and coordination of quality care services for women, men, and youth in Gleno and Becora prisons, and increased technical support for PRADET. However, further efforts are needed to improve women's safety in the community and access to housing. Unintended outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations provide areas to improve the project.