

“Gender Mainstreaming in a Post-Conflict State:
Toward Democratic Peace in Timor Leste?”

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Introduction

Gender equality is widely believed by international organizations and mainstream commentators to contribute to the consolidation of democratic norms and domestic and international peace.¹ The United Nations (UN) has promoted strategies for achieving gender equality as a central part of its peacebuilding and reconstruction programmes. In Bosnia, Kosovo and East Timor, UN missions have incorporated gender-mainstreaming and gender-balanced decision-making policies and programmes to foster civil society as means to ensure long-term peace and development. To what extent, though, are these institutional initiatives able to transform the deep-seated gendered social hierarchies in these new states? Feminist scholars argue that such hierarchies are at the root of violence against women, women’s lack of voice and political representation. They hold that any meaningful democratic strategy must eliminate these hierarchies to bring about political freedom and equality. In Timor these feminist perspectives on gender justice and equality are an emerging part of the public debate about the processes of democratization in state and civil society. They can be seen in speeches, communications and reports of local women’s organisations, donor agencies, NGOs and the UN however, this political activity has yet to be theoretically analysed by feminist or non-feminist scholars. Here we seek to highlight some of the gendered practices of democratization and assess the struggles within Timorese civil society to forge a gender-equal democracy.

In this chapter we show how Timorese women activists and gender entrepreneurs in the UN, donor governments and international NGOs have collaborated but also disagreed in their struggle to promote gender equality. Three overlapping gender equality strategies were negotiated and implemented; first, gender mainstreaming in policymaking, second, gender quotas in political representation, and third the mobilization of women’s voice in civil society. What is striking about the democratization process in Timor Leste is that these three gender equality strategies have been advanced whereas in past nation-building projects, the goal of gender equality has often been marginalised or at least traded-off as societies have sought to achieve other ostensibly more important goals.² The chapter reveals how the implementation of gender equality strategies was a contingent collaboration among particular gender entrepreneurs and activists from Timor and elsewhere with far-reaching implications for the construction of equal democracy.

¹ Isabel Coleman, “The Payoff for Women’s Rights.” *Foreign Affairs* 83, 3, (2004): 80-95.

² Maxine Molyneux, “Mobilization Without Emancipation? Women’s Interests, State and Revolution,” in *Transition and Development: Problems of Third World Socialism*, edited by R. R. Fagen et al. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985), pp.280 – 320.

Gender perspectives on peacebuilding and democratization

Neoliberal institutionalist IR scholars see democracy as contributing to enduring domestic and international peace. United Nations peacebuilding missions since the 1990s have sought to institutionalise democracy as an integral part of their post-conflict operations. Like mainstream IR scholars, powerful states and international organizations assume that nation-building efforts leading to democracy will promote the security and human rights of both men and women. But this assumption treats men and women’s experiences of conflict and “post-conflict” as the same and fails to take into account the gendered dimensions of democracy and security.³ Feminist scholars of international relations argue that international peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions may not advance women’s rights or improve their lives. They challenge the very concept of post-conflict, which tends to mask the ongoing political violence and especially the violence against women. Feminists focus on how military interventions even for peacebuilding purposes can contribute to the *insecurity* of individuals, particularly of marginalised and disempowered populations.⁴

For feminist IR scholars the increased incidence of sexual and domestic violence, forced prostitution, gang rape, honour killings, and sex-trafficking during and after conflict is evidence that the so-called democratic peace does not diffuse democratic norms in private as well as public life. Too much stress on the use of force in peacekeeping and peacebuilding can have the effect of legitimating and consolidating a militarised social order. Such militarisation overvalorises masculine aggression and fuels gendered violence. Feminists do not see women as more peaceful or as better peacekeepers than men contrary to what some scholars and commentators claim.⁵ Rather, IR feminists see peace and security in broad, multidimensional terms that include the elimination of all social hierarchies that lead to political and economic injustice.⁶ Similarly, feminist scholars challenge mainstream approaches to democratization that focus nearly exclusively on free and fair elections and creating a multi-party system. Such an approach neglects the importance of political equality and does not nothing to ensure women’s as well as men’s participation in democratic institutions. By contrast, a feminist approach to democratization highlights the importance of informal democratic practices in schools, families, workplaces and civil society as well as in formal political institutions.

Without institutional mechanisms to address gender inequalities feminists argue that democratization and peacebuilding may not bring about the same benefits for men and

³ Rehn, Elizabeth and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. *Women, War, Peace: The Independent Experts’ Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women’s Role in Peace-building*, New York, UNIFEM, 2002; Pamela Paxton, “Women’s Suffrage in the Measurement of Democracy: Problems of Operationalization.” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 35, 3, (2000): 92-111; J. Ann Tickner, *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Sherrill Whittington, “Gender and Peacekeeping: The United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor”. *Signs* 28, 4 (2003): 1283–1288.

⁴ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. (London: Pandora, 1989).

⁵ See for example, Francis Fukuyama, “Women and the Evolution of World Politics”. *Foreign Affairs* 77, 5, September/October 1998.

⁶ See Tickner, *Gender in International Relations*, pp. 22-23, 54-55.

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women. However, there are major opportunities to address gender inequalities in new states that are designing their democratic institutions for the first time. But these opportunities must be leveraged and advanced by local civil society and gender entrepreneurs with the support of political elites, international donors and organisations.

There are two parts to this chapter. In the first part we explore *why* gender equality strategies were introduced in Timor Leste. In the second part we investigate *how* gender equality strategies got implemented in a difficult, often violent and fragile, nation-building environment. We consider both the global and the local impetus for the promotion of gender mainstreaming in public policy, gender electoral quotas, and women’s civic voice. Moreover, we analyse the close collaboration among advocates of gender equality in Timor civil society and international organisations that have shaped the respective gender equality initiatives.

The Impetus for an Equal Democracy

The establishment of an independent, democratic Timorese state took place in a broader global environment. By the 1990s gender equality had evolved as an international norm and was increasingly diffused by transnational advocacy networks and international organisations such as the United Nations.⁷ Most countries had ratified the CEDAW Convention that legally required countries to promote women’s economic, social and political rights and report on their progress in so doing. Women’s activism had increased exponentially as western and non-western women’s movements pooled their energies and linked a myriad of locally-specific campaigns for women’s human rights and gender justice. Their activism reached a high point at the 1995 United Nations Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women.

At Beijing governments agreed to implement through national and international policymaking a wide-ranging Platform for Action (PFA) that was largely the result of women’s lobbying efforts all around the world. Gender mainstreaming was a cross-cutting theme in the Beijing PFA and seen as the best institutional mechanism for the advancement of women. Gender-balanced decision-making was also a major focus of international organisations in the late 1990s as women’s movements turned their attention to the lack of women decision-makers in political institutions. At the global level, policymakers increasingly realised the crucial importance of gender parity in any meaningful democracy. The United Nations Security Council, which had never before formally discussed gender equality produced a resolution (UNSC 1325) mandating the equal participation of women in peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes. Furthermore, experiences in UN Peacekeeping Missions in Bosnia and Kosovo revealed how collaboration between gender entrepreneurs and local women’s organisations could make a difference to peacebuilding and democratization.⁸ The

⁷ Jacqui True, “Gender Specialists and Global Governance Organizations: New Forms of Women’s Movement Mobilization,” in *Women’s Movements: In Abeyance or Flourishing in New Ways?*, edited by Marian Sawer and Sandra Grey, New York: Routledge, 2008.

⁸ Lesley Abdela. “Kosovo: missed opportunities, lessons for the future”. In *Development, Women, and War: Feminist Perspectives*. edited by Haileh Afshar and David Eade, Oxford: Oxfam, 2004, pp. 87-99.

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UN’s role in Timor’s nation-building thus came at time when it was a major advocate on the global stage for gender equality.

The local conditions supporting the creation of an equal democracy were also strong, particularly the existence of women’s organisations within the Timorese independence movement. Women have engaged in struggles to advance their rights at least since the 1970s. However, Timor Leste has a very strong patriarchal culture, which has inhibited awareness of gender injustices in Timorese society. Traditionally, girls married at a young age, often at 13 or 14, and still do in some of the more isolated rural areas. The tradition of *barlake*, or bride price, meant that men purchased their wives and gained full property rights over them.⁹ Women did not traditionally hold any positions of power and their participation in village-level decision-making was limited. The arrival of the Portuguese in 1515 did not bring women many new opportunities to improve their status. The Portuguese instituted their own political system on top of the traditional governance system and women had no access to formal political power. They allowed Timorese women few chances to exercise full political, social or economic rights.

Decolonisation, however, opened up the space for women to enter politics for the first time. In 1974 the Portuguese authorised the establishment of political parties in Timor. Female members of *Fretilin*, one of the new parties, established a women’s wing, the Popular Women’s Organisation of Timor Leste (OPMT). *OPMT* was the first overtly political women’s group in Timor, it organised meetings to raise awareness amongst women of the independence struggle. The leader of *OPMT* saw *Fretilin* as “[a] people’s organisation which creates opportunities for women to participate in the revolution”.¹⁰ However, women’s participation at the top was limited: for instance there was only one woman, Rosa Bonaparte, in *Fretilin*’s Central Committee.

The Indonesian occupation transformed women’s lives in Timor. On 12 December 1975 Indonesia annexed Timor Leste and executed leaders of *Fretilin* and *OPMT*, including Bonaparte. Timor became highly militarised and violence against women, particularly by members of the Indonesian Military and Police Force, was endemic.¹¹ Indonesian troops tortured, sexually harassed, raped and often killed women they suspected were linked to the resistance movement. Yet, paradoxically, at the same time the Indonesian occupation gave some women new work opportunities: some entered the public service, others worked with NGOs and state-sponsored women’s organisations. Many more women were involved in the resistance movement either as part of *OPMT*, or in other clandestine networks. Some women also fought in *Fretilin*’s military wing, *Falantil*. Ironically, the Indonesian occupation and its violent abrogation of women’s rights led women into the political realm to seek Timorese independence. However, the primary focus was independence and there was little political space, or support, for seriously addressing gender equality issues.

⁹ Sara Ospina, “Participation of Women in Politics and Decision-Making in Timor-Leste: A Recent History”, *Unpublished Report*, Dili: UNIFEM, 2006, p.12

¹⁰ Ospina, “Participation of Women in Politics,” p.16

¹¹ Ospina, “Participation of Women in Politics,” pp.18-22; Gender Affairs Unit and Cliondah O’Keeffe, *Situational Analysis of Gender in Post-Conflict East Timor* Gender Affairs Unit. Dili. East Timor, 2002, p.10-11.

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This changed in the 1990s as Timorese women campaigned widely on international and local levels explicitly for women’s rights. Timorese women in the diaspora networked with women’s movements in Indonesia, Australia and Portugal and attended international women’s conferences. In the late 1990s they used the peace-process period to lobby for greater inclusion of women. Milena Pires, a leading Timorese gender activist, for example, proposed the formation of a women’s department in the National Council for East Timorese Resistance (CNRT). However, the Timorese political elite tended to sideline women and did not often take seriously their suggestions.¹²

Independence, and the arrival of the UN and other international actors, created a new window of opportunity for women’s political activism. In 1999 the UN organised an independence referendum in Timor. The Timorese, including a large proportion of women, overwhelmingly voted for independence. The Indonesian forces withdrew violently: massacring, raping and burning much of Timor to the ground. UN peacekeeping troops were sent to Timor and the UN Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET) was established. UNTAET had a unique mandate; it was responsible for organizing elections, maintaining security, establishing government institutions and infrastructure, as well as the day-to-day running of the state. It had the most powers of any UN mission ever.¹³ UNTAET was the sovereign authority in Timor until 2002 and following Beijing PFA goals and the SC Resolution 1325, promoting gender equality was a mandate of the mission.

Timorese women took the lead in campaigning for gender equality. The formation of a new nation-state gave them political space to build their movement. In 2000, Timorese women organised the first Women’s Congress of Timor Leste. Over 500 women met to discuss and form their own platform for action inspired by the global Beijing PFA.¹⁴ The congress was a pivotal turning point in the history of women in Timor. It included Timorese expatriates who had left during the Indonesian occupation for Australia, Mozambique, Portugal and returned home. It was the first time that so many women had been brought together from such a wide variety of backgrounds. It was at this congress that the women of Timor transitioned from “freedom fighters into...a women’s movement”.¹⁵

Implementing an Equal Democracy

The women’s movement was strongly unified in 2000 and this is one of the chief reasons for *why* gender equality strategies were adopted within Timor’s democratization. But even in the late 1990s women’s NGOs emerged in Timor and began to address sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). In this second part of the chapter we discuss *how*, through what processes and negotiations, the gender equality

¹² Irena Cristalis, and Catherine Scott. *Independent Women, The story of women's activism in East Timor*. (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 2005), pp.54-56.

¹³ Sue Downie, “UNTAET: state-building and peace-building in East Timor.” pp.29 – 42, In Damien Kingsbury and Michael Leach (eds.) *East Timor Beyond Independence*, (Melbourne: Monash University Press, 2007), p.29.

¹⁴ The Congress produced a new women’s umbrella organisation, *Rede Feto*, which literally means “women’s network.” It coordinated 16 women’s organisations to strategically campaign on the Timorese Platform of Action.

¹⁵ Phone Interview, Sherrill Whittington, 8 November, 2007.

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strategies of developing women’s voice in civil society, integrating a gender perspective across government policymaking and ensuring women’s presence in decision-making through electoral quotas were implemented.

Developing Women’s Civic Voice and the Violence Against Women Campaign

Due to the all-encompassing struggle for independence it wasn’t until the late 1990s that the first Timorese women’s NGOs emerged in Dili. In 1997 *Fokupers* was established and in 1998 *ETWAVE* (East Timorese Movement Against Violence Towards Women and Children) and *GFFTL* (East Timor Students’ Women’s Group). These NGOs marked a new phase of women’s organising in Timor; their primary priority was gender equality, rather than independence. As the former head of *Fokupers*, Manuela Pereira, explains, “One of the important things that we forgot to talk about [during the occupation] was that the women in East Timor, they suffer from gender inequality”. *Fokupers*, for example, set up shelters for victims of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) committed by the Indonesian forces.

The 1999 independence referendum and violent Indonesian withdrawal was a critical moment for Timor’s emerging women’s movement. The UN arrived and international aid poured into the country to assist with the humanitarian crisis.¹⁶ The UN established a vulnerable persons unit (VPU), aimed at working with victims of SGBV. This unit of UN police, experienced at working with SGBV, taught *Fokupers* new ways of supporting victims. A number of INGOs, such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC), also worked on the issue. They looked for local organisations to assist and Timorese women to employ thus fuelling the growth of the Timorese NGO sector. As a result the number of local NGOs working on gender increased dramatically in the early 2000s.

Through training and seminars INGOs introduced concepts of gender, domestic violence, human rights and the CEDAW convention to a wide range of Timorese women and men. Many of these participants were employed by INGOs or started up their own local NGOs. Milena Vilanova, for example, who was employed by the IRC remembers when she first started working on SGBV in 2000 “I don’t even know what gender is.”¹⁷ Other local NGOs emerged during this period such as the *Alola Foundation*, *Rede Feto* and *Pradet* yet the movement was still driven by relatively urban, middle class activists based in Dili. The growth of this sector, and the increased awareness of SGBV, was in large part due to the international humanitarian aid that was given to strengthen Timorese civil society. This was a critical transition period where civil society “came from a stage of thinking [where] there was no special attention for women’s issues... to another era where we saw women’s issues as a priority”.¹⁸

After independence Timorese women were able to talk about *domestic* violence rather than just the violence against women perpetrated by the Indonesian military. Prior to the arrival of the international organisations, ex-Fokupers director, Pereira, had

¹⁶ Cecilia Brunnstrom, "Another Invasion: lessons from international support to East Timorese NGOs." *Development in Practice* 14, 4 (2003): 310 -321.

¹⁷ Personal Interview, Milena Vilanova, Dili, 23 November 2007.

¹⁸ Personal Interview, Manuela Pereira, Dili, 3 December, 2007.

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thought domestic violence was “normal”, as it was “happening to everyone”.¹⁹ In 2000 the National Women’s Congress identified domestic violence as a critical problem that needed to be addressed. The Congress provided the impetus for a national campaign for a law against domestic violence.²⁰ By 2002 there was a strong coalition of local and international organisations campaigning for such a law in Timor. UNIFEM, a UN agency dedicated to gender equality played a significant role in the formation of the Timorese national campaign against domestic violence.²¹

Strikingly, in the space of a few years Timor developed a strong, vocal civil society with both men’s and women’s groups advocating for legal and policy change to address domestic violence. This coalescing of Timorese civil society against domestic violence was a dynamic, organic process. Facilitated but not directed from above by international donors, the campaign against domestic violence both involved and was made possible by a series of ongoing negotiations between Timorese and international gender advocates and entrepreneurs.

Engendering Policy: the establishment of the GAU, OPE, and SEPI

The adoption of gender mainstreaming in the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor owes much to the advocacy of gender policy entrepreneurs, who pioneered and progressed ideas about gender equality and the institutional mechanisms to advance it in Timor. Milena Pires, a member of the National Council of East Timorese Resistance (CNRT) introduced the concept of gender mainstreaming in 1999.²² She lobbied for a gender unit within the transitional government in the negotiations between the UN and the CNRT. On the UN side, Sherrill Whittington, a senior gender expert, also pushed for the inclusion of a gender affairs unit.²³ Although the UN “in the interests of economy” did not establish the unit, Whittington, went to Timor and worked with the one inexperienced UN gender advisor to establish a mandate and seek funding and staff for a unit.²⁴ It was due to Pires’ initiative and Whittington’s persistence that Timor was the first UN peacekeeping operation to set up a gender affairs unit.

The Gender Affairs Unit (GAU) developed a mutually supportive relationship with the Timorese women’s movement. From the outset Whittington sought the input of women leaders, such as Maria Diaz, Micato Domingas and Milena Pires.²⁵ After the Women’s Congress in 2000 she worked with the leaders to turn their platform of action (PFA) into a policy document. Whittington and the congress leaders wrote to Sergio de Mello, the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) and

¹⁹ Interview, Pereira, 2007.

²⁰ First Congress of Women of Timor Loro Sa’e, (2000) *Plan of Action*, June 2000.

²¹ In 2007 the prime-minister, Xanana Gusmao and the president, José Ramos Horta even spoke out against domestic violence and featured on the campaign posters. UNIFEM, “Hapara Violensia Kontra Feto” (Stop Violence Against Women Poster), Dili, 2007.

²² Catherine Scott, Are women included or excluded in Post-Conflict Reconstruction? : A Case study from East Timor, CIIR, 30 June 2003 <http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/Timor-Leste/CIIRWomensPart03.html> (accessed 13 June 2007).

²³ Whittington is an Australian with experience working at the most senior levels on gender mainstreaming. For example, she was on the secretariat of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing as a senior advisor in 1995. Following the conference she worked in the gender section of UNICEF developing gender mainstreaming guidelines.

²⁴ Sergio de Mello quoted in Cristalis and Scott, *Independent Women*, p. 78.

²⁵ Phone Interview, Sherrill Whittington, 8 November, 2007 and Personal Interview, Maria Diaz, Dili, 1 December, 2007.

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demanded that UNTAET work with them on implementing their policy. The GAU adopted the platform as their mandate and it became a mechanism for the women’s movement to realize their goals. By mid 2000 Timor had a unified women’s movement and an national institutional machinery that could collaborate on a common agenda for advancing women’s rights.

The GAU was initially staffed completely by international analysts but its aims were to introduce both international and national staff to gender mainstreaming, and to facilitate the development of policies with a gender perspective. It worked closely with the women’s movement, meeting regularly with *Rede Feto*, the women’s umbrella network. In 2002 the UNTAET mission withdrew and all its associated offices, including the GAU, were expected to be disbanded. Whittington took measures to ensure the long-term survival of the GAU. UN agencies had a longer mandate in Timor beyond the UNTAET operation so she embedded a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) project on SGBV in the GAU to keep it alive and well-funded.²⁶ In 2001 the GAU hired and trained local staff to take over its operations. The women’s movement, selected an experienced Timorese woman leader, Maria Domingas Alves, “Micato”, to head – and ensure the survival of – the Gender Affairs Unit. In less than two years the first gender mainstreaming office in a UN Peacekeeping Operation had been established with UN and local political support.

The critical question was would the GAU survive the transition from UN rule to full independence in 2002? And if so, what form would the office take within the new Timorese government? The GAU had the support of the SRSG, Sergio de Mello, who consulted Whittington and Micato on where the office should be positioned in the new government. One proposal from the women’s movement was to form a Women’s Ministry. However Whittington argued a smaller policy unit in the office of the Prime Minister would be more catalytic. She feared that a ministry “was too big for a country of that size” and might be turned into a ministry for women, children, and welfare and its efforts to mainstream gender perspectives across and at all levels of policymaking would be lost.²⁷ Her proposal for a smaller policy unit was endorsed by the SRSG, De Mello and the Prime Minister, Mari Alkatiri. Timor Leste now had an Office for the Promotion of Equality (OPE) responsible for gender mainstreaming within government. It owed its creation to the collaboration between GAU staff and the women’s movement. The GAU provided the institutional structure and rationale for integrating gender perspectives in Timor’s government.

The OPE inherited the GAU’s policies, projects, and most importantly its understanding of gender mainstreaming as an across government policy strategy. Their main programme, campaigning against SGBV and developing services to provide support for women survivors, was largely run by UNFPA’s advisor to OPE. OPE had very little funding from the Timorese government but was constantly being approached by donors.²⁸ For institutional support and administrative funding OPE partnered with Irish Aid.²⁹ Irish Aid had a strong interest in supporting the women’s

²⁶ Phone Interview, Sherrill Whittington, 8 November, 2007.

²⁷ Phone Interview, Sherrill Whittington, 8 November, 2007.

²⁸ Phone Interview, Sara Negrao, 16 October, 2007.

²⁹ Anna Trembath and Damian Grenfall, *Mapping the Pursuit of Gender Equality, Non-Government and International Agency Activity in Timor-Leste*. (Melbourne, Australia: The Globalism Institute, RMIT University, 2007).

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movement and saw OPE as a crucial mechanism for promoting gender equality. They paid for an international gender advisor and also, in 2006, an international organisational advisor. These partnerships with UNFPA and Irish Aid offered OPE long-term financial support, gender expertise, and capacity building for organizational and professional development.

Micato brought to OPE her a strong relationship with the women’s movement. As the Advisor to the Prime Minister on the Promotion of Equality she was able to raise the profile of women in Timor and promote a gender perspective on policy. However, she faced many obstacles; she had no access to the Council of Ministers meetings and could only give advice indirectly to them through the Prime Minister. The OPE lacked skilled staff and thus did not have the capacity to review legislation or monitor government programmes. Furthermore, the institution had a “very precarious” organizational structure; it was more programme-based than a policy advisory unit.³⁰ These factors constrained the OPE’s ability to ensure that potentially differential gender impacts on women and men were taken into account in the development of new government law and policies.

The 2006 Timorese political crisis effectively put a stop to the OPE’s work.³¹ Micato resigned in protest at the way the Fretilin government handled the crisis. A new head, Aurora Ximenes, was soon nominated by the women’s movement and appointed. But she had little experience with gender analysis of policies.³² All of the OPE’s programmes were put on hold and it wasn’t until the new government was elected in 2007 that the OPE resumed its policy work. Under the new government the OPE became the Secretary of State for Promotion of Equality (SEPI) and its new head was given power to make policy recommendations and to speak at the Council of Ministers. Despite this institutional strengthening SEPI has come under criticism from civil society organisations because it has not formally consulted with them as did previous mainstreaming units. The leader of one important women’s group claimed she had not yet met with SEPI and has no idea what their plans or programmes are for 2008. A member of another NGO also expressed concern over whether the creation of SEPI was an effort to sideline gender mainstreaming and place all the responsibility for mainstreaming with SEPI rather than with all of government.³³ This was precisely what Whittington had warned against and sought to prevent when OPE was first created.

That gender mainstreaming has been successfully implemented in Timor – to the extent that there are institutional mechanisms to pursue it – is in large part due to the mutual cooperation and pioneering work of gender advocates in the Timorese women’s movement, in the UN and in international donor agencies. By supporting local women’s organising the GAU was able to foster a strong women’s movement that also gave it local as well as international legitimacy. The movement then used the GAU as a mechanism to lobby the SRSG and the transitional government, and the institution was adapted by locals to suit their own goals. Despite the high level of

³⁰ Interview, Negrao, 2007.

³¹ The 2006 political crisis in Timor involved 600 petitioners deserting the army and resulted in widespread civic violence, and thousands of internally displaced persons. However, there was no constitutional breakdown and the government stayed in power throughout the crisis.

³² Interview, Negrao, 2007.

³³ Personal Interview, Teresa Verdial de Araujo, Dili, 30 November, 2007.

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international support, however, OPE did not successfully implement gender analysis and impact assessments of government policies. It remains to be seen how SEPI will operate. If it is to be successful in mainstreaming a gender perspective in policymaking it will need to become expert not only in advising government but in engaging with local women’s organisations that are the chief rationale for its existence and the most important promoters and diffusers of its work.

Campaigning for Gender Quotas

As well as gender mainstreaming and strengthening women’s organising in civil society, greater representation of women in politics was a central demand of the first East Timorese Women’s Congress in June 2000. The Women’s Congress PFA set a goal of at least 30 per cent women in all decision-making bodies. A quota was seen as the most effective way to ensure women’s representation. *Rede Feto*, the women’s umbrella organisation, made the campaign for gender quotas its first priority for the constitutional assembly elections in 2001. In this quota campaign, Milena Pires, was invaluable as an interlocutor lobbying the UN and publicising the Timor campaign internationally.³⁴

Pires and *Rede Feto* took the campaign for quotas to CNRT and UNTAET in 2000. The CNRT Congress unanimously passed a resolution to pressure UNTAET to adopt a policy of 30 per cent female representation in decision-making bodies.³⁵ *Rede Feto* then lobbied UNTAET to endorse quotas for the upcoming elections. However, the UN was internally divided over quotas. While there was some support for quotas within UNIFEM and UNDP for instance, senior UN officials in the Electoral Affairs Division (EAD) charged with administering Timor’s national elections considered quotas problematic. The head of the EAD, Carina Perelli, was strongly against quotas. According to Whittington, she argued that quotas would set a “precedent for all sorts of other groups, and then we’ll be having quotas for everyone’s uncles and cousins in every election run by the UN”.³⁶ Her position was supported by the head of the Department of Political Affairs (UNDPA) in Timor,³⁷ Peter Galbraith, who apparently saw quotas as “only happening in socialist countries.”³⁸ Thus, the two key UN officials in charge of the Timor election opposed quotas.

The quota debate became “very fiery” and international in scope.³⁹ The campaign pitted the Timorese women’s movement, backed by INGOs and some UN agencies against the UN DPA. The Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR) began a petition to support *Rede Feto* and lobby the UN. Publicised in newspapers, on websites, such as East Timor Action Network’s (ETAN), the quota campaign was discussed by top officials at UN headquarters in New York. Angela King, the special advisor to the Secretary-General was supportive of the Timorese women’s campaign

³⁴ Milena Pires, “Enhancing women’s participation in electoral processes in post conflict countries: Experiences from East Timor”, (Paper presented at Expert Group Meeting on Enhancing Women’s Participation in Electoral Processes in Post-Conflict Countries, Glen Cove. United States, January 19-22, 2004).

³⁵ Pires, “Enhancing women’s participation.”

³⁶ Phone Interview, Sherrill Whittington, Thursday 8 November 2007.

³⁷ The Electoral Affairs Division is part of the Department of Political Affairs.

³⁸ This is the view related by Sherrill Whittington, Phone Interview, Thursday 8 November 2007.

³⁹ Phone Interview, Sherrill Whittington, Thursday 8 November 2007.

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and met with Kieran Prendergast the head of the DPA in New York.⁴⁰ UN officials in New York were puzzled why UNTAET was not supporting gender quotas.

At the same time as quotas were being debated in New York, DPA was putting pressure on the Timorese National Council. They lobbied council members to vote against quotas.⁴¹ As a result, many who had previously supported quotas, including some women who had acquired their seats through quotas, changed their mind. The Electoral Affairs Division ruled against quotas, claiming that “[e]lectoral quotas for women (or any other group) do not constitute international best practice for elections”.⁴² *Rede Feto*, disappointed with the decision, petitioned outside the UN offices in Dili. They argued the DPA’s decision undermined the CEDAW convention and UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and went against the collective organising of East Timorese women. The decision to oppose quotas illustrates the complexity of the UN bureaucracy: while some UN agencies namely UNIFEM were strongly supporting the women’s quota campaign, other agencies namely the DPA were directly opposing it.

The campaign to increase women’s political participation was not completely lost, however. Although quotas could not be used, other affirmative action strategies were not ruled out. Timorese women convinced senior UN officials that some sort of affirmative action was necessary. Sergio de Mello (SRSG in Timor) met with Peter Galbraith (Head of DPA) and Whittington to discuss alternative strategies. De Mello suggested training forty women to stand as candidates in the election. Whittington was “so angry” at this meagre effort that she replied “we’ll train a hundred to run for office”.⁴³ It was also decided that political parties would receive extra air-time on radio and television if they included at least 30 per cent women on their party list. De Mello and Xanana Gusmao made it a personal priority in their speeches leading up to the election to lobby for women’s inclusion in party lists. Ironically, the refusal by the DPA to support quotas led the women’s movement and UN gender entrepreneurs to work even harder to promote women’s political representation. Rather than relying on a quota system they collaborated, drawing on strategies developed by women’s movements in other countries, to raise the profile of women and increase the skills, competency, and confidence of those wanting to stand.⁴⁴

The result was extraordinary: women won 22 out of 87 seats in parliament (25.3 percent). This ranked Timor 33rd in the world and one of the highest in its region for the percentage of women in parliament.⁴⁵ A woman, Ana Pessoa, took the second most influential role in parliament, as Minister for State Administration. As a result of

⁴⁰ Interview, Whittington, 2007.

⁴¹ Pires, “Enhancing Women’s Participation.” 2004.

⁴² Milena Pires, “East Timor and the Debate on Quotas.” International IDEA, *Regional Workshop on the Implementation of Quotas: Asian Experiences*. Jakarta. Indonesia, September 2002, p.38.

⁴³ Phone interview, Sherrill Whittington, Thursday 8 November 2007.

⁴⁴ See Martha Alter Chen, Alter. “Engendering World Conferences: The International Women’s Movements and the United Nations,” pp. 139-155, in *NGOs, the UN and Global Governance*. Edited by Thomas G. Weiss and Leon Gordenker (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996). The Gender Affairs Unit (GAU), UNIFEM and *Rede Feto* worked together to organise and run six weeks of back-to back training. 140 women were put through the training.

⁴⁵ International Parliamentary Union website, *Women in National Parliaments*, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>, updated 31 January 2007, viewed 6 September 2007.

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the candidate training a new NGO was formed: *Women’s Political Caucus*. *Caucus* became part of *Rede Feto* and is now the main organisation supporting women’s political representation. In 1999 Timor had no quotas, no precedent of affirmative action for women in politics, and no women’s movement. By the end of 2001 a strong, unified women’s movement had formed, and campaigned successfully for affirmative action strategies to ensure the inclusion of a sizable proportion of women in Timor’s parliament.

In 2006 the quota debate returned. Timor Leste was drafting its electoral law for the upcoming 2007 parliamentary elections. A coalition of NGOs including *Caucus* and *Rede Feto* worked with UNIFEM to campaign again for a 30 per cent quota for women on party lists. This time the UN DPA had no power over the decision. In late 2006 a compromise between a coalition of NGOs and parliamentarians endorsed a candidate gender quota of 25 per cent. The resulting electoral law stipulated that “lists of effective and alternate candidates must include at least one woman per every group of four candidates”.⁴⁶ In 2007 the election result again was outstanding: 27 percent of parliamentary representatives were women; a two percent increase on the previous election in 2001. However, there was some frustration among gender advocates over the way women were included in the party list. Most parties placed women as the last candidate in each group of four. Furthermore, women were not given as many executive positions as in the previous government.

Supported by INGOs *Rede Feto* initiated a campaign to ensure a large number of women entered the national Timorese parliament. They leveraged international norms of gender equality and adapted women’s caucusing strategies used around the world. Although the UN was divided, and blocked quotas, it did eventually support other affirmative action strategies, which led to women being trained in election campaigning and included on party lists. Timorese women were successful in gaining greater representation in parliament because of their strong transnational networking. Moreover, after the departure of UNTAET gender advocates were able to reintroduce the quota debate and pass a gender electoral quota law.⁴⁷ Without the development of a strong Timorese civil society voice for women and a supportive gender mainstreaming unit within UNTAET these quotas would have never been finally implemented in Timor.

Conclusion:

What lessons can other states and international organisations learn from Timor Leste’s experience of building democracy? Which institutional strategies for gender equality work best? The Timor case illustrates the unique opportunity that new states and their international partners have to promote gender equality and women’s participation in democratization processes. In Timor the three gender equality strategies evolved together and organically as their key advocates collaborated closely and were well connected to senior UN officials and Timor leaders. The women’s

⁴⁶ Article 12.3 of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, *Law on the Election of the National Parliament*, Law No.6/2006, 28 December 2006.

⁴⁷ In addition, in 2004 after the disbanding of UNTAET, three seats were reserved on every *Suco* (village) council for women. For the first time ever several women were elected as *Xefe de Suco*, head of the village.

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movement both supported and was supported by the succession of gender mainstreaming institutions. The gender quota campaign, although initially unsuccessful, led to a flourishing of women’s political voice and interest in politics. The Gender Affairs Unit in UNTAET was the major facilitator of the affirmative action efforts that brought a large number of women candidates into the Timor Parliament. However, while important institutional changes that have the potential to significantly change the status of women have been introduced in Timor, they have yet to seriously transform the unequal gendered structures of Timorese state and society. For instance, the gender mainstreaming framework has been instituted but routine gender impact assessment is not being carried out. Thus, no public policy has been altered as a result of taking into account gender differences and inequalities. Similarly, more women in parliament and in cabinet positions have not translated in the short term into feminist platforms and policies. At the same time, the women’s movement in Timor has become a strong and recognised force in national and international civil society with a diverse feminist political agenda that addresses both practical and strategic gender interests.

A feminist perspective on democratization and peacebuilding forces us to look at democratic institutions in terms of who is represented, who is present and absent, and in whose interest power is executed. Such a perspective reveals a democratic deficit when men dominate political institutions and women are absent or a minority voice in these institutions. Feminists argue that democracy requires all citizens, women and men, to be involved in the design of new institutions. They see democracy not merely in terms of a public sphere or set of political institutions but in terms of the underlying practices within a private sphere that includes the economy, civil society and the family. Thus, democratizing a state and society requires collaboration between groups in public and private spheres, between institutional and non-institutional actors. Consistent with this, a feminist perspective highlights the central role of civil society and women’s organising within civil society in building the collaborative relationships that establish democracy in everyday practice as well as in institutional design. In this regard, Timor Leste has the potential to create a truly equal democracy having begun its nation-building process with institutionalised gender equality initiatives and women’s voice at the heart of this process in civil society, and with the benefit of international learning, political and practical support.

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