

Violence against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Promising Practices

In 2007, AusAID's Office of Development Effectiveness identified violence against women as a major barrier to development in Melanesia and East Timor, with serious effects on the health and welfare of women experiencing violence, as well as their families, communities and countries. AusAID commissioned a study to assess the effectiveness of current approaches to addressing violence against women and girls in five countries, East Timor, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.

The goal was to contribute to the evidence base for effective violence against women interventions through a participatory assessment of what has been achieved to date in the region. An international evaluation team including Mary Ellsberg, former Senior Advisor for Gender, Violence and Human Rights at PATH, designed a multi stage methodology to identify lessons learned and examples of promising interventions that could be scaled up, or applied in other countries. It focused on women's own experience of violence, and what does or does not help them in terms of protection and prevention. The process included a range of innovative, participatory methods used during visits to each of the countries with the help of local researchers, such as:

- **Semi-structured interviews** with key individuals including policy makers, civil society leaders, women's groups, government officials, service providers, researchers and survivors who have used services provided valuable insight into how violence against woman is addressed.
- **Focus group discussions** with a diversity of social actors (police officers, church members, community men and women, magistrates, etc.) The team used such participatory techniques as Venn Mapping, Free Listing, Timelines, Open Ended Stories to explore community attitudes towards violence against women, and the options available to respond to violence, both at a community level and more broadly.¹

The local researchers were trained by the team in the use of participatory interviewing techniques, and subsequently carried out additional interviews and focus groups in rural areas. In each interview, either by international or local researchers, there was at least one dedicated note taker in addition to the facilitator. Notes and reports from each interview were compiled, with care taken to collect verbatim quotes as much as possible.

The result of this lengthy and complex process is a document that is grounded in the perspectives and hopes of a broad spectrum of Melanesian and East Timorese society. By focusing on the most promising interventions, from the perspective of survivors themselves, we hope that it will provide a blueprint for strengthening responses to violence against women in the region that is accurate, relevant and useful, not only for international donor agencies, but also for community members, local decision makers and activists.

¹ These techniques are described at length in Ellsberg and Heise, 2005.