



TOWARDS A FUTURE FREE FROM VIOLENCE

Timor-Leste | Impact Brief
(2018–2022)



About this report

This report is a summary of the end-of-term evaluation of World Vision's Towards a Future Free from Violence (TFFV) project, supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

The evaluation was conducted by Ethos of Engagement Consultants (EoE) between April to June, 2022. The evaluation team was headed by Dr Anne Stephens, field researchers, Ms Guilhermina de Araujo and Mr Domingos Mesquita, and data analyst, Ms Trina Nguyen. Further data analysis review and guidance was provided by World Vision Timor-Leste (Domingos Bucik, Jared Berends) and World Vision Australia (Shirantha Perera, Katie Chalk and Stephen Milford).

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Front cover photo: Towards a Future Free from Violence is one of many initiatives in Timor-Leste bringing children and young people together to plan for a safe and productive future.





CONTEXT

Violence against women and children is a major problem in Timor-Leste, in part a legacy of a complex history of brutal occupations, with significant impacts on Timorese culture and collective trauma.¹

On paper, Timor-Leste's Constitution guarantees equality between women and men in all spheres of social and political life. Timor-Leste's Strategic Development Plan (SDP) 2011-2030 requires government departments to address gender equality as a whole of government task, with a goal to create a society where 'human dignity and

women's rights are valued, protected and promoted by our laws and culture'. But the true picture of gender inequality is vastly different. According to the Asia Foundation in 2016,² 47% of women aged 15-49 who had ever been in a relationship, experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner in the last 12 months; 9.5% of women had experienced rape by a non-intimate partner in the last 12 months; 24% of women (nationally) and 42% of men (from a smaller study of urban and rural sites) experienced child sexual abuse; 72% of women and 77% of men (again, from a smaller study) had experienced physical or sexual violence as a child.

1 European Union and the United Nations. (2020). *Spotlight Initiative in Timor-Leste – A Joint EU-UN Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls*.

2 Asia Foundation/Nabilan (2016). *Understanding Violence against Women and Children in Timor-Leste: Findings from the Nabilan Baseline Study*.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Towards a Future Free From Violence (TFFV) was a four-year project focusing on the protection of women and children (especially girls) from all forms of violence. Its objective was that 'women, men, boys and girls are equal, safe and mutually respected.' The project intended to achieve this through four outcomes shown below. Success was dependent on attitudinal and behaviour change from five different groups or 'boundary partners': young people (in and out of school), parents and caregivers, community leaders, faith leaders, and teachers.



Outcome 1: Women, men, and male and female youth and adolescents demonstrate equitable and non-discriminatory relationships

The project worked with female and male adolescents and youth and faith leaders and their spouses to promote healthy, equitable relationships using contextualised materials based on World Vision's IMPACT+, Channels of Hope for Gender (CoHG), and Celebrating Families tools.



Outcome 2: Parents and teachers provide a protective environment for children, including children with a disability

The project worked with teachers and school administrators, parents and community leaders to support child protection and positive discipline in schools and at home.



Outcome 3: Strengthened access to survivor-friendly Violence against Women and Children services

Outcome 3 focused on strengthening community response. The project engaged community leaders, including elected representatives and municipal service providers, to become more visible and active in their roles to protect those at risk, and survivors of family violence.



Outcome 4: Strengthened learning and collaboration to influence policy and programming

The project connected to national-level policy platforms promoting gender equality and protection from violence (intimate partner, gender-based violence [GBV], violent discipline).

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

To determine project outcomes and success relative to project inputs, it was important to see results for each of the five participating groups separately, as well as an overall view of progress towards reducing violence against women and children. A mixed methods approach was applied to capture large data sets for representation of the project’s

evaluation criteria, as well as opportunities for dialogue with representatives of the different groups to hear how and why aspects of the TFFV project did or did not work. This included five different surveys, focus groups across multiple locations in Baucau and Aileu, and key informant interviews (KIs) with staff and implementing partners.

Table 1: Survey participants from Baucau and Aileu disaggregated by groups with baseline comparison

Survey target group	Baucau	Aileu	Comparison to baseline	
			Baucau	Aileu
Adolescent and youth	214	356	186	136
Parents	80	92	149	189
Teachers	31	39	51	88
Community leaders	16	49	54	33
Faith Leaders	17	28	43	53

To make an evaluative assessment against the project’s theory of change (ToC), the evaluators drew upon the project’s predefined success outcome markers (OMs), set during the design phase. The OMs ask: What would we **expect to see** as a minimum outcome given our inputs and efforts? With this in place, what would we **like to see** as a more promising and sustainable outcome? And what would we **love to see** as the ideal outcome given our inputs and efforts? OMs were written for all five boundary

partners in line with the change anticipated. Largely, selected OMs consider behaviour change, but in the case of policymakers also count the volume and quality of actions to protect women and children from violence.

- **Expect** = minimum acceptable outcome
- **Like** = promising outcome
- **Love** = ideal outcome



The project sought to influence behaviour change across five different ‘boundary partners’ or target groups: teachers, parents, children, community leaders and faith leaders.

FINDINGS

ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

Young people continue to be influenced by gender inequity and patriarchal norms, including violence against women. Acceptance of this remains high, though equitable attitudes are improving. Adolescents, both female and male, recalled training on child protection, gender equality and GBV, and appreciated their improved skills in communication and leadership. They also benefitted personally from conflict negotiation skills. However, there is little evidence that young people are stepping up to become champions in their community for preventing violence against women or children. Young people are also less aware or able than other groups surveyed to use reporting and referral services, in some cases because they do not have the resources (they are poorer than adults or have no money of their own).

PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

As a result of parents participating in organised training and community events around positive parenting, the evaluation found a definite shift to non-violent parenting practices (especially in Aileu), and acceptance of violence against children is reducing, though zero tolerance is a difficult concept, and communities are receiving (and therefore acting inconsistently on) mixed messages on intimate partner violence (IPV), children's punishment and GBV. Awareness and capacity to report incidents of child abuse has improved. However, the deeper issues of gender inequity and patriarchal norms have not changed for communities as a result of TFFV, including violence against women and children, with higher exposure to violence in Aileu than Baucau.



'My teacher used to pinch my ears or [make me] kneel around the classroom when I was late or did not answer the questions,' says Aprilia, 15. 'But I did not tell my parents, to avoid problems. Now... the teachers are changing their behaviour towards us... They still punish us but in a different way, such as calling our parents to the school for misbehaviour.'

TEACHERS

Schools are more supportive of children with disability than previously, demonstrated through focus groups as well as direct provision of accessible infrastructure. Child protection training has made teachers aware of Child Protection laws and the zero-tolerance policy of the use of corporal punishment. However, teachers struggle with this 'zero-tolerance' approach which has been perceived as a loss of authority or taking child rights too far. Children confirm the use of corporal punishment at school continues. Alternative behaviour management strategies without using violent punishment will require teachers and parents to work together more cohesively. Teachers are aware of child protection reporting and referral protocols and more likely than before to refer to police, especially if school administration has not acted.

FAITH LEADERS AND THEIR SPOUSES

Tolerance for IPV and VAW remains shockingly high amongst faith leaders, along with unwillingness to report family violence incidents. However, willingness to support people facing violent situations is high. Faith leaders and their spouses are not taking up opportunities to run courses such as Celebrating Families independently of TFFV. Messages are delivered mainly to congregations during worship. These messages were found to conflict with national policy on women's and children's protection. Inability to provide survivor-centred advice and support is a major setback to the assumption of the value of faith leaders in achieving project goals.

"When we started the training, we felt confused but step by step we understood, opened our minds that women have the same rights as men. We need to value them according to religion, culture and law. The training is good but depends on how people react and their level of understanding."
 – (FGD, faith leaders, Baucau)

COMMUNITY LEADERS

Community leaders including responsible authorities have helped to improve community access to survivor-friendly VAWC services. Standard reporting protocols were well understood. The drivers and contributing factors of violence are less well understood. The project missed an opportunity to integrate a systems response to protect women and children from violence in the home during COVID-19 lockdowns and associated socio-economic pressures.



Teacher Flavia has succeeded in removing physical punishment from her lessons. She says: 'At first, it was quite difficult for me to change my habit of hitting students when they misbehaved. [But] as an educator, I have to treat students with respect and kindness to create healthy relationships with them.'

CONCLUSIONS

Though some shifts have been made in attitudes to gender equality, the goal – that harmful traditional or customary practices towards women and girls have been affected to the extent that they are no longer the norm – remains unmet.

Outcome 1 has been partially, but not fully, met. IPV and VAC remains both prevalent and secretive, 'behind closed doors'. Community leaders, some parents and even the youth interviewed for the study shared that many members of the community think that the violence among family is a private matter with 'no need to report as this is their own business' (FGD, Community Leader, Aileu). The sustainability of the TFFV project to produce transformative change is contingent on the weight of new norms replacing the old, and their transmission from community members themselves. Behaviour change projects, such as the elimination of VAWC, are intergenerational. The changes World Vision Timor-Leste and its partners want to see, may not transpire for decades yet to come.

Outcome 2 has also been partially, but not fully, met. Teachers are aware of their responsibilities under the law and are making an effort towards promoting and adhering to the 'zero tolerance' policy. Training for teachers has been implemented but many are unsure what is expected of them, expressing the belief that children's rights erase theirs to manage classrooms and learning effectively. More work with teachers is needed to support them to understand the benefits and pedagogy associated with positive behaviour management. Reporting and using standard operating procedures were found to be well understood.

Outcome 3 has seen the greatest progress in this four-year period. Community leader engagement and action was a highlight for the project. All groups have a better understanding of VAWC services available, with parents

and teachers stronger in this regard than youth. Given that adolescents turn to their parents in the first instance, this finding is not surprising. Faith leaders have knowledge of the services, but were least able to explain how their support to victim-survivors could complement support services. In their view, women wanting to leave violent relationships should return to their home and the support service personnel should reinforce this message.

The TFFV program of work has had an impact on people with disability, which is significant for the assessment of Outcome 1. The project has given visibility to people and children with disability that they might not otherwise have had. Training is changing the attitudes and language used about people with disability in schools and communities, and youth groups are making efforts to include them due to the TFFV training. In a KII with disability partner, RHTO, the interviewee described successfully advocating with a child's father to allow the child to access physiotherapy that could potentially reduce the severity of their disability. Public campaigning on disability has also reached widely across communities.

'We always share information about people with disability in the community. We know that to change people's behaviour takes time, so RHTO is working with World Vision to create a poster about what to call people with disability. We give it to the Head of Village to put in their office, so when community come to meet them, they can read the information in the poster.' (KII, RHTO staff member, Aileu)

SUSTAINABILITY: WHAT'S NEEDED NOW?

MAKE TFFV SURVIVOR-CENTRIC

The baseline report strongly recommended TFFV take a survivor-centred approach. It was recognised already that asking women to have the primary responsibility for establishing and maintaining homes that are free from violence is a form of victim-blame and should not be condoned by World Vision Timor-Leste or the faith leaders working alongside this project. Minimising the experience of IPV socially condones the practice and is a form of resistance to what TFFV aims to achieve. The evaluators urge World Vision Timor-Leste to step up efforts to educate the different groups, particularly faith leaders (see Recommendation 3). The attitudes and views of faith leaders run counter to international best practice evidence and there is a grave risk that they will undermine the sustainability of the TFFV project. Faith leaders must stop advising women to return to violent partners.

RESET THE COURSE FOR GENDER EQUALITY, NOT JUST VIOLENCE REDUCTION

The evaluators find that there is multiple messaging occurring, leading to confusion for participants and uncertainty about what changes are required of them. At best, social conflict is confused as being a type of violence to be addressed and at worst, as the FGDs with parent groups and faith leaders demonstrate, the seriousness of VAWC is minimised. Respondents may not understand that gender inequality and prejudicial attitudes towards people with disability, minors and others, are core drivers of violence, abuse and neglect. Gender equality is understood as the sharing of household tasks and parenting, which are important social reforms, but a very limited application of the intention behind equality agendas which seek to empower women in and outside the home.

A common misunderstanding found in the evaluation is that people equate non-participation in TFFV training events or group membership as the people responsible for acts of violence. This is not likely to be true. It cannot be said that participation in the TFFV project stops someone from being violent. The interviews and surveys with teachers and their students demonstrate this point that despite the illegality of corporal punishment, it is used and condoned.

ASSESS AND ADDRESS RISK OF BACKLASH

Risk of backlash and resistance to the prevention of violence against women and to gender equality overall has been under-anticipated. The evaluators found no risk assessment in the TFFV documents on backlash and resistance. Teachers, parents, carers and faith leaders continue to believe that women's and children's rights deny men theirs. Counter-claims of male disadvantage is a form of denial and expression of backlash. One strategy to build resilience and sustainability of PVAW and GBV prevention programs is to build safer environments with bystander awareness and preparedness for intervention. More work is needed in this area to address resistance and strengthen effectiveness of behaviour change discussions.

STEP UP THE SYSTEMS FOCUS

World Vision Timor-Leste cannot do this alone and work must be supported by the Government of Timor-Leste. Governments everywhere need to address the political, social, and economic structures that prevent women and girls from exercising their full rights to live safely and in equality with men and boys. The national plan for GBV in Timor-Leste and the national budget investments to strengthen multiple sectors to prevent and respond to VAWC is urgently required. Response sector settings that require government support include services for child health, maternal, sexual and reproductive health, mental health, alcohol or substance abuse, schools, community policing and infrastructure. The legislative frameworks and justice settings by Timor-Leste's government are not keeping pace with the need for change. World Vision Timor-Leste needs to advocate for government reform and increased funding (See Recommendation 7).

A DEEPER RESPONSE TO DISABILITY DISADVANTAGE

Disability inclusion is commonly understood to be the provision of access and receiving less verbal harassment. Anti-discrimination is seen as treating people (including students) with disabilities the same as any other person, but this overlooks how a disability makes someone's life and experiences distinctive from others and highly vulnerable to violence and neglect.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Design a long-term community mobilisation campaign** to challenge dominant notions of masculinity based on male authority over women. Focus on a simplified message in first phase, building into period 2, and so forth to create a layering effect. For instance, Period 1 might focus on non-discriminatory attitudes towards children, women and people with disability. Period 2 might add the concept of empowerment for women and girls. Similarly, awareness of the types of violence and the settings in which it occurs, can then be built upon with discussions about rape and sexual consent in relationships, followed by bystander awareness-raising to support communities to intervene safely and appropriately. Explain victim-blaming and how it stigmatises and isolates victim-survivors, especially people who are further marginalised by disability, age, gender orientation, ethnicity or other. Also consider support for community-wide reconciliation and healing for post-colonial trauma and behaviour change for peace.
2. **Continue to work with the identified participant groups**, given evidence of compound effectiveness in violence prevention and response through the socio-ecological spectrum from the individual to macro levels of society.
3. **Also add new actors, targets and markers of achievement to the theory of change.** The levels of achievement also need adjustment. Quantitative targets were too ambitious within this period but may be appropriate for the next phase. On the other hand, outcome markers were under-ambitious with some participant groups.
4. **Expand response sector participation to include community health facilities and workers**, and improve reporting systems in communities (Community Leaders). This will strengthen the response pathway for women and children connecting with medical treatment, psychosocial support and legal advice. Also invest in other survivor-centred responses, such as counselling in health settings, and UN-guided survivor-centric principles and practices throughout.
5. **Resolve challenges of empathy and equality among faith leaders.** Faith leaders may also not be the most appropriate mentors for young people on this issue. Consider other strong youth networks for IMPACT Clubs to connect with on issues of violence prevention and healthy relationships. Specific to conflict mediation, this should not be promoted as a primary strategy for reducing intimate partner violence among couples. Group-based workshops with women and men that promote egalitarian attitudes and relationships are more likely to bring attitudinal shifts needed for gender equality. However, conflict negotiation skills should be retained as a valued skillset for young people in IMPACT Clubs.
6. **Invest in further training with youth to recognise the drivers of violence** in interpersonal relationships, and build zero tolerance for IPV in their own or peer-age relationships. Include training for children and youth on roles and reporting protocols for bystanders, as leaders in Recommendation 1 above.
7. **Review training packages and increase direct skilled facilitation**, using facilitators from World Vision Timor-Leste, and participating groups, including Youth Champions. Curriculum and resources should be developed beyond World Vision International models: for instance, UN Women's RESPECT framework which has been translated into Tetun. Connect with mobilising efforts (Recommendation 1 above) across a variety of settings to encourage participation of local leaders, people with disability, older and younger people.
8. **Continue to advocate to relevant ministries and service providers on the need to engage and train teachers** on child-centric teaching and behaviour management approaches. This includes access for children with disabilities, both physical access (i.e. ramps to classrooms) and a modified curriculum to support classroom-based learning and flexible teaching across different abilities.
9. **Continue Positive Parenting programs** geared towards whole of family safety, food security, child nutrition, equitable gender-roles and decision making, and parental engagement in their children's education and schooling. Connect it more deliberately to work with teachers. Strong relationships between school and home are a protective factor for children but parents need to call out abusive behaviours by teachers, and teachers need to know that positive behaviour management needs parental support.



Veronica, 48, says the changes her family have put to the test since taking part in TFFV sessions have not always been easy. 'I have to convince and encourage them. We agreed to choose practices that are easy for us, such as appreciating (each other) and using language or expressions that do not offend.'



The project aimed to increase support for non-violent children's discipline to reduce the culture of violence in homes, schools and communities. While some progress was noted among parents, it proved challenging for teachers. More targeted influence, and more time, is needed to bring about consistent change in teachers' attitudes.



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THIS MEANS THE WORLD