

# Putting a Gender Lens on WASH Practice in Liquica, Timor-Leste

Gender

Di Kilsby

International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), with input from staff of WaterAid Australia and Timor-Leste

Towards Inclusive WASH Sharing evidence and experience from the field



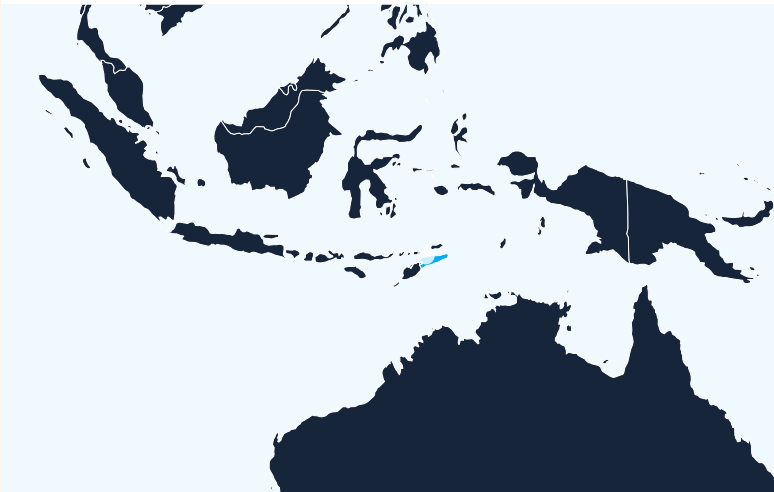
## The Context

This paper is a reflection on the partnership between a WASH specialist agency, WaterAid (WA), and a gender specialist agency, International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), and their efforts towards locating gender equality as a central concern of WA's WASH program in Timor-Leste.

In mid-2010, when the WA-IWDA partnership began, WaterAid in Timor-Leste (WATL) had: developed gender guidelines; provided some gender training to staff and partners (but understanding of gender concepts was confused); and had appointed a gender focal point (GFP), who had received minimal support and resources. WATL had committed to strive for gender balance across staff and management but had no women in senior or technical roles. WATL aimed to increase levels of participation in WASH-related decision-making and on community WASH committees ('GMFs'). WATL's local non-government organisation (NGO) partners had women on staff only as hygiene promoters and had not appointed GFPs.

### Location

» Liquica Province, Timor-Leste



## The Process: Partnership between WA and IWDA

**The partnership:** The WA-IWDA partnership aims to strengthen knowledge and skills within WATL and partner organisations to support community-driven gender equality through WASH programs. WA and IWDA conducted participatory strengths-based research in two project communities in Liquica district in June 2010. The research

facilitated women and men to identify, from their own perspective, gender outcomes achieved through project activities and enabling factors that had supported those changes. The research was a good starting place, as it built evidence; informed design of activities based on issues identified by women and men in communities themselves; built ownership amongst staff; and provided a real-life illustration of what confusing gender concepts are about.

**Reflection process:** Key WA staff participated in a small reflection process using existing frameworks: IWDA's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning 'Key Questions'; and elements of the 'Social Model' used by WA, reframed as locations of change (organisational, individual, environmental and social). WATL also facilitated reflective dialogue with women and men in one community (the 'test community') in which the research and other training have been conducted.

## Positive outcomes of the partnership's work to date

Staff and community participants in the reflection identified the following outcomes as changes that partnership activities have achieved or at least contributed to:

### Change at institutional and organisational level

There has been a demonstrable change in attitudes, understanding and practice on integrating gender into WASH programming among staff of WATL. Women have increased and broader representation on WATL staff including one in a technical role. There is now a male GFP. To address issues of unfair balance of domestic duties in the field, a cook/cleaner has been employed at the WATL district office and staff residence. WATL has taken on increasing numbers of female engineering interns, one of whom was recently recruited to the staff of a partner organisation. Partners now have GFPs, including one man. WATL, with IWDA support, is now implementing a Gender Training and Dialogue plan for staff and communities.

### Case Study 13

**Figure 1**  
WaterAid staff trial a new participatory tool for facilitating community dialogue on gender roles and relationships with women and men in Maniquibia, Timor-Leste  
Di Kilsby, IWDA



**Figure 2**  
Women's drama activity imagining changed gender roles in the future. Taken during the research process in June 2010, Maniquibia, Timor-Leste  
Di Kilsby, IWDA



in Brisbane, Australia. The WASH community has been interested and receptive, although the extent to which others have adopted similar practices is unknown.

**Social, attitudinal and behavioural change**

WATL now conducts regular 'dialogues' between women and men in communities to increase awareness of gender in/equality and to assist them to imagine and enact positive change (Figures 1 and 2). Both women and men in communities report that these processes have been beneficial in creating opportunities to discuss important and, in some cases, sensitive issues. Women in the test community report they now have more understanding about their rights. Although they feel it is difficult for them to take advantage of these rights, they believe their daughters will.

Men in the test community report increased awareness of and respect for contributions women make at home and in the community. Although changes in behaviour have been limited, men understand they can and should help women more with their work. They now discuss ideas and issues with their wives after community meetings. More women at community level now have technical roles on community WASH Committees (Tetun acronym GMFs) and at

**Change for individual women and men**

Individual women on staff, particularly the female GFP, enjoy heightened awareness and recognition among their colleagues of women's rights and contributions. Women in communities have gained similar recognition and some individual women have benefited from expanded roles.

**Environmental and contextual change**

The processes and outcomes of the WA-IWDA partnership activities have been shared both in Timor and Australia, including at the international WASH 2011 Conference

<sup>3</sup> Many factors may have contributed to changes in GMF composition. Recent data indicates that among NGOs participating in a national WASH program, 10% of GMFs now have women leaders and 33% have women registered in technical roles; this is in contrast to 2008 and 2009 data, which found limited participation by women in GMFs. (ISF-UTS, 2011)

Gender

**Case Study 13**



**Figure 3**  
IWDA partnership with WaterAid involved research into the use of different community facilitation tools. Dili, June 2010

WaterAid

least one woman now heads a GMF.<sup>1</sup> Women have a more active role in construction and repairs. Men and women both report that women now participate more in community meetings; staff have observed this too.

## Enabling factors supporting positive change

### Institutional and organisational factors

WA and IWDA have played key roles as institutional enablers. The partnership has valued flexibility in building strategies progressively, learning from shared experience and reflection. The partnership is marked by transparency and trust.

The WA-IWDA partnership is committed to sharing learnings. WATL and IWDA engage in regular reflection. Deeper longitudinal reflection is planned for the next phase of the partnership.

WA globally has created an enabling environment with its Equity and Inclusion (EI) Policy, backed up by a track record in related initiatives such as important work on menstrual hygiene management. WaterAid in Australia (WAAU) also has a Gender Policy.

### Enabling factors relating to individual women and men in communities and organisations

The drive and commitment of key individuals has been central to positive outcomes.

This includes:

- » IWDA works intensively with the GFPs to develop training and other processes and supports them while they become familiar with implementing them (Figure 3). This builds cultural appropriateness and allows the GFPs to build their own skills and experiences.
- » The woman WATL GFP is dynamic and committed, highly motivated to learn and try new things and has excellent facilitation skills.
- » The male GFP has willingly taken on this role even though gender was new for him. His presence encourages greater male participation in training, opening men's minds to new ideas, as men are less likely to dismiss it as a 'women's activity'.
- » The WATL Country Manager has been supportive and keen to learn.
- » In Australia, the key WAAU contact has a dual role managing WaterAid's Timor Leste program and as WAAU's Equity and Inclusion Focal Point (EIFP). She has played a catalytic role in the success of the partnership.
- » The WAAU CEO has also shown positive leadership, creating the necessary institutional political will.
- » Individuals in communities have also played an important role in bringing about change. In particular, certain strong individual women have been courageous in speaking out within their communities, due to personal attributes and for some, having benefited from training.

### Environmental and contextual factors

Other NGOs and the Government of Timor-Leste (GOTL) have been enablers. Gender Equality is core to the stated development agenda of the Timor-Leste government and national WASH policy frameworks provide support for gender inclusion. A bilateral project, BESIK, also has a focus on gender. The WATL GFP is a Master Trainer with BESIK. BESIK and the Timor-Leste WASH

<sup>2</sup> During the research, communities talked about the significance of the role-modelling effect in encouraging women to consider taking on new roles.

Gender

## Case Study 13

Sector Forum have facilitated learning on gender within the broader WASH sector.

The WASH sector in Timor-Leste has a focus on broader inclusion issues, particularly disability. A charismatic Australian disability advocate visited Timor-Leste in 2011 and with local disabled people's organisations powerfully demonstrated the need for simple, cost-effective strategies to address WASH needs of people with disabilities (See Case Study 7 in this publication). The dual focus on gender and disability has sharpened the interest, focus and commitment of many in the WASH NGO sector on inclusion.

The Australian WASH Reference Group has provided a supportive environment through its focus on Inclusive WASH and has been a means for sharing learning within the WASH sector.

### **Social, attitudinal and behavioural factors**

Information and perspectives shared openly, willingly and with good humour by women and men in communities, have provided invaluable learning to WA and IWDA upon which to build partnership strategies, while also contributing to their own learning about hidden gender issues.

Women's presence in expanded percentages and roles on staff creates positive role-modelling for other women.<sup>2</sup> This may be a contributing factor to the expanding representation of women in community committees including in non-traditional roles.

It has also been important to involve men at every stage in the process, in the community and on staff.

## **Challenges and lessons learned**

### **Institutional and organisational barriers**

Despite best intentions, follow-up after visits and production of documentation has often been limited or delayed. This has hampered implementation of training and has limited sharing of experiences and materials. In future the partnership will need to allow more time for documentation. The recent recruitment of an English and Tetun-speaking WATL Capacity Development Advisor will provide a bridge to keep things moving between IWDA visits.

### **Challenges experienced by individuals**

In common with the experiences of many GFPs in development,<sup>3</sup> the WA GFPs have had to balance multiple roles, often taking on GFP responsibilities in their own time. The GFPs have applied themselves diligently, but at some cost to themselves. The male GFP faces particular challenges as gender is still frequently conceptualised as a 'women's concern'. Clarifying and supporting the male GFP role will require further WA-IWDA attention.

### **Attitudinal and social barriers**

'Participation' has long been a standard aspect of community development practice; however, the term has been used 'so widely and so loosely' that 'the meaning of the concept has become blurred' (Mikkelsen, 2005:53). Fostering meaningful 'participation' of women is complex (various authors in Mikkelsen, 2005:77).

<sup>3</sup> Many writers have described the limits upon the ability of GFPs to achieve significant change. Goetz and Sandler critique the expectations placed on GFPs, who are often at relatively junior levels therefore frequently not present during decision-making. Typically GFPs take on this job, on top of their existing role, without sufficient time or resources allocated and frequently with little training (Goetz and Sandler in Cornwall et al, 2007:170). Mukhopadhyay speaks of how, while GFPs may be a part of an organisation's internal gender infrastructure, in reality, taking gender concerns forward is largely a matter of 'goodwill' among colleagues. (Mukhopadhyay in Cornwall et al, 2007:146).

<sup>4</sup> The 24-hour clock is a well-known tool; an explanation of the tool in relation to making visible gender differences in workload can be found in Halcrow et al (2010).

<sup>5</sup> The 'gender and development' approach is sometimes misunderstood to mean that there is no place for women-only activities; however, while also working with men, it 'is necessary to centre-stage women's concerns' (Panda, 2007 pp, 331).

Gender

## **Case Study 13**

**Figure 4**  
Debriefing with IWDA and WaterAid staff following a community dialogue process. Dili, March 2011  
WaterAid



**Figure 5**  
Return visit to follow up with women who participated in the research, March 2011, Maniquibia, Timor-Leste  
Di Kilsby, IWDA



Two important issues for WATL are:

**The implications of expecting already over-burdened women to take on yet more responsibilities, e.g. on WASH committees:** The WA-IWDA partnership has begun to address this through deliberately focusing on raising community awareness of the workload already carried by women, and the significant and essential contributions women make in their various roles, using tools such as the '24-hour clock'<sup>4</sup> and an exercise on 'Three Kinds of Labour'. Further focused strategies and persistence will be required, as the household is notoriously the most difficult arena in which to effect change in gender roles and relations (Hunt and Kasynathan, 2010; Chant, 2007; Panda, 2007).

**The quality of 'participation':** Some men from both staff and community, lacking personal experience of the obstacles that prevent women from speaking up, at times use somewhat forceful tactics to 'encourage' women to speak up in workshops and meetings, sometimes inadvertently putting women 'on the spot'. Men also comment publicly that women have 'failed' to take up the 'opportunity' given to speak up, that women are 'shy' or lack education and may not be able to participate. Such comments can be shaming, feel patronising and discouraging for women. Addressing these issues will be a focus for WA-IWDA, including developing strategies to support women to develop skills and confidence for voicing their perspectives (Figure 4).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>6</sup> More than half of participants, women and men alike, in a WATL and partner staff gender training workshop in September 2011 responded to the evaluation question, 'what do you see as the most significant challenge for you in working for gender equality?', with the response 'culture' or 'tradition'. IWDA, which regularly conducts gender training for development workers, finds this is a common issue. This was also a finding of recent research by IWDA and ANU (Kilby and Crawford 2011).

<sup>7</sup> IWDA is undertaking a one-year project to document and develop tools and strategies for navigating the gender and culture interface, funded by AusAID's Innovations Fund. WATL is participating in this project.

Gender

Case Study 13

**Figure 6**  
Women in Manuquibia discuss rankings during the gender research process, June 2010

Di Kilsby, IWDA



During community gender dialogue processes, women and men have separate discussion groups, as well as spaces for women and men to share their views together. Women have given feedback that this creates a safe space to speak freely (Figure 5). Although some issues have been opened up for discussion in communities, women report that while they discussed the 'new ideas' with their husbands immediately after WATL events, they do not continue to do so, as 'we still have to love each other' and they don't want to make their husbands angry (Figure 6). This underlines the importance of discussion in a supportive environment. Skilled women on staff are vital for facilitating separate women's discussion groups.

Confidently navigating the interface between gender and culture remains a significant challenge for staff.<sup>6</sup> The WA-IWDA partnership will work with staff to develop explicit strategies for working on gender within the cultural context.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

The partnership between WA and IWDA has been a productive way for WA to build strategies, skills and experience in addressing gender issues in its WASH programming in Timor-Leste. WATL staff believe the WA-IWDA partnership has been effective in bringing about positive change and that the resources invested in this have been used well.

This WA-IWDA partnership experience demonstrates what can be achieved in promoting gender-inclusive WASH practice through a partnership combining gender and WASH expertise, with a strong commitment to critical reflection, learning and flexibility. WA recognises it will require a long-term commitment and is willing to continue investing in the process of building skills, tools and strategies for integrating gender into its program.

A more detailed version of this case study is available on the Inclusive WASH CD or at [www.inclusivewash.org.au/case-studies](http://www.inclusivewash.org.au/case-studies).

## Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the following individuals for contributing to the development of this case study: Rosie Wheen, Equity and Inclusion Focal Point, WAAU; Delfina da Silva and Longuino (Agi) Pereira Moniz Sequeira, Gender Focal Points, WATL; Sophie Cooke, Capacity Development Advisor, WATL; staff of WATL; women and men of Manuquibia, Liquica, Timor-Leste. Also Dinesh Bajracharya, Country Manager, WATL for his support for the partnership activities and all staff of WATL for their active and enthusiastic participation in our shared endeavours.

WA-IWDA partnership activities have been funded as part of project funding from AusAID.

Gender

## References

- » Chant S (2007) *Dangerous equations? How female-headed households became the poorest of the poor: causes, consequences and cautions*, in Cornwall A, Harrison E and Whitehead A (eds), *Feminisms in Development: Contradictions, Contestations and Challenges*, Zed Books, London
- » Cornwall A, Harrison E and Whitehead A (eds), *Feminisms in Development: Contradictions, Contestations and Challenges*, Zed Books, London
- » Goetz A and Sandler J (2007) *SWapping gender: from cross-cutting obscurity to sectoral security?* in Cornwall A, Harrison E and Whitehead A (eds), *Feminisms in Development: Contradictions, Contestations and Challenges*, Zed Books, London
- » Halcrow G, Rowland C, Willetts J, Crawford J and Carrard N (2010) *Resource Guide: Working Effectively with women and men in water, sanitation and hygiene programs*, International Women's Development Agency and Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney, Australia
- » Hunt J, Kasynathan N et al (2009) *Breaking the Shackles: Women's empowerment in Oxfam Australia's Sri Lanka program*, Oxfam Occasional Paper 3
- » ISF-UTS (2011) *Timor-Leste Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector Brief*, prepared for AusAID by the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney, October 2011
- » Kilby P and Crawford J (2011) *Closing the Gender Gap: Gender and Australian NGOs*, ACFID Research in Development Series Report No. 2
- » Mikkelsen B (2005) *Methods for Development Work and Research: A new guide for practitioners*, Sage Publications India, California and London
- » Molyneux, M (1985) *Mobilization without emancipation? Women's interest, the state, and revolution in Nicaragua*, *Feminist Studies* 11(2):227–254.
- » Moser, C (1989) *Gender planning in the third world: meeting practical and strategic gender needs*, *World Development* 17(11):1799–1825.
- » Mukhopadhyay M (2007) *Mainstreaming gender or "streaming" gender away: feminists marooned in the development business*, in Cornwall A, Harrison E and Whitehead A (eds), *Feminisms in Development: Contradictions, Contestations and Challenges*, Zed Books, London
- » Panda, SM (2007) *Mainstreaming Gender in Water Management: A Critical View*, *Gender Technology and Development* (11):321

## Supporting Resources

- » Kilsby, D (2010) 'Now we feel like respected adults': *Positive change in gender roles and relations in a Timor-Leste WASH program*, Research conducted by IWDA, WaterAid in Australia and WaterAid in Timor-Leste, June 2010.

## Author

### Di Kilsby

dkilsby@iwda.org.au

International Women's Development Agency

This case study is one of sixteen from the Towards Inclusive WASH series, supported by AusAID's Innovations Fund. Please visit [www.inclusivewash.org.au/case-studies](http://www.inclusivewash.org.au/case-studies) to access the rest of the publication and supporting resources.

Gender

## Case Study 13