

Paper 4 – Addressing Conflict – A Review of Irish Aid in Timor-Leste

1. Background

This is one of four learning papers that were produced as the final product of an independent external evaluation conducted by Mokoro in 2014 of the Irish Aid Engagement in Timor-Leste.¹ This paper focuses on the conflict dimension of the Irish Aid programme. It addresses two key questions:

- How did the analysis and programme choices focus on reducing risk of conflict?
- What was the relevance and effectiveness of the Conflict Resolution Unit (CRU) contribution to the programme choices and programme implementation?

The other three papers in this series examine: the quality, depth and comprehensiveness of the analysis that went into decision-making (Paper 1); the effectiveness and appropriateness of the modalities of support (Paper 2); and the results of the Irish Aid programme (Paper 3). These papers should be read in conjunction with a general background paper on the Timor-Leste programme which provides details on the priorities, programmes and budget over the period.

2. Context

Timor-Leste has experienced periods of significant violence since the Timorese voted for independence in 1999. In the wake of that vote, anti-independence militia and the Indonesian military launched a campaign of terror and destruction that left an estimated 1,400 to 1,500 dead.² A quarter of the population fled, mainly to West Timor (Indonesia), including many militia members evading arrest. Martial law was imposed and an Australian-led peacekeeping force arrived to restore order. Formal independence in 2002 was ushered in peacefully and by 2005 the country was being touted as an example of successful political transition. In April and May 2006, however, violent clashes broke out – taking most of the international community by surprise – instigated by former soldiers who had been dismissed from their posts. Other forces and political groups became involved and the violence spread, leaving more than 30 people dead and 150,000 internally displaced.³ Three months later, in response to the violence, a new UN peace-keeping mission was set up in the country.⁴ In 2008, there was further violence when renegade soldiers made an attempt

¹ A general overview of the Irish Aid programme in Timor-Leste can be found in the Background Paper that is part of this series.

² Engel, R.F and Vieira, L.F. August 2011. *International Contributions to State-building in Timor-Leste: The Undermining of State Legitimacy?* NOREF: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre. The estimated number of deaths varies. The paper uses the numbers estimated in the Timor-Leste Truth, Reception and Reconciliation Commission (CAVR) report *Chega!* (2005).

³ *Report of the United Nations Independent Special Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste*. Geneva. 2 October 2006. <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/COITimorLeste.pdf>

⁴ The UN Integrated Mission in East Timor (UNMIT).

on the life of the President, Jose Ramos-Horta. The soldiers involved subsequently surrendered, and since that point Timor-Leste has seen no further major outbreak of violence. In 2012, following peaceful parliamentary and presidential elections, Australian troops withdrew and the UN ended its mission.

Despite the current relative calm, it is acknowledged that sources of potential conflict remain, including political factionalism, communal disputes (often over unresolved land issues), and unaddressed grievances among groups who feel that they have yet to see a peace dividend. The existence of martial arts clubs greatly increased the likelihood of potential conflict breaking out into open violence. These clubs originated in a history of resistance against Indonesian occupation but became involved in more localized factional disputes after independence. In September 2013, the government banned all martial arts clubs following two years of continuing violence in which they were implicated and when at least 12 people were killed and more than 200 injured.

3. What was done?

Ireland's support for interventions concerned with the prevention and resolution of conflict can be divided into two main periods: before and after 2006. The events of 2006 spurred Irish Aid,⁵ among other donors, to review whether its programming was sufficiently sensitive to the drivers of conflict in Timor-Leste. In addition, Ireland's later development cooperation with Timor-Leste was influenced by policy changes at home, under which a new international role was envisaged for Ireland in translating experience and lessons from the Northern Ireland peace process to other conflict and post-conflict contexts.

Pre-2006

The first Irish Aid strategy documents (2001–2003) focused on assisting the process of recovery from conflict rather than on addressing a potential return to conflict. Thus, the Small Grants Facility (SGF) was set up during the first (Transitional) Country Strategy Programme (CSP) to respond to local level needs and to provide quick wins in districts that were identified as vulnerable as a result of conflict. Support was also provided to the United Nations (UN) Gender Affairs Unit, influenced by the then recent publication of the Brahimi report (2000) which criticized the lack of involvement by women in post-conflict recovery (and which led to UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325).⁶ The second CSP (2003–2005) included support to the Commission for Truth, Reception and Reconciliation (CAVR), which reported to Parliament on human rights violations committed under Indonesian occupation, and also funding for a number of Timorese human rights NGOs. This strategy period also saw the first support to decentralization and to the building of justice sector institutions.

⁵ The Government of Ireland's department concerned with development cooperation has experienced changes of name during the period under review. For simplicity, the current designation (Irish Aid) is used throughout this paper.

⁶ Brahimi, Lakhdar et al. 2000. *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*. A/55/305 S/2000/809 http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/55/305 UNSCR1325 called for the adoption of a gender perspective that included the special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction.

The lack of an explicit focus on conflict up until 2006 does not mean that Irish Aid was unaware of the possibility of a renewal of conflict. The first Irish Representative to Timor-Leste (2000–2003) had observed that many social and political cleavages, which had been suppressed around the time of independence, were beginning to re-emerge, and she suggested informally to headquarters (HQ) that a conflict analysis to guide programming should be undertaken. In line with the general focus at the time on state-building rather than conflict prevention, Irish Aid HQ did not take up her suggestion. Instead, the programmatic choices made by Ireland at this time appear to have assumed that assisting social and economic recovery by providing immediate and tangible benefits to communities, particularly in more remote rural areas, would by their nature contribute to political stabilisation. This approach was maintained in the 2006–2008 CSP. In an otherwise generally upbeat assessment (drafted before the 2006 crisis), the CSP noted that growing poverty and unemployment could lead to civil unrest, particularly in the period leading to elections in 2007. As before, however, this reflection did not lead to the development of a country programme designed to prevent or mitigate violence.

Post-2006

The events of 2006 caused Timor-Leste’s development partners, including Irish Aid, to review whether their programmes sufficiently addressed structural factors likely to give rise to conflict, amongst which the UN highlighted a lack of opportunities for youth, high unemployment and a governance deficit.⁷ Irish Aid responded immediately by making additional funding available for initiatives to tackle unemployment and for the new national human rights commission.⁸ Irish Aid also continued its previous support to a range of individual NGOs working directly on human rights, justice and legal issues as well as to a women’s network (Rede Feto) for work on gender-based violence.

In 2007, the Department of Foreign Affairs established a Conflict Resolution Unit (CRU) in its Political Division to disseminate lessons from Ireland’s role in the Northern Ireland peace process and to provide support to conflict resolution activities elsewhere.⁹ In consultations between Political Division and Irish Aid HQ, Timor-Leste was chosen to pilot the initiative, in part because of the presence of an Irish Aid programme and management infrastructure to which a CRU programme could be attached. During 2007 and 2008, the CRU undertook a series of scoping missions to identify how Ireland might better support conflict resolution initiatives in Timor. While these missions had the support of Irish Aid in Dublin, differences between the CRU and the Irish Aid office in Dili impeded the development of a shared analysis and common approaches to addressing conflict.

In 2008 the CRU and Irish Aid commissioned a conflict analysis of Timor-Leste to guide the identification of an appropriate conflict prevention programme and the following year a

⁷*Report of the United Nations Independent Special Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste*. October 2006.

⁸Provedoria dos Direitos Humanos e Justiça (PDHJ).

⁹The Conflict Resolution Unit was set up to improve Ireland’s contribution to international conflict resolution by drawing on its tradition of UN peacekeeping and commitment to overseas development aid, human rights and the international rule of law. The CRU aimed to share lessons Ireland learned from the Northern Ireland peace process with other regions going through, or coming out of, conflict. See: <https://www.dfa.ie/our-role-policies/international-priorities/peace-and-security/conflict-resolution/>

follow-up conflict report was commissioned to support the development of the upcoming CSP (2010–2013) and the integration of CRU activities within this.¹⁰ The scope of both analyses is comprehensive. They identify a wide range of potential entry points for intervention, including knowledge-sharing on the Northern Ireland peace process; contributing to improved governance; strengthening dialogue across government, political parties, and civil society groups; adding conflict resolution activities to key components of the Irish Aid programme; contributing to a security sector review; and engaging with like-minded donors on conflict-related themes. The 2009 report includes proposals for changes within Irish Aid and CRU systems and processes that would strengthen the conflict sensitivity of programming.¹¹

Within the framework of this new initiative, a series of activities were supported in Timor-Leste between 2008 and 2010. In 2008, the Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Dermot Ahern, T.D. appointed Baroness Nuala O’Loan as Ireland’s Special Envoy on UNSCR 1325.¹² As Special Envoy, she visited Timor-Leste on a number of occasions and a cross-learning initiative between Ireland, Timor-Leste and Liberia on UNSCR 1325 was developed. In the same period, the CRU contributed funding for a Timorese government-UN security sector review but did not follow this up with support for security sector reform, both because of slow progress on the review and because more significant actors (notably the UN, Australia and Portugal) were the key players in the sector. In 2008 and 2010 the CRU funded some smaller related initiatives, including grants for a Global Leaders Foundation mission to review progress in security sector reform and for training for civil society organisations (CSOs) to increase their understanding of and capacity to engage in issues related to the sector.¹³

Both the CRU and Irish Aid were involved in designing the 2010–2013 CSP¹⁴ which had a more explicit focus on conflict than Irish Aid’s previous programmes in Timor-Leste. The CSP was structured around three pillars, one of which was conflict reduction; activities under this pillar included support to a range of NGOs, including Trócaire, an Irish NGO, to develop a Peace, Remembrance and Reconciliation programme with a group of Timorese NGOs, and to Belun, a Timorese NGO, to establish networks to provide early warning of and response to potential outbreaks of localized conflict. The cross-learning initiative on UNSCR 1325 was

¹⁰ O’Gorman, E. (a) January 2008. *Supporting Conflict Resolution in Timor-Leste: An Enhanced Role for Ireland. Report of CRU Technical Mission to Timor-Leste.* (b) November 12, 2009. *Responding to Conflict and Fragility in Timor-Leste: Implications for preparing Ireland’s next Country Strategy Paper. Conflict Analysis Mission Report.* Eleanor O’Gorman is an international expert in the field of conflict, peacebuilding, humanitarian and development affairs including gender analysis and policy.

¹¹The 2009 report was a response both to the 2006 crisis and to a 2008 evaluation which concluded that a better understanding of the causes of conflict in Timor-Leste would have allowed Irish Aid to address these causes more appropriately and earlier.

¹²Baroness O’Loan had been Northern Ireland’s first Police Ombudsman between 1999 and 2007.

¹³The training was provided by the International Security Sector Advisory Team (ISSAT) in collaboration with a Timorese NGO, Fundasaun Mahein.

¹⁴In July 2009 the CRU created a post in Timor-Leste with a remit to develop and manage conflict resolution activities. The post was terminated in October 2010 because of lack of funding, which also led to earlier than anticipated closure of the CRU programme.

also carried forward into this CSP. In addition, unemployment – widely seen as a primary catalyst for conflict – was addressed under the first CSP pillar (Local Governance and Service Delivery) through support to private sector development in rural areas and to labour-based construction projects, both implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

In October 2010, the CRU component of the CSP was wound down for operational reasons, although committed funding to some NGOs continued after the formal closure of the CRU programme.

4. Assessment – How useful was it?

Quality of Analysis

Ireland's failure to anticipate the conflict that emerged in 2006 needs to be seen within the context of the wider international community at that time. In the post-independence period it was assumed by almost all donors involved in Timor-Leste that, since the main source of conflict – Indonesian occupation – had disappeared, the political transition would be relatively smooth. Even where it was recognised that sources of instability existed, Timor-Leste's development partners pursued a strategy of institution-building as a means to build state legitimacy and defuse grievances and antagonisms rather than as a way of directly addressing potential sources of conflict. Irish Aid's support for district-level initiatives meant that it was more aware than others that grievances persisted, but Irish Aid does not appear to have capitalised on this to elaborate a different analysis of the development context from that of donors whose support focused on building central institutions.

Several factors appear to account for this. First, the Irish Aid office in Dili only ever had a small number of staff and its capacity to use its local knowledge to formulate an alternative analysis was commensurately limited. In the first years of the programme, Irish Aid staff at HQ were not in a position to guide or support the office in this regard since Timor-Leste was Irish Aid's first engagement in Asia and the division lacked sufficient country- or region-specific knowledge to support the local office. In any event, support to Timor-Leste represented a relatively small proportion of the time of HQ staff. Moreover, international agencies at that time were perhaps too reliant on conceptual frameworks that oversimplified the emergency-recovery-development trajectory. There was insufficient recognition that countries go in and out of emergencies and that an important predictor of conflict is a past history of conflict.¹⁵ In Ireland, there was a functional separation between the emergencies, country desk and political sections of the Department of Foreign Affairs that did not foster systematic and strategic analysis of conflict. Approaches to humanitarian crises began to change from around 2000, but not sufficiently to encourage a deeper or more nuanced contextual analysis of Timor-Leste.

The outbreak of violence in 2006 marked a significant change of focus and an acknowledgement of the need to strengthen capacity for more conflict-sensitive programming, both in terms of the design of programmes and in terms of Irish Aid's internal

¹⁵ Collier, P. et al. 2003. *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy. A World Bank Policy Research Report. World Bank/Oxford*. Collier observes that countries reaching the end of civil war face around a 44 per cent risk of returning to conflict within five years, in part because the factors that caused the initial war are still present. While Timor-Leste's independence struggle was not a civil war, this observation is still apt.

systems for addressing conflict. It led to the commissioning by the CRU and Irish Aid of the 2008 and 2009 conflict analyses, which are reported to have been important influences in the design of the 2010–2013 CSP. It is apparent that, with its designated conflict pillar, this CSP has a much more explicit focus on conflict than previous ones but not all of the wide-ranging recommendations from the two analyses were incorporated into the CSP or translated into new Irish Aid procedures. The 2009 report notes that applying conflict analysis to programmatic choices requires strong and sustained engagement with stakeholders to establish the relevance and feasibility of alternative proposed interventions. It may be that the opportunity for such engagement was curtailed by the decisions taken to close the CRU programme in October 2010 and to close the Irish Aid programme a year later.

Relevance

In reality, Ireland's scope for programmatic choice was limited, given actual and perceived weaknesses in government's capacity to manage funding and deliver programmes. In this situation, multilateral agencies and CSOs became the partners of choice for Irish Aid, as they did for other donors. In other respects, Irish Aid distinguished itself from the general donor trend by purposefully seeking opportunities to support infrastructure and capacity development in districts (for example, via the SGF and the UNDP/UNCDF decentralization programme). Whether explicitly stated or not, this focus on supporting decentralization and inclusion was highly relevant to addressing at least some of the sources of conflict in Timor-Leste, and it was consistent with government concerns about the Dili-centric nature of much of the donor effort. The rural focus of Irish Aid's work also appears to have insulated the programme to some extent from the effects of the 2006 violence. Irish Aid's support to rural areas, a later intervention, concerned with promoting labour-based employment in rural areas, responded more explicitly to unemployment as one of the triggers of conflict. A related initiative to promote private sector development in rural areas addressed this indirectly.

The decision for Timor-Leste to be a pilot country for the CRU owed much to Ireland's history of solidarity with the country as well as to the presence of an Irish Aid programme to which a CRU programme could be attached. However, the Timorese authorities failed to engage with the initiative to the extent anticipated. This meant that the conflict reduction programme that finally emerged to form part of the 2010–2013 CSP lacked any significant and sustained engagement with government, and was concerned primarily with supporting CSO efforts in conflict prevention and resolution. Evaluations of these CSO activities commended their effectiveness (see below) but also suggested that greater collaboration with government peace-building initiatives might have increased the relevance and impact of their work.

Irish Aid programme documents make periodic references to Ireland's comparative advantage as an 'honest broker' in Timor-Leste, based on a shared experience of long-term colonization and of being a small island state. Importantly, also, Ireland saw itself as having no vested interests in the country, unlike some of Timor-Leste's bigger development partners. It is apparent that Ireland was indeed seen as an 'honest broker' by its CSO partners – much of the CRU-funded work was in the sensitive areas of reconciliation and peace building where Ireland was seen to add value as a neutral and trusted partner. It is less evident that this comparative advantage extended to Ireland's relations with

government in sensitive areas of governance such as security sector reform. In this regard, Ireland was less influential than expected.

Effectiveness

CSP 2010–2013 is described as having an integrated approach to conflict prevention and resolution. While both the CRU and Irish Aid were involved in developing this CSP, it is in essence a portfolio that addresses conflict through a range of related interventions more than being an integrated and strategic programme. This is a not untypical stage in the transition from more project-based to more programmatic approaches. The closing down of Ireland's support to Timor-Leste meant that the CRU and Irish Aid had no opportunity to develop a programme in which conflict sensitivity was mainstreamed more systematically and comprehensively.

Underdeveloped monitoring procedures (see Paper 3 on Results), including a lack of specific conflict-related objectives in performance measurement frameworks (both within Ireland's programming and in partner CSOs), make effectiveness hard to assess. Evaluations of the CRU-funded programmes found that Irish support had increased communities' access to accurate information, thus reducing the power of rumour to sow mistrust. Support to locally based conflict early warning systems was also assessed as having strengthened capacity for conflict prevention and to have improved conflict response mechanisms by CSOs and local government. CSOs funded by the CRU consider that Ireland's support enabled them to do work that they would otherwise have been unable to do. This includes translating the CAVR report into Bahasa for an Indonesian audience, translating a new security law from Portuguese into Tetun so that members of the security forces are able to understand their legal responsibilities towards citizens, and some cases where the timely introduction of labour-based projects in areas of high unemployment was able to defuse potential violence by martial arts groups. Evidence from this evaluation also suggests that Irish support contributed to strengthening the sub-sector of CSOs working on conflict issues, including CSOs concerned with gender-based violence.

As suggested above, fewer results were seen in work with government. After funding the security sector review, Ireland decided against following this up with funding for security sector reform. Ireland's work on UNSCR 1325 internationally has had high visibility and is well-regarded but there was a lower level of explicit follow-up on this in Timor-Leste, although Ireland's significant and sustained support for work on gender-based violence is regarded in Timor-Leste as reflecting similar principles to UNSCR 1325.

The perception by Timor-Leste's development partners that the country is now more stable than in 2006–2008 is supported by evidence from communities involved in CRU-funded CSO programmes. Accounting for this relative stability is problematic, however, particularly since it is also generally recognized that the underlying causes of conflict remain. The absence of open conflict since 2006 is widely seen as *prima facie* evidence that structures of governance are beginning to deliver a peace dividend. Development partners are seen to have contributed to this through support to the building of structures and systems that *inter alia* promote and protect human rights, increase access to justice, and improve service delivery. Other commentators attribute the absence of open conflict to the government's ability to use revenue from Timor-Leste's substantial oil and gas reserves to provide a practical peace dividend in the form of cash transfers to marginalised social groups,

including internally displaced persons from 2006, veterans of the independence struggle and their survivors, and the elderly, the disabled, and female-headed households. While cash transfers may in some respects have contributed to stability, they may also have offered perverse incentives to others to undermine stability, including to former soldiers, who have successfully used the threat of violence to demand payments for themselves.¹⁶

5. What were the lessons?

We outline below the key lessons that emerge from this assessment of how conflict was addressed by Irish Aid and the CRU in Timor-Leste between 2001 and 2013.

Table 1 - Lessons on Addressing Conflict in Contexts of Fragility

| Category | Issue | Impact | Lesson |
|----------------------|--|---|--|
| Conflict risk | <p>Timor-Leste's development partners' emphasis on state-building in the first independence period ignored the existence of social cleavages and grievances with the potential to re-ignite conflict.</p> <p>Irish Aid's focus on decentralization and inclusion gave it greater understanding of social and political cleavages in Timorese society than some other development partners but it failed to develop this into a detailed analysis of potential conflict triggers.</p> | <p>Donors were unprepared for the conflict that broke out in 2006 and the resulting level of destruction of infrastructure, displacement of population and loss of life.</p> <p>Like other donors, Irish Aid was caught unawares by the 2006 violence, although its rural programme focus insulated Irish Aid from some of the worst effects of the conflict.</p> | <p>Recognise that in any post-conflict situation there are risks of returning to conflict, even where the original conflict was an anti-colonial or independence struggle that has been won. Prepare for this by carrying out a conflict risk assessment at the start and periodically thereafter to identify and analyse potential socio-economic and governance drivers of conflict.</p> |

¹⁶OECD. 2014. *Fragile States 2014: Domestic Revenue Mobilisation in Fragile States*. <http://www.oecd.org/dac/incaf/FSR-2014.pdf>. In 2010, cash transfers were 22 per cent of the annual budget and in 2011, 17 per cent. More sceptical commentators attribute peaceful elections in 2012 to political horse-trading between the contending parties.

Irish Aid Timor-Leste Learning Paper – Conflict

| Category | Issue | Impact | Lesson |
|---|--|---|--|
| Approach to cross-department collaboration | For much of the period of Ireland’s development co-operation with Timor-Leste, there was a functional separation between the Irish Aid emergency, country desk and political divisions of the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade. Later, tensions emerged between the Representative Office and CRU. | Irish Aid’s programmatic focus on state-building in Timor-Leste went largely unchallenged until the events of 2006 brought the need to address conflict to the fore. This, combined with the functional separation between divisions in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, impeded effective conflict-sensitive programming until 10 years into Ireland’s development cooperation with Timor-Leste. | From the outset, ensure that experience from emergencies and country desk and political perspectives are built into analysis and programming in fragile/conflict-affected states and are used to inform prioritisation, and the phasing and sequencing of interventions. |
| Staffing | The Irish Representative Office was over-stretched for most of the period under review. A lack of country- and region-specific knowledge meant that HQ was able to provide only limited support to the Representative Office. Support was also limited because Timor-Leste comprised a relatively small part of HQ’s staff responsibilities. | In the context of the Timor-Leste programme Irish Aid had insufficient numbers of staff and insufficient expertise (country-specific; conflict-related) to capitalise on knowledge and learning from its programme to design and implement a strategic approach to addressing potential socio-economic and governance conflict drivers. | Conflict-affected countries present greater complexities and more operational challenges than more stable countries, and make commensurately greater demands on staff. This implies that these country offices require more, not fewer, numbers of staff and that these staff need to be well experienced. The demand for support from HQ by programmes operating in volatile contexts with weak governance structures is also likely to be high. |
| Monitoring | Programme monitoring was concerned mainly with short-term results such as completed activities and delivered outputs, with limited reflection on effects of interventions in preventing or reducing conflict. | It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of Irish Aid’s support as a contribution to preventing or reducing conflict. | Programme design in conflict-affected states requires strong analysis of how programmes can address drivers of conflict and what intermediate effects can be expected as programmes move forward. Such analysis also requires systematic assessment of assumptions and of external factors that are likely to facilitate or impede progress. Performance frameworks should have a strong focus on monitoring these intermediate effects and the influence of external factors. |

Irish Aid Timor-Leste Learning Paper – Conflict

| Category | Issue | Impact | Lesson |
|------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Ireland's positioning | Ireland overestimated the extent to which some shared characteristics and a history of solidarity with Timor-Leste gave it influence with the Timorese government, particularly in sensitive areas of governance such as security sector reform. | A lack of interest on the part of the Timorese government limited the CRU's capacity to develop a conflict-related programme of work with the government. Support to conflict-related activities by CSOs was relevant but more could have been achieved through providing complementary support to government and/or to government-civil society collaboration. | In fragile contexts with weak governance structures, critically examine assumptions about Ireland's capacity to influence governments, particularly where these assumptions derive from relationships established during an earlier period and under different circumstances. A systematic assessment is needed of Ireland's positioning in relation to government, civil society and other development partners, and of how this affects Ireland's capacity to influence change, particularly on sensitive issues of governance. |