

Tokyo Peacebuilders Symposium 2008
“Peacebuilding Experience and Knowledge from Asia to the World”

Part 1: Peacebuilding Experience in Asia – Listening to Voices on the Ground

Session 2: Timor-Leste

Commentator: Ayako Higuchi (UNDP Timor-Leste)

1. My tasks during OJT and relation to peacebuilding

- Preparation for the MDG Report of Timor-Leste and localizing the MDGs in pilot district
- Preparation for the third National Human Development Report of Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste is one of the poorest countries in the region; 40% of the population is living under the national poverty line of US\$ 0.55/day. Alleviating poverty is often considered as more of a development issue rather than peacebuilding. However, prolonged poverty can become a potential source of conflict. Ultimate objective of the MDG Report is to support achieving the MDGs by monitoring the progress, and for NHDR, promoting and raising awareness of human development issues in Timor-Leste. I believe reducing poverty, promoting education and gender equality, in other words, improving the lives of people and enhancing human development of Timor-Leste, contribute directly and indirectly to peacebuilding.

2. What I learned from my OJT: My view on peacebuilding experience in TL

In a country like Timor-Leste struggling to consolidate peace, I learned that there are various approaches to peacebuilding and peacebuilding should be a comprehensive approach. Although crucial, peacebuilding is not only about Security Sector Reform or transitional justice, but other development related issues, for example, poverty reduction can be an important component of peacebuilding. In Timor-Leste, 85% of the population lives in rural areas, relying mostly on agriculture. During my OJT, I had opportunities to visit several districts and some of the most rural villages in the country. What I saw was real poverty. People were living in huts made out of sticks and leaves without electricity. Their lives have not changed much before and after independence. I even heard some people say that the life was better during Indonesian times. In order to actually consolidate peace in the country, there should be emphasis to improve the livelihoods of people not just in Dili, but also in the rural areas. If most of the population cannot feel the improvement in their lives, frustration towards the government can be accumulated leading to instability. On the other hand, if most of the population can feel improvement, it would become a solid base for peace and stability.

3. Comments to presenters

- Fr. Gusmao & Mr. Jesus: There should be more emphasis on “traditional” approach to peace in Timor-Leste as mentioned by Fr. Gusmao and Mr. Jesus. There must be Timorese approaches to justice or conflict resolution, as in any other country would have traditional approaches to dealing with conflicts. I believe adopting traditional approaches would lead to more effective peacebuilding and can create solid peace, and international community and donors should respect the Timorese way of peacebuilding.
- Mr. Matsumoto & Mr. Jesus: Oil/gas revenue should be transferred to people in short period so that people could feel economic benefits. People have expectations for development after independence, but I have heard people say “life was better during Indonesian time.” People also have expectation that they should benefit from the oil/gas revenues that government is accumulating. If these expectations are unmet, and the government cannot show tangible benefit to its people, it could become another source of conflict. This has been the concern among government and some donor communities in Timor-Leste, including UNDP. Although still tentative, UNDP is thinking of conflict prevention and promoting human development by effective use of oil/gas revenue as the theme for the next National Human Development Report.
- Mr. Toyama: The proposal by Mr. Toyama on capacity development in the government is very relevant in relation to the effective use of oil/gas revenue. Even if the government is willing to use oil/gas revenues for its people, there is a question as to whether or not the government can actually spend oil/gas revenues when they cannot fully execute the budget they already have. The situation is that Timor-Leste has money, but has only limited capacity to spend it. In order to solve this dilemma, Timor-Leste needs to increase the capacity of the civil servants, especially the middle-ranking bureaucracy, as mentioned by Mr. Toyama or need to adopt other options, such as importing human resources.