



Working Together to Implement Gender-Responsive Policing: Gender Advisory Work in Timor-Leste

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Abstract

For sustainable development to occur in post-conflict contexts, security concerns need to be addressed. Gender-responsive policing aims to provide policing for all community members. The Timor-Leste Police Development Program (TLPDP) is a bilateral partnership between Timor-Leste and Australia, supporting the *Polícia Nacional de Timor-Leste* (PNTL) to develop capacity in areas of identified need. This includes reducing sexual and gender-based violence. Delivered by the Australian Federal Police, the program is informed by a gender strategy that reflects international agreements on gender, security, and human rights. This article draws on program design, evaluations, reports, and experience, to explore how strategic objectives on gender have been translated into practical initiatives of the TLPDP. Initiatives include a gender audit of the PNTL, a scoping review of the vulnerable persons units, specialist training courses, and community awareness campaigns. The article highlights the role of strategic alignment, partnership, and collaboration within and beyond policing to amplify efforts.

Keywords: Gender-responsive policing; gender equality; Timor-Leste; Australian Federal Police.

Introduction

The harms of conflict are gendered, and for women and children, they often include widespread sexual and gender-based violence (Johansson & Hultman, 2019; Wandita et al., 2006). *Gender-based violence* refers to various harms directed at people because of their gender. These include forced marriage, human trafficking, technology-facilitated violence, and domestic violence by intimate partners or household members, whether physical, sexual, emotional, financial, or psychological (OECD, 2023; UN Women Australia, 2020). In post-conflict environments, such harms may continue due to poor social conditions, the prevalence of trauma, and the normalisation of violence to resolve conflict (Myrtilinen, 2005; Niner, 2011; Wandita et al., 2006). As reflected in the United Nations (UN) *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations General Assembly, 2015), research has affirmed that safety and personal security are essential for sustainable development to occur (Murney et al., 2011). However, it is difficult for victim-survivors to have the harms of violence addressed because key institutions are typically damaged and corrupted during conflict, impacting both trustworthiness and capacity (Huber & Karim, 2018; Mobekk, 2010). Rebuilding police organisations to reflect UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security necessitates program-wide consideration of gender (Stewart-Withers & Greener, 2022). Such an approach aligns with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

This contribution focuses on Timor-Leste, a post-conflict island country in Southeast Asia, neighbouring Indonesia and Australia. Having gained independence in 2002, Timor-Leste is classified by the UN as both a small island developing state



(SIDS) and a least developed country (LDC) (United Nations [UN], 2023). These classifications signify particular challenges for access to resources for development, highlighting the need for SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The Timor-Leste Police Development Program (TLPDP) is undertaken as part of a bilateral agreement between the governments of Australia and Timor-Leste. The TLPDP supports the *Polícia Nacional de Timor-Leste* (PNTL) to develop in areas of identified need, based on international agreements, such as the Women, Peace and Security agenda, and the strategic objectives of the partner organisations. A particular focus of the TLPDP is to improve the PNTL's capability to respond to sexual and gender-based violence. A *vulnerable person* in this context refers to a victim-survivor of such harms, or a person who may be vulnerable for other reasons, who is also a victim-survivor of such harms.

As Stewart-Withers and Greener (2022) note, there is a need for examples of initiatives with positive impacts on gender equality and security outcomes. Similarly, this article aims to illustrate how international agreements and organisational strategic objectives have been translated into practice in the implementation of gender-responsive policing in Timor-Leste. The article first provides an overview of developments in gender-responsive policing, before discussing the context and gender landscape of Timor-Leste, including its police development, gender policy environment, and gender-based violence data. It then outlines the four-part gender strategy of the TLPDP and, drawing on program design documents, evaluations, reports, and experience, the article next provides examples of gender-responsive policing initiatives undertaken to meet strategic objectives. It contributes broad insights into achievements and challenges, highlighting the role of strategic alignment and collaboration within and beyond policing to amplify efforts.

Gender-Responsive Policing

In post-conflict states, state-building agendas aim to promote peace and sustainable development by developing functional and trustworthy institutions, including through international policing efforts that aim to build, rebuild, or reform state police institutions (Greener, 2009). Gender-sensitive security sector reform necessitates *gender balancing*, which typically involves greater gender diversity in policing and security, often by including more women. This needs to happen at all levels of the organisation. However, simply including more women does not improve gender sensitivity because new members tend to adopt the prevailing organisational culture (Huber & Hudson, 2019). Therefore, gender mainstreaming is essential for generating transformational change that can improve policing for women and girls as well as for marginalised men and boys. *Gender mainstreaming* involves incorporating a gender equality perspective and assessing the implications of decision-making by gender at all stages in policies, programs, and legislation (Huber & Hudson, 2019; Mobekk, 2010). Additionally, the intersectionality of gender with other identity characteristics has been increasingly recognised. *Gender-responsive policing* recognises that police services should be for all members of the community. It therefore encompasses diversity—such as sexuality and gender diversity, regionality, age, and (dis)ability—through consultation and engagement with partner organisations and networks (Denney, 2019).

For the past 25 years, the UN and other leading bodies in security sector reform have explicitly considered gender in policies and policing practices. The first gender advisors were deployed to UN missions in Timor-Leste and Kosovo in 1999 (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2005). From 2000, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security—and nine subsequent resolutions—acknowledged the gendered harms of conflict and the need to recognise women's contributions to peace and efforts in recovery (Howes, 2023). The UN launched a global campaign in 2009 to increase women's inclusion in police services and UN peacekeeping missions and published resources in 2015 to assist in gender mainstreaming initiatives (United Nations Police, 2015). The Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) published a toolkit of resources on gender and security sector reform in 2008 (Bastick & Valsek, 2008). A new edition in 2019 prioritises gender-responsive policing “in partnership with communities in all their diversity” (Denney, 2019, p. 17). Other recent publications include a toolkit for gender-equitable and transformative recovery after crisis (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2019) and a gender-responsive policing handbook to assist in addressing gender-based violence effectively (Fernandez & Townsley, 2021).

Although these milestones suggest that much has been learned, achieving gender-responsive change is challenging. Patriarchal gender norms that prioritise certain forms of masculinity are often deeply entrenched in societies (Miedema & Fulu, 2018). The liberal democratic policing ideals promoted by the UN reflect the values of countries of the Global North and may be particularly challenging to implement in the resource-limited countries of the Global South (Hills, 2009). In these contexts, a substantial proportion of the population may reside in rural areas and is more likely to trust—and have access to—traditional systems of justice (Dinnen & McLeod, 2009; Watson et al., 2023). Tensions exist in working with traditional systems because resolving conflict, such as domestic violence, at the family or community levels often de-prioritises the human rights of individual victim-survivors in favour of collective harmony (George, 2017; Wallis, 2017).

Further, the countries of the Global North that contribute to international police development programs face their own challenges in addressing gender-based violence domestically. For example, in Australia, these challenges include a lack of adequate government funding to address gender-based violence (Fitz-Gibbon & Segrave, 2022) and the need for improved responses to domestic violence (Commission of Inquiry into Queensland Police Service responses to domestic and family violence, 2022; State of Victoria, 2016). Within police organisations, there are inequities in women's opportunities for promotion, as well as ongoing sexual harassment of women and marginalised men (Elizabeth Broderick and Co., 2016; South Australian Equal Opportunity Commission, 2016; Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2015). Despite having supported the Women, Policing and Security agenda from its inception in 2000, the Australian Government did not have a National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Police and Security until 2012 (Australian Government, 2012). It focused on gender mainstreaming, the promotion of Women, Peace and Security, and a coordinated and holistic approach.

Context of Timor-Leste

The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (DRTL) has a tropical climate, mountainous landscape, and white sandy beaches. The government is reliant on oil and gas revenues, while most households rely on subsistence agriculture (Neves, 2018). The country comprises the eastern half of the island of Timor, two smaller islands (the inhabited island of Ataúro, and the uninhabited island of Jaco), and Oecusse, a coastal exclave located on the western part of the island, surrounded by Indonesian territory. Administratively, Timor-Leste is divided into 13 municipalities (previously districts). According to the most recent census, Timor-Leste has a population of 1.34 million people, representing a 13% increase since 2015 (Timor-Leste National Institute of Statistics [IENTL], 2023). Almost 65% of the population is under 30 years of age. Most (70%) of the population is rural, although urbanisation is evident as people relocate to the capital of Dili. The overwhelming majority (97.5%) of the population identify as Catholic (IENTL, 2023)—a legacy of colonisation.

The people of Timor-Leste faced a long and arduous journey to independence. A four-and-a-half-century period of Portuguese colonisation began in the 16th century. Dutch traders took over the western half of the island in the 17th century as a key post on the trade route. During World War II, East Timor (as it was then known) was occupied by Japan for over three years before Portuguese administration resumed. A change in government in Portugal led to its withdrawal from East Timor in 1974. Political parties had formed in East Timor and independence was declared in 1975 by the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (*Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente* [FRETILIN]), a party on the left of the political spectrum. Claiming concern about the potential for communism on its doorstep, Indonesia invaded nine days later, with tacit acceptance by the international community, and occupied East Timor for 24 years (Armstrong et al., 2012; Wandita et al., 2006). During the Indonesian occupation, an estimated total of 102,800 people died of famine, starvation, or illness associated with the regime (84,200) or were killed by the regime (18,600) (Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation [CAVR], 2005).

A change of government in Indonesia allowed for a UN-sponsored referendum to be held in 1999, seeking popular views on independence or autonomy under Indonesia. Approximately 1,500 people were killed in the lead-up to the referendum or in its aftermath (CAVR, 2005). When the outcome was 78.5% in favour of independence, widespread violence and destruction ensued. Approximately 250,000 people were deported to West Timor by Indonesian security forces and pro-Indonesia militia groups, 300,000 were displaced within East Timor, and most public infrastructure was destroyed by Indonesian military and associated militia in a scorched earth campaign (CAVR, 2005). In response to the post-referendum crisis, International Force for East Timor (INTERFET), a multinational stabilisation mission led by Australia and endorsed by the UN Security Council, was deployed to East Timor. Stabilisation overlapped with three years of UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) in the lead-up to independence in 2002.

Establishing the PNTL (1999–2012)

Building the national police institution was complex. The UNTAET was the first of four UN missions in Timor-Leste that explicitly included a remit to develop the national police organisation. Although Indonesia's withdrawal led to human resource deficits in public service and leadership roles, UNTAET brought a large influx of international support. Work to establish the new national police organisation commenced by recruiting former officers of the State Police of the Republic of Indonesia (*Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia* [POLRI]) and new recruits. The rationale for inclusion of former POLRI members was to ensure some prior policing experience. However, this inhibited public trust of the PNTL due to the brutality and impunity of the POLRI during the Indonesian occupation. An inadequate vetting process during recruitment, and a shorter training period than for new recruits, added to public concern (Armstrong et al., 2012). Once independence was achieved in 2002, the second institution-building mission—the UN Mission in Support of East Timor (UNMISSET)—commenced to support ongoing institutional development.

The roles of police and the military had been poorly delineated, and with defence engaging in matters of internal security, clashes between the two organisations resulted. Despite these issues, the UN interventions were deemed successful in international comparisons (Myrntinen, 2009) and, consequently, the third UN mission in 2005—UN Office in Timor-Leste (UNOTIL)—provided a scaled-down resource commitment. However, in 2006, the conflict between the PNTL and the *FALINTIL-Forças de Defesa de Timor-Leste* (Defence Force of Timor-Leste [F-FDTL]) escalated and culminated in violence and riots. It led to 37 deaths, widespread population displacement (of 150,000 people), and the collapse of the police and military (Svoboda & Davey, 2013). The Government of Timor-Leste requested assistance and the International Stabilisation Force, a multinational Australian-led stabilisation mission, was deployed. A fourth UN mission to Timor-Leste, UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT), which again had a remit to rebuild the police, soon followed. The UN formally completed its drawdown in 2012, although many related organisations have since maintained a presence in Timor-Leste.

Institution building in Timor-Leste has been analysed to understand what led to the institutional collapse in 2006, with a range of issues identified. For example, the UN and multinational forces lacked insights into the nuances of Timorese society; they focused on Dili with limited reach in the districts. Many discussions were held in English, preventing the full input of local leaders (Armstrong et al., 2012; Svoboda & Davey, 2013). This disregard was attributed to the linguistic complexity of Timor-Leste, with Tetum and Portuguese as national languages, Indonesian and English as working languages, and over 30 regional languages represented (IENTL, 2016). Second, a sense of national identity in Timor-Leste and loyalty within its new organisations had not yet been achieved. Rather, while women's roles and ties focused on the domestic sphere, men's loyalties were in the public sphere. They were derived from family, community, and regional ties and networks, and membership in veterans' and martial arts groups, some of which were associated with the use of violence (Armstrong et al., 2012; Myrntinen, 2009; Niner, 2022). From an institution-building perspective, these local systems had the potential to undermine public trust in new security organisations (Myrntinen, 2009). Finally, the UN police officers came from a wide range of countries, and few had development experience. The policing models, cultures, objectives, and standards varied among deployed personnel; the training provided to the PNTL lacked the guidance needed for a consistent and coherent approach (Lemay-Hébert, 2009; Myrntinen, 2009; Svoboda & Davey, 2013).

Despite the challenges and missteps, substantial progress has been made since independence, including in policing. Many countries have contributed to police development in Timor-Leste (Svoboda & Davey, 2013) and various bilateral arrangements have provided support in targeted areas of capacity development (see e.g., den Heyer, 2021; UNDP, 2015). Regarding gender, not only did UNTAET have a gender advisor from 1999 (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2005), but also the UN established a national vulnerable persons unit (NVPU) and vulnerable persons units (VPU) in each district in 2001, with at least one female police officer assigned per unit (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2005). The PNTL had 22% women by 2003 (Amnesty International, 2003, p. 85), reflecting efforts to include women from the organisation's inception.

Gender Policy Environment

Broadly defined, security sector reform applies both to state and nonstate actors in the security or justice sector, as well as oversight bodies, such as ministries and parliaments (Mobekk, 2010, p. 279). During UNTAET, the Constitution was developed in a process that was dominated both by FRETILIN and members of the elite who returned from exile in Portugal and Mozambique (Wallis, 2019). Despite challenging circumstances, a working group campaigned successfully for gender equality to be enshrined in the Constitution (Wandita et al., 2006). In 2003, the Government of Timor-Leste ratified human rights agreements, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Timor-Leste's parliament has 38% representation by women, which is supported by a quota introduced in 2006 (Niner et al., 2022). By contrast, in local government where the quota applies instead to the proportion of female candidacy, women account for only 4.7% of elected positions (Niner et al., 2022).

Among other processes, the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR) was established in Timor-Leste in 2002 under UNTAET, with a focus on the Indonesian occupation. Men and boys had often been involved in direct combat, while women and girls were more often involved indirectly; for example, by providing food, shelter, and information to combatants. Human rights abuses were widespread; women and girls were targeted as victims of sexual violence (CAVR, 2005; Wandita et al., 2006). Although gender equality was promoted by the women's movement and resistance groups within and outside Timor-Leste (Loney, 2020), in the aftermath of conflict, challenges, frustrations, and trauma prevailed. Often there was a reversion to gender biases (Groves et al., 2009; Niner, 2011) and changes in gender relations and customs, such as the exchanges between families at marriage (*barlake*) (Niner, 2011; Grenfell et al., 2015). Reflecting concerns of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, women's contributions to the resistance were less likely to be recognised and women were vastly underrepresented in the compensatory payments made by the government (Niner, 2011; Wandita et al., 2006). In the post-

conflict environment, victim-survivors faced social stigma associated with sexual violence amid a host of other challenges. Women who reported sexual violence often experienced ostracism, blame, and discrimination (Wandita et al., 2006).

In 2010, the government introduced a new law against domestic violence (LADV), making it a public crime. It mandates training for *Chefes de Suco* (leaders of villages) and *Aldeia* (sub-village/hamlets) (Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste [DRTL], 2011). The *Rede Referál Fomesadór Servisu* (Service Provider Referral Network), which has expanded nationally since 2005 (Grenfell et al., 2015), coordinates a wide range of government bodies and civil society organisations (CSOs) that provide support for victims of sexual and gender-based violence (Eelens & Eelens, 2022; Government of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste [GoDRTL], 2017). Expectations that women and girls focus on the domestic sphere have impacted women's access to paid work and girls' educational opportunities (Myrntinen, 2009). However, the policy intent is reflected in changing parental aspirations for their children's futures, which include education and work outside the home for girls and boys (Cowan, 2013; Trembath et al., 2010). The gender gap in literacy evident among those aged over 30 years is not present among the younger generations (IENTL, 2023).

Gender-Based Violence

Despite some proactive gender policy developments, domestic violence is an intractable problem. A high proportion (58.8%) of women and girls in Timor-Leste aged 15–49 years who had ever been in an intimate partner relationship reported having experienced physical or sexual violence, or both, in their lifetime (The Equality Institute, 2016; UNFPA, 2023). Additionally, 46.6% had experienced it in the previous 12 months. These figures are high when compared against a global average lifetime prevalence of 27% (Sardinha et al., 2022). Higher rates are associated with several factors, such as the impacts of conflict and childhood trauma, economic insecurity, and gender inequitable law (Sardinha et al., 2022; The Equality Institute, 2016). In regional comparisons, Timor-Leste recorded the highest rates of gender-based violence of the 17 countries in Asia for which data were provided (UNFPA, 2023). Only Afghanistan and Bangladesh also reported over 50% lifetime prevalence. Of 13 countries in the Pacific, the Republic of Marshall Islands and Papua New Guinea reported over 50%, and Fiji, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu reported over 60% lifetime prevalence (UNFPA, 2023).

A survey on community perceptions of development issues conducted across Timor-Leste ($N = 3,754$) revealed that “violence, safety and domestic violence” was among the top 10 perceived challenges for the nation, the community, and the individual (The Asia Foundation, 2023). Participants perceived that domestic violence was the largest of the issues (40%) faced by women. Relatedly, research with young men and male teenagers in Timor-Leste ($N = 482$) found that they endorsed statements that reflected a lack of equality in relationships (Wigglesworth et al., 2015). For example, respondents endorsed a man's right to punish his wife for mistakes (39%) and agreed that a woman cannot refuse her partner sex (42%). Although young men endorsed equal rights (90%) for education and work outside the home, their views differed regarding the private sphere and intimate partner relationships. The prevailing view was that the man was the head of house and key decision-maker (55%) (Wigglesworth et al., 2015). Over 80% of respondents endorsed statements condemning domestic violence; however, the survey revealed a lack of agreement on which acts constituted violence, highlighting a need for public education.

Given the context of security sector reform and the existence of both the formal state system and customary systems of justice, it is important to consider where community members turn to report gender-based violence. Most victim-survivors (65.9%) in Timor-Leste did not report their experience to anyone (The Equality Institute, 2016). In a recent nationwide survey on safety, security, and justice, participants ($N = 4,225$) were asked how they had responded to specific issues, including domestic violence. Of the small proportion of participants (7%) who disclosed that they or a family member had experienced domestic violence, 40% had reported it to authorities. Of those, 79% had approached local authorities. Specifically, 42% responded that they reported to the *Lian-na'in* (customary leader), 13% to the *Suco* (village) elected chief, and 24% to the *Aldeia* (sub-village/hamlet) elected chief. On the other hand, only 14% responded that they reported to the police (The Asia Foundation, 2022). Although local authorities referred a proportion of cases to the PNTL, figures for domestic violence cases were not disaggregated from other crime types. Overall, the findings of research and analysis suggest that there remains much to be done to reduce gender-based violence in the community and to achieve a robust and sustainable gender-responsive police organisation as part of the broader justice sector.

Timor-Leste Police Development Program

Since Timor-Leste's independence, Australia has been its largest development and security partner (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT], 2023a). The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) coordinates a broad suite of initiatives as part of a bilateral partnership (DFAT, 2023b). One element is the Timor-Leste Police Development Program (TLDP), which began in 2004 (Australian Federal Police [AFP], 2018a), and is known as *Serbisu Hamutuk* (Working

Together). It is guided by a program design document, which is developed by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) International Command Gender Team, based on reviews and evaluations of previous periods and current strategic priorities. The design for 2018–2022 (the fourth iteration, which was later extended for another year) refers to Timor-Leste's NAPs on Women, Peace and Security (GoDRTL, 2016) and Gender-Based Violence (GoDRTL, 2017). It also reflects Australia's first NAP on Women, Peace and Security (Australian Government, 2012) and the AFP's *International Command Gender Strategy 2018-2024* (AFP, 2018b). The program undergoes a gender analysis, and all personnel undertake pre-deployment gender training (AFP, 2018a).

The TLPDP is led by a senior responsible officer (superintendent) and there is an explicit aim for gender-balanced deployment of AFP members and recruitment of gender-balanced locally engaged staff (AFP, 2018a). The fourth iteration of the TLPDP reflected a lean deployment. It included an advisor in each of the following areas: forensics; gender; human resources; maritime; monitoring, evaluation, and learning (included later than the other roles); training; transnational crime; and security.

The significance of gender is evident in the space devoted to it in TLPDP documents, and that responsibility extends beyond the gender advisor (AFP, 2018a, 2019; Wilson et al., 2021). The design document for the fourth phase outlined four strategic objectives for advancing gender equality:

1. Support PNTL to develop a gender strategy which promotes women's participation and advancement in the PNTL;
2. Strengthen PNTL capability to respond to gender-based violence and other gender-related crime through improved investigational capability and support to victims including vulnerable people;
3. Ensure gender mainstreaming across all program activities; and
4. Increase stakeholder engagement and collaboration with civil society on gender-related objectives and activities. (AFP, 2018a, p. 37)

To help achieve these strategic objectives, the gender advisor worked directly with a PNTL counterpart and a locally engaged TLPDP staff member who was able to act as an interpreter and translator. The gender advisor had support to take regular lessons in Tetum and discretionary funds to support the strategic objectives. Drawing on evaluations, reports, and the second author's experience, the following examples illustrate how strategic objectives were put into practice by the TLPDP in partnership with PNTL counterparts and other organisations.

Gender Audit of PNTL

To address the first strategic objective (developing the PNTL gender strategy), there was a need for a gender audit to evaluate experiences, attitudes, and workplace culture nationally. A gender audit also reflects the third strategic objective (gender mainstreaming across all program activities) as the outcomes can inform strategic planning of the PNTL and TLPDP. With approval from the PNTL General Commander, the research team—including the gender advisor, a PNTL counterpart, and an Australian expert—travelled to all 13 municipalities to facilitate the completion of the survey as a pencil and paper test in classroom settings (Timor-Leste Police Development Program [TLPDP], 2022). A total of 1,235 police officers (67% male, 32% female, and <1% other) from all ranks participated, representing 29% of the organisation. Additionally, 310 members were engaged in follow-up focus groups or in-depth interviews (TLPDP, 2022). The survey asked participants about their observations and experiences of gender and equity in the PNTL. It provided brief scenarios, asking participants to indicate whether they constituted sexual harassment or general interactions, and asked about awareness of sexual harassment occurring within the PNTL.

Workforce data indicated that the proportion of women in the PNTL was 15% in 2022 (TLPDP, 2022). Apart from their roles in VPUs, women had been underrepresented in operational roles and overrepresented in administrative roles. Attitudes about women's capability and concerns about safety limited their involvement in specialist teams and sub-districts (administrative posts), respectively. Barriers to recruitment for women included a requirement for applicants not to be married or pregnant. As women in Timor-Leste marry at a younger age on average than men (IENTL, 2023), both requirements impact women's recruitment. Women were appropriately represented within the sergeant category but underrepresented at the two lowest ranks (agent and principal agent), and at ranks of inspector upwards. There had been no recruit intakes since 2017 (TLPDP, 2022). While most male and female participants agreed (approx. 90%) that PNTL leaders discussed the importance of gender equality and that bosses showed equal respect, a higher proportion of female (over 60%) than male officers (50%) had received gender training. Greater differences emerged in the perception that women are good leaders; just under 40% of men and 60% of women endorsed the statement. Just under 40% of male and female participants endorsed the statement that gay, lesbian, or transgender people make good police officers (TLPDP, 2022). It may be that participants did not know of many examples, as the LGBT community is emerging, having held the first pride march in 2017 (Niner, 2022). Regarding sexual harassment, almost 60% of

participants reported awareness of sexual harassment behaviours within the PNTL, with staring and sexual comments or jokes the most common, followed by unwelcome sexual advances (TLPDP, 2022). Over 10% of participants reported being aware of actual or attempted rape or sexual assault. Despite lacking a workplace sexual harassment policy, 58% of participants reported that they knew how to report sexual harassment in the PNTL.

Discussions shed further light on working conditions. Women and men had differential opportunities to carry firearms and drive vehicles within the PNTL (TLPDP, 2022). Without driving experience, women's access to opportunities was more limited. Facilities had not been designed with women in mind; for example, not all PNTL offices had facilities such as sex-segregated toilets. Women in administrative roles raised issues about the unsuitability of their uniforms (with pencil skirts and heels) for police work and noted that maternity uniforms had not been distributed to colleagues who needed them. Highlighting broader social circumstances, such as the influence of the Catholic church (see e.g., Niner, 2022), women reported pressure to have children and maintain primary responsibility for domestic work and childrearing, despite their demanding PNTL roles (TLPDP, 2022).

The gender audit found that the existing PNTL gender strategy (Polícia Nacional de Timor-Leste [PNTL] General Command, 2018) remained relevant and could be extended (TLPDP, 2022). The findings resulted in key recommendations in several areas. First, human resource recommendations included facilitating women's participation through policy and legislative change to improve flexible working conditions, with support from the TLPDP Human Resources advisor; addressing the declining proportion of women in the PNTL through a temporary 30% quota and a review of entry requirements; and accelerating women's leadership, by revising promotion gateways and introducing a 20% quota. Second, recommendations to address workplace sexual harassment included developing a standard operating procedure, with gender training for all staff to be cofacilitated by PNTL members in roles as gender focal points. Third, recommendations for gender-equitable access to resources included the communication of clear rationales for doing so. Finally, recommendations to resource gender governance suggested strengthening networks by including members with an active interest in gender and women's rights, rather than by role or position (TLPDP, 2022).

Scoping Review of Vulnerable Persons Units (VPUs)

The VPUs aim to assist victim-survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse. They are part of *Rede Referál* (the Referral Network) and work closely with network partners to provide support to victim-survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (Eelens & Eelens, 2022). A scoping review was undertaken to map capacity and assess needs, addressing the second and fourth strategic objectives (strengthening PNTL response capacity to gender-based violence and increasing stakeholder collaboration). The team, including TLPDP members and the National VPU Coordinator, visited the VPUs at all 13 municipalities (TLPDP, 2021). We identified three key themes from the scoping report as follows.

Buildings and Infrastructure

Most VPUs had a dedicated building on police station grounds; however, one was within the investigator's office in the police station without a suitable space for victims and witnesses. Many had murals or other consideration to make them welcoming places for the families and individuals who would attend them (TLPDP, 2021). The VPU buildings required maintenance to varying degrees. In three municipalities, they were dilapidated and unsafe for use, due to hazards such as a collapsing ceiling. There was a plan for the UNDP Spotlight Initiative to build new facilities in three municipalities; however, the scoping review identified three further municipalities where buildings required urgent attention. Most other VPUs required some general maintenance, such as new door handles and painting, while two were new and fit for purpose. Only about half of the VPUs had kitchens, bathrooms, electricity, and running water. For those without these facilities, staff and clients had to attend the main police building or an onsite facilities block.

Human Resources

Typically, the VPU in each municipality had several police members, often with two or three at the base and one at most administrative posts (formerly subdistricts). The VPUs typically had at least one female police officer. Although the government agencies and CSOs varied by municipality, each VPU reported good working relationships through *Rede Referál* and several reported having regular roundtable meetings with agencies or with courts. Many VPU members reported having received training from the TLPDP on sexual assault investigations and child protection, a need identified previously by the TLPDP gender advisor (AFP, 2019). There was interest in further training on various matters, such as victim referrals and leadership, noting a need to extend opportunities to those based in administrative posts and *sucos* (villages) as they were often overlooked. In a few VPUs, the main police office responded to cases after business hours. In another few VPUs, shiftwork had been implemented to ensure that 24-hour specialist assistance was available to community members. However, in most

VPU, members attended incidents after hours without overtime pay. A key issue was the transfer of VPU staff to other areas of the PNTL, resulting in a loss of specialist skills from the team.

Equipment and Resources

Transporting victims and briefs of evidence to court posed a challenge. In some instances, the vehicle assigned to the VPU had been taken by another squad and VPUs did not always include a member with a licence and driving experience (TLPDP, 2021). This issue reflects the social and organisational preference for male drivers (TLPDP, 2022) and led to recruitment decisions based on driving ability or reliance on partner organisations for transport (TLPDP, 2021). A lack of internet connectivity and computer access posed further challenges. VPU members often had to use the internet in the main police office, which necessitated double handling and impeded accurate data management and secure storage. While mobile phone cameras may provide photographs of adequate quality, courts required colour prints to show the extent of injuries where applicable. Printing facilities were often located in the main police office and colour ink was not always available. A lack of phones meant that members had to provide their personal mobile phone numbers to victims, offenders, and other community members. A lack of laptop computers and data projectors meant that VPU members had to rely on partner organisations to facilitate community awareness workshops (TLPDP, 2021).

Overall, the scoping review of VPUs recommended focusing on three key areas: rebuilding and repairs beginning with those in urgent need; human resource initiatives to address training needs and reduce the organisational movement of specialist members; and the provision of filing cabinets and storage cupboards as a low-cost option to improve data security and efficiency (TLPDP, 2021). The TLPDP has since provided a mobile phone to each VPU and negotiated for the NVPU to provide monthly data and call coverage. Soft furnishings, drawing equipment, and toys were provided to each VPU to support children to feel safe in interviews. The TLPDP also funded renovations to provide sex-segregated toilets for PNTL Headquarters and Dili municipality, following findings of the gender audit.

Education and Training

To assist in facilitating women's promotion and application for scholarships in line with the first strategic objective (promoting women's participation and advancement), a Women's Leadership Program was developed in 2020. As it had been observed that English language skills were associated with opportunities for further training and promotion, an English language training component was offered along with application writing, interview skills, and a fitness program. Fourteen female PNTL staff completed the English language component; however, from March 2021, other elements of the training program were suspended due to the COVID pandemic (Wilson et al., 2021). Five of the officers subsequently participated in training in Australia or New Zealand. The program was then redesigned to include public speaking and confidence building. It was offered again from 2022, with a focus on regional inclusion, initially for officers from Suai municipality.

To assist with implementing the PNTL gender strategy and the first strategic objective, several training opportunities were offered. First, although the UN had introduced PNTL gender focal points throughout Timor-Leste, few of the currently nominated officers had received training for their roles. A three-day workshop developed role descriptions and strengthened existing knowledge in gender mainstreaming and preventing and responding to workplace sexual harassment. Following the gender audit, extensive collaboration and consultation took place to develop the Sexual Harassment Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), which was approved by PNTL's General Commander, and launched in 2023. Based on the findings of the gender audit, PNTL commanders received a day's training on the Sexual Harassment SOP. Once finalised and approved, a five-day training package was provided to 55 PNTL officers, including gender focal points, trainers, and investigators who were tasked with the rollout. The development of a training package for all PNTL members was also underway.

To address the second strategic objective (increasing PNTL capability to respond to gender-based violence and other gender-related crime), a 10-day Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Investigations Course was provided to all 108 VPU staff. It was run in partnership with the PNTL, the UNDP Spotlight Initiative, and others, thereby addressing the fourth objective (increased collaboration with CSOs). The course aimed to build skills using demonstrations and activity-based scenarios. Pre- and post-course surveys and interviews found support for increased knowledge on responding to gender-based violence (Wilson et al., 2021). Since 2022, content has been enhanced to include trauma-informed communication with children. Additionally, the Interviewing Vulnerable Witnesses Program was reinstated after a break due to the pandemic. It offered multiagency training for investigators, child protection officers, prosecutors, and nongovernment organisation employees.

An evaluation found that the TLPDP had contributed to increased proportions of female participants in training (Wilson et al., 2021). This reflects the third strategic objective (gender mainstreaming across all program activities). Efforts were made to collect gender disaggregated data on training participants. Measures were also taken to provide leadership opportunities and

address the limited access to firearms for female police officers—an issue highlighted in the PNTL gender audit. The TLPDP advocated for a female trainer to be included in all exercises within a train-the-trainer program for use-of-force training, and for images of female PNTL officers using firearms to be included in training materials (Wilson et al., 2021).

Engagement and Awareness

In line with the fourth strategic objective (strengthening collaboration with CSOs), the TLPDP gender advisor established quarterly meetings with several of PNTL's donors and partners. This ensured VPUs received the most appropriate service delivery, training was contemporary and relevant, and that the gifting of equipment was streamlined to avoid waste and duplication. Wilson et al. (2021) recommended that the TLPDP include another gender advisor and integrate prevention and response for greater impact. While it was not possible to adopt this suggestion in the short term, a Gender Action Plan was developed to facilitate continuity for the next gender advisor and all TLPDP personnel.

From time to time, the TLPDP contributes to community awareness campaigns. During the pandemic, national broadcast services and social media were used to communicate about floods and gender-based violence (Wilson et al., 2021). Similarly, public service announcements about domestic violence were broadcast on radio, television, and via social media twice per day for one month over the 2020 Christmas holiday period. Although reporting of domestic violence increased in the follow up period, it is unclear to what extent the media campaign contributed (Wilson et al., 2021). Following the gender audit of the PNTL outlined above, a poster campaign was run within the PNTL to raise awareness of sexual harassment. In 2023, an opportunity arose for a billboard campaign in Dili to raise awareness of domestic violence. These kinds of activities provide important opportunities to collaborate with partner agencies to raise community awareness about domestic violence and how to report it.

Achievements and Next Steps

The initiatives discussed above exemplify projects undertaken as part of the gender advisory remit of the fourth TLPDP project design document. Echoing the experiences of previous TLPDP personnel (Edwards & O'Donnell, 2011), such work requires engaging with the complexities and nuances of Timor-Leste and the PNTL. This supports understanding of local needs and visions; building relationships within and across organisations; aligning initiatives with local strategies, interests, and agendas; and capitalising on unanticipated opportunities. The practical examples highlight many achievements, such as PNTL attention to—and leadership on—gender, VPU members' engagement in specialist training, increased opportunities for women's participation in training, and collaboration with CSOs to address sexual and gender-based violence. However, many challenges remain, such as a decreased proportion of women in the PNTL, their disproportionate assignment to VPUs, and women's experience of sexual harassment and under-resourcing. These challenges are not entirely unexpected, not only because of a reversion to gender biases in post-conflict environments (Groves et al., 2009; Niner, 2011) but also because such issues also pervade police organisations of the Global North (e.g., Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2015). Ongoing commitment is needed to ensure continued progress in gender-responsive policing and to monitor developments, noting challenges, such as limited PNTL funding for recruitment and promotions.

It must be emphasised that progress on gender equality and security is incremental and involves an iterative process, building on previous findings and outcomes to inform the next phase of development. The fourth TLPDP design focused on women as the representation of gender. Although the PNTL Gender Audit aimed to incorporate a broader conceptualisation of gender and sexual identity, it is unclear to what extent other intersectional elements, such as disability, featured in initiatives. The second-generation *Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security* is guided by four key principles: a "do no harm" approach, a human rights-based approach, gender mainstreaming, and recognising and responding to diverse experiences (Australian Government, 2021, p. 14). The fifth TLPDP design (AFP, 2023) aligns with the second-generation NAP, including an explicit focus on gender equality, diversity, and social inclusion. It therefore better reflects gender-responsive policing (Denney, 2019). Although finalised after the design of the fifth TLPDP, Timor-Leste's second-generation NAP (GoDRTL, 2024), also better reflects intersectionality and diversity, having involved wide consultation with diverse community groups, including in regional areas. Notably, the fifth TLPDP design explicitly identifies additional elements that *could* be included in the program if Australian Government priorities were to change, such that resource allocation increased. Given resource limitations, the NAPs of both countries concur that the best approach is for implementing partners to collaborate effectively with civil society organisations to achieve common goals. This aspect remains prominent in the strategic priorities of the fifth TLPDP program design.

Conclusion

This article aimed to explore practical examples of the implementation of gender-responsive policing in the context of a police development partnership in Timor-Leste. Despite significant challenges for gender equality and security, political will and hard work in Timor-Leste have resulted in substantial progress in developing the gender policy environment and establishing the frameworks necessary to address and prevent sexual and gender-based violence. While large-scale UN missions with police development components concluded in 2012, continuing bilateral agreements have fostered productive partnerships in targeted areas, such as addressing gender-based violence. Even as the TLPDP has become a lean program in recent years, gender-responsive policing has remained a key priority. Overall, the examples discussed highlight that, with a small program, alignment with strategic priorities and collaboration within and beyond policing are essential. Although much remains to be done to reduce sexual and gender-based violence in Timor-Leste, through its ethos of *Serbisu Hamutuk* (Working Together), the article showed how the fourth iteration of the TLPDP contributed in practical ways to implementing gender-responsive policing, taking steps towards gender equality and security for all community members.

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