



**Our Path is
Upwards;
Becoming
Strong
Together**

Strengthening Women
Survivors of Violence in
Timor-Leste Through
Participatory Action Research
(PAR)

Asosiasaun Chegal! ba ita (ACbit)
Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR)

In Cooperation with UN Women
Asia-Pacific and UN Trust Fund to
End Violence Against Women

February 2017



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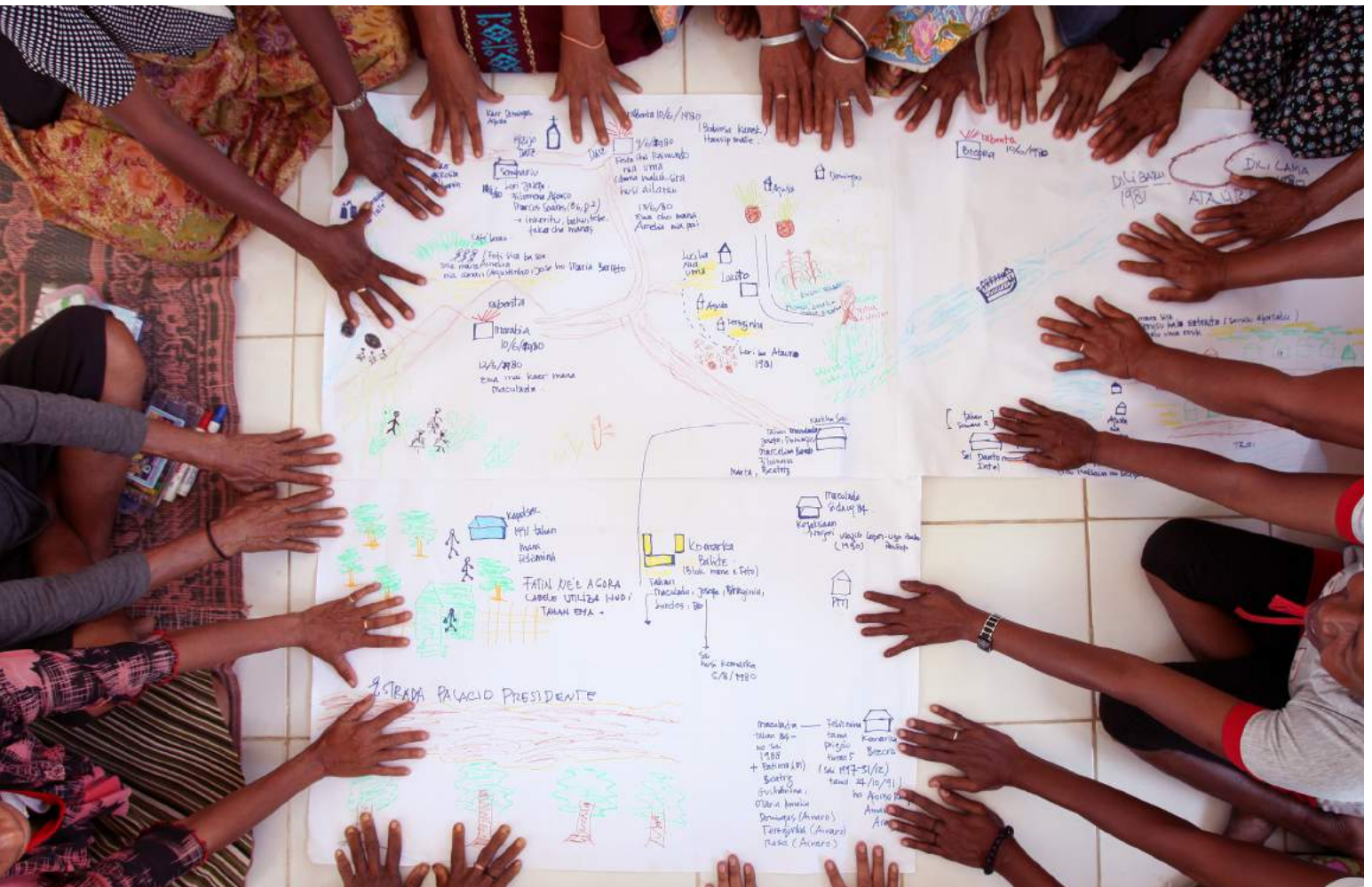
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Executive Summary



Asosiasaun Chega! ba ita (ACbit), working closely with the National Victims' Association (NVA) and Fokupers, and with technical assistance from Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR), conducted participatory action research with 161 women survivors of violence from June 2015 to May 2016 in all 13 districts of Timor-Leste. A total of 42 community facilitators, many of them survivors themselves, were trained to support the research process.

The research brought together both survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) from Timor-Leste's past conflict (1975-1999), and those who have experienced violence in the newly democratic Timor-Leste. This was an innovative approach taken by ACbit and its partners, linking survivors from the "past" and "present" in order to better understand and address the root causes of GBV. These survivors were able to identify the barriers they face in accessing services in their communities and now attempt to overcome them. This report documents our community-driven participatory research process. It outlines the research process and methodology used and shares reflections from the community facilitators on the process itself, drawing out key lessons for future research and action. The report also presents the key findings of the research and discusses strategies developed by the participants together with ACbit for their ongoing advocacy work for survivors' access to services.

Reflections on the process and key lessons for future research

For most of the community facilitators it was their first time using participatory techniques. In general, participants praised the way the tools engaged them and made them feel comfortable, enabling them to share their stories and ideas. They appreciated that these tools allowed created a space to remember, providing all participants with an equal opportunity to talk, but only if they wanted to. The process generated an inspiring and supportive atmosphere thanks to the presence of victims with similar backgrounds. Consequently many of them felt that the tools contributed to building solidarity among the victims and helped them gain strength and support.

Key lessons concerning the research process were:

- Mixing older and younger women facilitates intergenerational understanding and support: mutual understanding was fostered and the patterns of violence against women and girls were identified as extending across generations and occurring both in times of peace and in conflict.
- A clear explanation of the process is required from the very beginning. Some participants were confused initially and did not understand that the tools were simply a way to facilitate discussion and sharing. Participants, especially those with low levels of literacy, perceived the tools as strange. Furthermore, in some locations there was a misunderstanding that the activities would lead to material support. Expectations needed to be managed carefully.
- Building rapport is crucial to obtaining quality data. Although the community facilitators had existing positive relationships it was important to give adequate time to build rapport so participants felt comfortable using tools such as body mapping and community mapping.
- For the above reason, community facilitators opined that it was very important to maintain the same facilitators throughout the research process to make sure women felt comfortable and safe and did not have to repeat their stories.
- Participatory approaches take time. All participants agreed that sufficient time is crucial to the integrity of the process. Rushing the process can compromise the quality of the data.
- The location of the activities is important. Participants deemed a peaceful and calm site, away from regular activities and distractions, ideal for the activities.
- Community facilitators need to be careful of normative processes and guide participants to share their own views independent of fellow participants. For example, during the Stone and Flower exercises there was some confusion about the process and some participants just copied exactly what the person before them did rather than share their own thoughts.
- Community facilitators need to be mindful of language issues. Considering the linguistic diversity of Timor-Leste it was important to sufficient time and skills for translation among the facilitators.

Key Findings on Violence, Access to Services, and Survival Strategies

Participants discussed the types of violence they experienced and continue to experience; the causes, contributing factors, and consequences of this violence; their ability to access services; barriers to services; and strategies for moving forward.

Types of Violence:

- Women did not speak of discrete and isolated events but of ongoing, multiple and repeated violations over a prolonged period of time extending beyond the period of armed conflict (1975-1999). Violations were not limited to sexual or physical violence but also included violations of economic, socio-cultural, civil and political rights.
- The most commonly discussed types of past violence were sexual violence, detention, torture and threats committed by the Indonesian military (known as the TNI, Tentara Nasional Indonesia), the Indonesian police, and pro-Indonesian militias. Sexual violence included acts of rape, gang rape and sexual slavery where women were forced to 'marry' and held against their will for long periods of time. A total of 11 women explicitly said they had children from sexual violence.
- A total of 12 out of 154 victims spoke openly about both past and current violations. These women spoke of a pattern of violence where they still have to grapple with the consequences of past violations while facing with new types of violence including abandonment by their partners and ongoing discrimination and violence from the communities resulting from the stigma of their past experiences.
- Types of violence currently experienced by participants included domestic violence, abandonment, stigma and discrimination. A total of 18 women shared their stories of domestic violence including physical and emotional violence, resulting in impoverishment. Of the participants, 25 shared stories of being abandoned by their partners and being left alone to support their children. Six women disclosed cases of incest and another six spoke of being sexually abused by people in their communities.

Cause, Contributing Factors and Consequences

Women identified that one of the root causes of violence against women during conflict and during peacetime is the same, that is: the inequality between women and men. The discrimination and unequal treatment that women face in Timor-Leste is fundamental to the violence they experience. Contributing factors discussed during the research process included:

- **Conflict:** Many stories shared by participants referred to acts of violence committed during the Indonesian occupation.
- **Loss of family support:** Many of those who had lost their husband, parents or brothers became more vulnerable to other types of violence including sexual violence, physical violence and extreme forms of discrimination.
- **Loss of land and property:** As a consequence of the violation they experienced, a number of participants mentioned losing access to land, having no documents to prove their land ownership or having no land and having to stay with family members. This led to economic deprivation and struggle.
- **Cycle of violence:** Because impunity is entrenched and the root causes of violence are not addressed, the violence and abuse experienced by the victims are repeated in the next generations.

The consequences of the violence participants faced are diverse and cut across all aspects of their lives. These include:

- **Physical:** Women frequently spoke of the physical consequences of violence including broken bones, and untreated sexual and reproductive health issues that have had a negative impact on their sense of well-being as well as on their mental health, and have affected their ability to earn a living and provide for their families. Of the survivors who participated in the research, 25 were aged over 60 and a further 41 were aged between 50-60, highlighting the need for services sensitive to care for older and aging women.
- **Psychological:** Women frequently spoke of shame, self-blame and dread, all having a negative impact on their ability to actively engage with their families and communities, and hampering their access to much-needed services. Women frequently spoke of their desire for justice and expressed sadness, bitterness, and anger that perpetrators went largely unpunished and justice remained illusive. As a consequence, they felt neglected and alone, which continues having an adverse effect on their mental health.
- **Social:** Participants also shared their experiences of ostracism, stigmatization, and bullying by members of their communities and their families. Widows in particular experience such treatment from their husbands' families. This affects their ability to be engaged in their communities and fulfill their social needs.
- **Economic:** The economic consequences of violence include the loss of land, livestock, farming equipment and personal possessions; the loss of family support structures; and also loss of the ability to work through physical injury or social exclusion.

Barriers to Accessing Justice and Services

Facing these diverse consequences of violence, survivors need access to a range of services and support structures to facilitate their healing. These services include medical, psycho-social and economic assistance, safe spaces, support to develop vocational skills or to resume educational opportunities, legal aid, and access to justice.

A review of the data on research participants shows that few are accessing justice or services. Only 33 women spoke about accessing justice, with two of these being through customary (adat) processes. Of these, only 12 cases had been decided including cases of domestic violence, abandonment, incest, and sexual violence (by a perpetrator who is not a family member). This also included one case where a woman was able to get her husband's murderer convicted, a militia member who committed this crime during the Indonesian occupation. This means 132 of 154 women did not speak about accessing justice, either through customary or formal processes.

Reasons given for not being able to access justice included:

- The case is considered closed with unfavorable outcomes.
- Lack of faith in the legal process; it is a lengthy endeavour and the women lose hope in ever obtaining justice
- Lack of clarity about the activities of CAVR (Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation) and how their contribution to the report has been used
- Lack of attention from local and national leaders to their cases and situation
- Lack of knowledge about how to obtain justice and their own legal standing
- Lack of abilities to collect and organize documentation in order to receive assistance and process cases
- The silence, embarrassment and trauma surrounding their experiences still renders the victims unable to report their cases.
- The alleged perpetrators have fled to Indonesia.
- **Fear for own safety and security:** many have received threats from their partners, husbands or other family members which prevents them from reporting or even talking about their experiences.
- **Economic dependency on their husbands/partners for their own and their children's livelihood (including paying school fees)**
- **No possession of assets (land, property, livestock, etc.)**
- **Lack of time and economic resources needed to access justice**

In terms of services, a total of 60 women did not mention any services or support from either government or non-government agencies. Of the remaining 101 women, some spoke of multiple sources of support while others only mentioned a single source. Of these, the majority was support from the government of Timor-Leste, with only one from the Indonesian government (Indonesian Embassy) and 15 from non-government sources including one woman who spoke of borrowing money from a friend. The vast majority of this support was financial and women most frequently mentioned using this for meeting their daily needs and supporting their children's education. One woman spoke of using the money to fix her husband's grave and three women spoke of using credit to start up a small business. Only one woman mentioned health services, speaking of support from ACbit to access health care, and two specifically mentioned counseling support from Fokupers.

Participants spoke of the following barriers to accessing services:

- Lack of knowledge and information about available services and how to access them
- Fear of service providers and concern that they would not be safe, respected or their case would not remain confidential.
- Embarrassment and trauma. Some still have not disclosed the violence they experienced, they feel overwhelmed with the idea of seeking help and having to tell their story.
- Lack of information about entitlements and processes and inability to fill out forms and engage with formal bureaucracy
- Concerns that seeking services will jeopardize the financial support they currently receive from their husbands/partners
- No screening for histories of violence from medical service providers

A Framework for Empowering Women Survivors Working to End Impunity for Sexual and Gender-based Violence

This participatory action research presented an opportunity to listen intently to the views of women survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. ACbit's team and community facilitators tried to capture the experiences and views of more than 160 women survivors, from 13 districts and across two generations. Their stories, photographs and words are captured in a photo-book about this research. Community facilitators together with ACBit, Fokupers and NVA, reflected on their key findings during the analysis workshops held in 2015 and 2016. During these workshops and group sessions, they discussed strategies to help survivors to best access existing services and advocate for their rights and needs.

Through this process, we developed a new framework to help guide a holistic, long-term approach to working with survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. The framework involves four inter-related pillars: 1) Ensuring the foundations for sustaining life, including meeting their basic needs as human beings; 2) Strengthening women survivors' resilience of spirit; 3) Building recognition, security and access to justice. 4) Creating initiatives with the next generation to bring hope for a better future. We believe that this holistic approach is required in the long-term work to end violence against women.



Conclusion

This action research has provided ACbit with the strong reminder of the long-term and intergenerational impact of sexual gender-based violence. The consequence of this violence demands a programming and policy response that is holistic: dealing with the trauma, psychological and socio-economic effects especially on women survivors of sexual and gender-based violence that happened during the conflict, and violence that is still taking place in time of "peace." We must improve ways to empower women survivors, by helping them access services, and ensuring women's access to justice, assisting them to rebuild their lives during and after conflict, recognizing the violence they endured and its impact. Our approach must be transformative and long-term, looking to the future and trying to promote change in the underlying structures and conditions of discrimination and inequality that shape women's experience in conflict and post-conflict settings. We must look to address violations of civil and political, as well as social and economic rights. Finally, any kind of intervention must ensure the meaningful participation of women survivors. They must be actively involved in identifying and advocating for their own priorities and in developing solutions.

We are indebted to the women survivors who participated in this action research, giving their precious time to learning to listen to each other and supporting each other. We hope that the government of Timor-Leste and their development partners will increase their attention to the plight of women survivors, by providing more resources to help empower survivors, enabling them to take on a critical role to end violence against women.

1. Background

In 2012, Asosiasaun Chega! ba ita (ACbit) conducted participatory research with fifty women survivors of violence in Timor-Leste concluding that many of these women, especially survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), are poor, have little access to basic services, and remain disempowered and discriminated against in their communities. To assist ACbit in addressing these issues, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women supported a three-year project (2015 – 2017), “Strengthening Women Survivors of Violence” with the following project goal:

Women survivors of sexual and gender-based violence during Timor-Leste’s conflict experience greater access to socio-economic support and services, lower levels of stigma and marginalization, and a more active role in voicing their issues and decision making in their communities.¹

The project aims to increase access and quality of services to vulnerable women survivors and to increase survivors’ organizational capacity to conduct advocacy and sustain their organizations.² One key activity of the project is for ACbit to build upon its relationship with the National Victims Association (NVA) by conducting participatory action research with its women membership base, as well as to identify other survivors of GBV, in order to improve their access to services. This is outlined specifically in Output 1.2.

The project also brought together survivors of gender-based violence from Timor-Leste’s past conflict (1975-99), with those who have experienced violence in the newly democratic Timor-Leste. This was an innovative approach taken by ACbit and its partners, linking survivors from the “past” and “present” in order to better understand and address the root causes leading to gender-based violence. Through this participatory action research, survivors were able to identify and attempt to overcome the barriers they face in accessing services in their communities.

This report documents ACbit’s innovative community-driven participatory research process. First, it will outline the research process and methodology used. Second, it will share reflections from the community facilitators and draw out key lessons learned for future research. Third, the key findings of the research will be discussed. Finally, the strategies developed by participants and ACbit for their ongoing work and advocacy around access to services for survivors will be shared.³

“After these meetings, I changed a lot. I can now make decisions for myself. Before, I was afraid, I wasn’t free to go out. After this program, I strengthened myself. I now can go here and there I am not afraid.”

Action Research Participant,
Dili, November 2015.

1. The findings of this research are published in *Enduring Impunity: Women Surviving Atrocities in the Absence of Justice*, AJAR, 2015, <http://asia-ajar.org/2015/11/enduring-impunity-women-surviving-atrocities-in-the-absence-of-justice/>

2. Ibid.

3. Process Report, *Strengthening Women Survivors of Violence Proposal*, 2013, p.18

2. Research Process and Methodology



2.1 Overall Approach

The project further developed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach created together with AJAR and women survivors and advocates from Timor-Leste, Myanmar and Indonesia.⁴ Key to the approach was engaging survivors as researchers (participatory) and actively working towards practical outcomes (action) at the same time as creating new forms of understanding (research). An important part of the process, and central to the aims of the project, was to involve survivors of past conflict related violations and survivors of violations that have taken place in post-conflict Timor, as both facilitators and participants. This method was created in response to the false separation between the two types of violence and recognition of the common root causes.

Since 2010, Timor-Leste has enacted a law on domestic violence. However, the government continues to turn a blind-eye to women victims of conflict.⁵ ACbit is challenging this disconnect by linking women survivors (from the past and present) in order to demonstrate how impunity for past violations have contributed to sustaining root causes for gender-based violence.

In this project, women victims of the past have played a leadership role in reaching out to new victims. Survivors from conflict and post-conflict Timor have worked together to identify and overcome the barriers they face in accessing services in their communities. Importantly, ACbit built on existing community networks to conduct the research, where relationships and rapport had already been established. This was essential to the success of the project particularly in light of the sensitivities of working on GBV.

It is also important to state that this was a qualitative research process with purposive sampling. Community facilitators used guidelines to collect qualitative information by asking open-ended questions. Participants were encouraged to share whatever information they were comfortable with. For some participants, this was the first time they shared their experiences. Consequently they were more guarded, sharing only minimal information. The research was designed this way in recognition of the fact that experiences of GBV are notoriously difficult to disclose. The barriers to disclosure include shame, fear of stigma and judgment from family and community, and safety concerns. Regardless, clear patterns emerged and key findings were identified as outlined in Section 4.

4. ACbit was a key member of multi-country team to develop participatory methods for action research designed to assist survivors to heal, take action, and build solidarity. See AJAR and ACbit's manual series on Unlearning Impunity (I); "Stone and Flower: A Guide to Understanding and Action for Women Survivors," AJAR, 2015.

5. See ACbit, January 2016, "Where are They Now? Women Victims Ten Years after the Chega! Report in Timor-Leste".

2.2 Safety and Ethics

The ACbit team is well aware of the potential damage and danger to individual women and their families of engaging on research about GBV. The methodology followed the guiding principles outlined in the World Health Organisation (WHO) Guidelines for conducting research on violence against women. These principles include safety and security of participants and of the evaluation team, confidentiality and respect. The following strategies were developed to ensure that these principles are adhered to:

- Community facilitators were selected from the existing networks of ACbit, NVA and Fokupers, many of whom are trained service providers with basic understanding of the guiding principles for working with survivors of GBV.
- At the Participatory Research Training Workshops, sessions were held on the importance of confidentiality, informed consents, safety and ethics.
- Informed consent was sought from all participants with signed (or thumb printed) forms before they began their participation in the research process.
- Specific sessions were held on accessing services and referring survivors to existing services in each location.
- The Director of ACbit Director closely monitored fieldwork and held regular debriefings with community facilitators and stressed the importance of confidentiality and safety.
- A community tool kit “*Fatuk ho Ai-Funan*” and Referral Book “*Husi Vitima ba Sidadaun*” (also produced as part of this project) is part of a package that will be provided to all Community Facilitators to ensure they have up-to-date information about services available and referral procedures for their ongoing work.

2.3 Research Tools

The tools used as part of the participatory action research included:

Stone and Flower: This tool aims to better understand how localized social, economic and cultural forces nurture and reinforce impunity, particularly for gender-based crimes. Participants chose a stone (negative) or a flower (positive) to describe whether the rights to truth, justice, healing and a life free from violence have been fulfilled in their personal, family and community life. The reasons for choosing a stone or flower are then discussed as a group.

Timeline: This tool enables women to work together to build a collective history highlighting the violence they experienced throughout their lives.

Body Mapping: This tool provides women an opportunity to speak about the impact of violence on their bodies and also the sources and sites of their strengths and happiness.

Community Mapping: This tool facilitates participants to draw a map of their community that highlights where violations have taken place as well as other important locations in their communities.

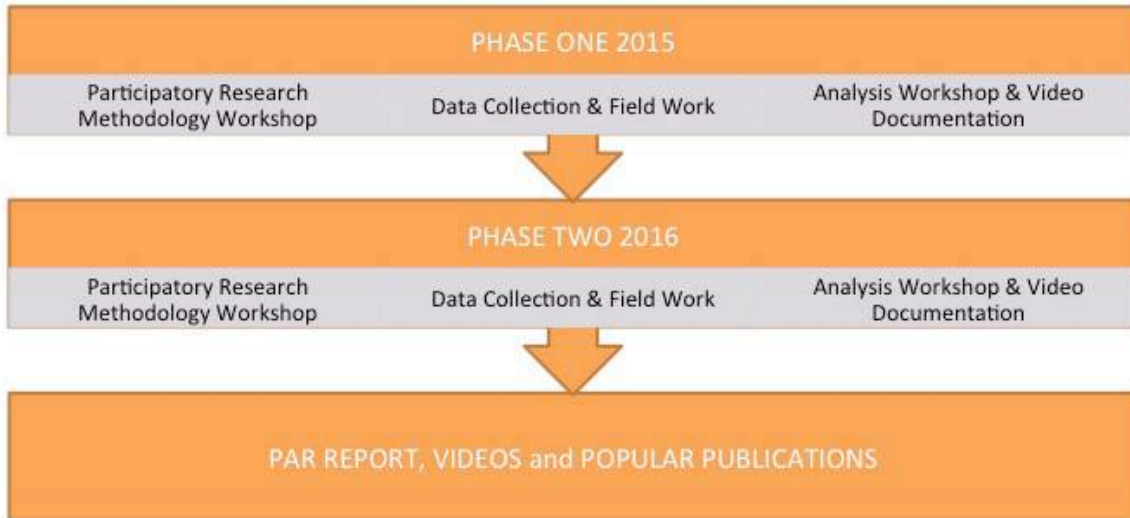
Resource Mapping: Using this tool, participants describe their sources of livelihoods, before, during and after the conflict. This process offers insight into the cycle of poverty experienced by women victims in post conflict settings.

Photo stories: Researchers visited participant’s homes to take photos of locations and sites of significance to them. They created a photo story that includes locations and objects with particular meanings.

Memory Box and Postcards: Participants were asked to fill a box with objects that connect to sweet or bitter memories and to write a story about their life experience on postcards. Participants had the opportunity to open their boxes and describe the contents of their boxes to the group.

2.4 Research Process

The research was conducted in two phases. Phase One (2015) focused on eight districts: Dili, Liquisa, Ermera, Bobonaro, Cova Lima, Aileu, Baucau and Lautém. These districts were selected for the first phase because ACbit staff have strong connections to women's groups in these locations and these groups were considered to have sufficient capacity to carry out the research and follow up activities. Part of the first phase involved reflection on the process and refinement of the research tools for the next phase. Phase Two (2016) involved research in the five districts of Oecussi, Manatuto, Manufahi, Viqueque and Ainaro. The research process is outlined below:



Full participation of service provider agencies in the research workshops, as envisaged in the original proposal, was not possible due to their limited time and personnel. However, ACbit actively shared information with key service providers at all stages of the research process. Details of this engagement is outlined further below.

2.4.1 Participatory research methodology workshop (Phase One 17th – 20th June 2015; Phase Two 16th-19th May 2016)

These workshops focused on introducing the community facilitators who made up the research teams to each other; unpacking the key concepts of gender, gender-based violence and transitional justice; learning about and reflecting on similar research conducted in other countries; sharing experiences; and developing the key research questions and methodology for the research.

Senior staff from Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) worked together with ACbit to facilitate the workshops. Research tools were based on participatory action research previously conducted by ACbit and AJAR⁶, but were refined and tailored further to the Timorese context. These methods were Stone and Flower, Timeline, Body Mapping, Community Mapping, Resource Mapping, Memory Box and Photo Story.

A total of 42 community facilitators (25 in Phase One and 17 in Phase Two) and eight ACbit researchers attended these workshops.

6. AJAR and ACbit have previously worked together to develop and conduct participatory action research modules with survivors of violence in Indonesia, Timor-Leste, and Myanmar. See *Enduring Impunity: Women Surviving Atrocities in the Absence of Justice*. AJAR, 2015 <http://asia-ajar.org/2015/11/enduring-impunity-women-surviving-atrocities-in-the-absence-of-justice/>.

2.4.2 Field Research (Phase One, August–December 2015; Phase Two, June– October 2016)

Following the methodology workshops, facilitators returned to their respective districts and implemented their chosen methodologies to gather information and support survivors. In each location there were either two or three community facilitators from ACbit, Fokupers, or NVA, and also survivors from the target community who participated in the research.

Field research was conducted over four to five days in each location. A total of 154 women participated—78 in Phase One and 76 in Phase Two (see detailed breakdown below in Table 2). Workshops were held either in participants’ homes or safe community spaces such as the Uma Mahon women’s shelters established by the government for victims of domestic violence and run by Fokupers in Maliana and Suai.

2.4.3 Analysis Workshop (Phase One, 10-12 November 2015; Phase Two, 3-6 October 2016)

Following the field research, the community facilitators gathered in Dili to present and jointly analyze their findings. They discussed and reflected on the key needs of women survivors, the barriers they face accessing services and potential community-based strategies for overcoming these barriers. A total of 45 community facilitators (25 in Phase One and 20 in Phase Two) attended these workshops together with eight ACbit researchers.

Although it was originally proposed that the documentation and analysis workshop would include government and NGO service providers, it was decided that the community facilitators would hold internal workshops to look at emerging findings, and to identify gaps, needs, and barriers to accessing services. Advocacy and engagement with service providers on referral procedures and follow-up was undertaken in a more tailored fashion, with different approaches used for different agencies in different locations. Details of the internal workshops and of ACbit’s engagement with service providers are outlined below.

Internal Workshops

On the first day of these workshops, community facilitators shared their data and photos from the research process. First, basic information for the ACbit database was compiled (biodata, type of violations experienced, etc). The community facilitators then worked in small groups to discuss their findings using the following guiding questions:

- Who are the most vulnerable women?
- Why are they vulnerable?
- What kind of support do they have?
- What are the three most surprising things about these cases?
- What are the three most inspiring things?
- Have they been able to access justice? services? If no, why, and what are the barriers? If yes, what have they accessed, and what has been the impact?

On the second day, ACbit and AJAR staff led the community facilitators in a process of joint analysis. Community facilitators discussed the barriers to accessing services and possible community based strategies to help survivors to best access existing services or advocate for needed services.

In both phases of the research, ACbit engaged a film-maker to document different aspects of the action research, producing 7 short videos. These videos are a way to report back to the women who participated in our action research in a more accessible way, and can be used as tools for advocacy to policy makers. The seven videos are the following:

- Two videos depicting the process of our action research at community-level. We show-case the work of Beatriz Miranda, a survivor of sexual slavery who is now one of our facilitators working in Kraras, Viqueque [2015, 24 minute video.] There is another video about Olga da Silva Amaral, another survivor of sexual slavery who is a teacher and facilitator in the village of Mauchiga, Ainaro. [2016, 7-minute video]
- A video showing the second analysis workshop with women facilitators held in Dili, November 2016.
- Three short video interviews with women survivors who participated in the action research. [2016]
- A video documenting a visit by women survivors to the Chega! Exhibition [2016].

Engagement with Service Providers and Leadership

Government officials and civil society service providers were engaged in a number of ways to enhance their knowledge and skills in working with survivors safely and ethically and in ensuring appropriate service provision and referral. These are outlined below (Table 1):

Location	Date	Service Providers or Leadership	Specific Outcomes
Maliana (Bobonaro District)	10 - 12 March 2015	Sub-district leader	ACbit has advocated for the survivor group Nove Nove to maintain its rights to a government owned building they have been using since 2000 as a site of their cooperative. The issue is being followed up.
National	April 2015	SEM (Secretary of State for the Support and Socio-economic Promotion of Women)	ACbit lobbied this institution to prioritize women SGBV victims from the conflict period so that they can support themselves in receiving health care and providing for their families
National	Oct 2015	Multi-stake holder meeting	ACbit shared results of MSS need-assessments with women survivors accompanied by women survivors sharing their testimonies with the members of PDHJ and MSS. Victims from five districts shared their testimonies and/or accompanied the process.
Atabae (Bobonaro District)	8-9 December 2015	Village leader	Advocated for survivor group Sagrada Familia to participate in government programs such as exhibitions and trainings. The Village head agreed.

Nasionál	5 Outubru 2015	Bispu	ACbit informa Bispu Baucau nian kona-ba situasaun sobrevivente feto-sira nian, husu nia ba nia apoiu ba kontinuasaun servisu ida ne'e.
Nasionál	15 Dezembru 2015	Sobrevivente-sira no representativu-sira husi variedade ministériu prinsipál inklui Asegurasaun Sosiál no Saúde, no Prokuradór Jerál ba Diretus Umanus no Justisa – Partisipante nain 90 (72 feto no 18 mane)	Fasilita semináriu ida ho sobrevivente-sira no ministériu prinsipál-sira ho titulu "Arende husi pasadu ba future ne'ebé diak-liu" ne'ebé fornese oportunidade ida ba sobrevivente-sira atu buka klarifikasaun no apoiu ba isu saúde reprodutiva-sira no pagamentu veteranu-sira.
Ermera		Chefe de Saúde iha munisípiu, doutór iha rezidénsia ba klínika saúde públiku iha munisípiu Ainaro, no Chefe de Suku iha Ermera Villa.	Fasilita dialógu entre doutór-sira, Ministériu de Saúde no sobrevivente-sira atu fasilita asesu ba lalaok-sira atendumtu no referal nian.

2.5 Research Participants

Research participants were sampled purposively. A mix of survivors of conflict related violence and of 'new' violence in the post-conflict setting were invited to participate through the existing networks of the community facilitators. The mix of participants were different for each location varying on local partners, already existing victims groups, historical local context, and of course the availability and willingness of the survivors. From both phases a total of 161 women participated in our action research. Breakdowns are in this following table (2 and 3):

Phase One - Location	Past	Current	Current and Past	Total
Suai	5	12	0	17
Maliana	4	4	1	8
Liquisa	2	6	0	8
Aileu	7	0	1	8
Dili	1	6	1	7
Ermera/Atsabe	6	0	2	8
Ermera/Villa	9	0	0	9
Baucau	12	0	0	12
Los Palos	8	0	0	8
	54	28	5	85

Phase Two - Location	Past	Current	Current and Past	Total
Oecussi	7	0	0	7
Manatuto Lacio	2	6		8
Manatuto Villa	6		1	7
Manufahi	5	6	1	12
Viqueque	11	5	5	21
Ainaro	21	0	0	21
	52	17	7	76

3. Experiences of Community

During the analysis workshops, the 42 community facilitators were given the opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences of the process, on using the tools, and on working as facilitators. The experiences and key lessons shared by community facilitators are outlined below.

“The tools served as triggers; they helped participants to remember their stories.”

Most of the community facilitators used participatory techniques for the first time. Some commented that at first the tools felt unfamiliar. Many were surprised and not used to being involved in processes that were interactive. In general, participants commented that they really appreciated the way the tools engaged participants, made them feel comfortable and able to share their stories and ideas. Participants appreciated that the tools allowed space for people to remember and share their stories, giving all participants an opportunity to talk, but importantly, only if they wanted to. As one participant from the 2016 workshop said, ‘This method doesn’t force people to share their stories, because sharing stories is not easy. If we want to speak it has to be our own decision, victims should not be forced to share’.

“The methodologies seemed strange at first, like using crayons and colouring in the body map, but they really worked to get people to open up and talk.”

3.1.1 Lessons Learned

During the workshop a number of key lessons learned for future work were identified. These are outlined below.

Combining older and younger women facilitates intergenerational understanding and support. Mutual understanding was fostered and the patterns of violence against women and girls were able to be identified as extending across generations and occurring in both times of peace and in times of conflict. As one older participant said, ‘I am like a bridge. I want to motivate the younger generation so they can tell our stories. So they will not just end with us.’ This intergenerational scope also highlighted a key finding discussed in section 5, that women often survive multiple types and recurring violence throughout their lives. The older women, who survived atrocities and discrimination during the conflict, also inspired the younger women to overcome their shame, speak-out and break their silence on domestic violence.

“They have the freedom to speak and give each other motivation to share their experiences.”



At the start of the process, a clear explanation is required. Some participants were confused initially and did not understand that the tools were simply a way to facilitate discussion and sharing. The tools were initially felt to be strange, especially by participants with low literacy skills. Furthermore, in some locations the activities have created a misplaced expectation for material assistance, that had to be managed carefully.

Building rapport is crucial to obtaining quality data. Even though the community facilitators had existing positive relations with participants, it was important to allow adequate time to build rapport in order to make the participants feel comfortable using tools such as body mapping and community mapping. The body mapping tools in particular initially made some of the participants feel unsafe and uncomfortable. Conversely, these tools, when used in a safe and ethical way, assisted in building rapport.

For the above reason, community facilitators made the observation that it was very important to **maintain the same facilitators throughout the research process to make sure women felt comfortable and safe**, and did not have to repeat their stories. As one community facilitator remarked, “If the facilitators change in the middle of the process, they [the participants] will feel shy and not try to become close to the facilitators.”

Participatory approaches take time. All participants agreed that sufficient time is crucial to the integrity of the process. Rushing the process can compromise the quality of the data. The community mapping and timeline tools were the most time-consuming.

The location of the activities is important. Participants felt that a peaceful and calm site, away from regular activities and distractions, was the ideal location for using the tools.

Community facilitators need to **be careful of normative processes and guide participants to share their own views independent of fellow participants.** For example, during the Stone and Flower exercises there was some confusion about the process so that some participants copied exactly what the person before them did instead of sharing their own thoughts.

Community facilitators need to **be mindful of language issues.** Considering the linguistic diversity of Timor-Leste, it was important to ensure sufficient time and skills among community facilitators for translation.

Flexibility is key to success. Facilitators need the skills to be able to adapt to emerging situations. As one community facilitator said, it is important to “use the manual as a guide rather than as a Bible.”

3.2 The Tools

Some points relevant to the specific tools are outlined below.

- The Stone and Flower tool was noted as particularly useful for talking about issues of justice. As noted above, careful explanation is required beforehand so that participants are clear on how the tool can help them share their stories.
- The Timeline was seen as useful for eliciting different stories of the women and allowing them space and time to talk about their own journeys, as well as to piece together what happened to them as a community. As noted above, adequate time must be allocated in order to use this tool well.
- The Photo Story tool was appreciated because the opportunity to visit women in their own homes allowed community facilitators see the women's living conditions firsthand and get a better sense of their welfare and well-being.
- The Memory Box and Postcards tools were noted as particularly effective for sharing stories between older and younger generations, strengthening understanding and empathy. As one participant said, "The postcards really helped children to know the stories of their parents. Like with me, my mother experienced violence in the past. (Despite that) she has been able to raise me."
- The Body Mapping tool was noted as useful for discussing the physical and mental impact of violence the women had experienced, and also for brainstorming about solutions and identifying where medical attention is required. It was highlighted that this tool requires careful explanation and sufficient rapport between participants and facilitators. Some participants said they initially felt embarrassed and even angry that they were being asked to do something 'childish'. However, participants came to appreciate the tool. As one participant remarked, "I liked it because I was able to understand why and how certain parts of my body felt pain." Ensuring female only groups was seen as particularly important for this exercise.
- The Resource Mapping was thought to be helpful to share stories of economic survival before, during, and after the conflict, how things had changed and how women experienced poverty in different ways.
- The Community Mapping tool was highlighted as useful for identifying sites where atrocities occurred. Women indicated that these sites should be recognized as historical sites of significance. As one survivor of sexual violence during armed conflict noted, "These sites where TNI once tortured us are being forgotten and are not mentioned anymore. In these places many women experienced violations, but the government has never acknowledged this." The development of this survivors' collective narrative was thought to be particularly powerful for advocacy and also for trauma healing.





3.3 Community Facilitator Skills

The ideal skill set of community facilitators was discussed in the analysis workshops. Participants worked together to generate a list of desired skills and areas to target for training/mentoring in future research activities. These included:

- General facilitation skills
- Time management
- Understanding of different types of violence and a good framework for understanding the root causes and contributing factors and possible consequences.
- Managing trauma emerging in sessions and knowledge of available and appropriate services for referral as required.
- Understanding and being able to explain the issue of informed consent
- Understanding of the overall research process – the overall objectives and specific details (each method and how it contributes to the overall picture)
- Data collection, in particular basic forms that can easily be filled in would make it easier for facilitators/notetakers and also those who will analyse and process the data.

“I must continue to organise all of us [so we can] continue walking together because we are all widows and we all have suffered, and we are all poor. But that is why we have to move forward and not return to our past, and we will face the challenges together with no need to be afraid.”

Community facilitator, Viqueque, 2015



4. Key Findings

This section will outline the key research findings. The first section discusses the types of violence the participants have experienced. The second part outlines the causes and contributing factors. The third briefly examines the consequences of this violence. The last section focuses on the victims' ability to access services and the obstacles they face in the process. It also introduces the sources from which the survivors gain strength and support.

4.1 Types of Violence

The participants in the action research spoke of many different types of violence they have experienced throughout their lives. Women did not speak of discrete and isolated events but of ongoing, multiple and repeated violations over a prolonged period of time extending beyond the period of armed conflict (1975-1999). Violations were not limited to sexual or physical violence but also included violations of economic, socio-cultural, civil and political rights.

Table 4 below gives an idea of the types of violence the participants experienced. Their experiences of multiple and ongoing violations are not reflected in these figures but will be discussed further below. In addition, it is important to remember that despite the data being generated from a very participatory process, it is likely that some women did not disclose all the violence they have experienced so these figures are likely to be lower than the actual occurrences.

Type of Violence	Number of women (total 161)
Sexual violence (TNI, militia, police)	53
Other violence (torture, detention, threats by TNI, militia or police)	54
Family member killed (husband, father, mother, child, sibling)	53
Sexual violence (non security sector related)	6
Incest	6
Abandoned by partner	25
Domestic violence	18
Stigma from family and community	8

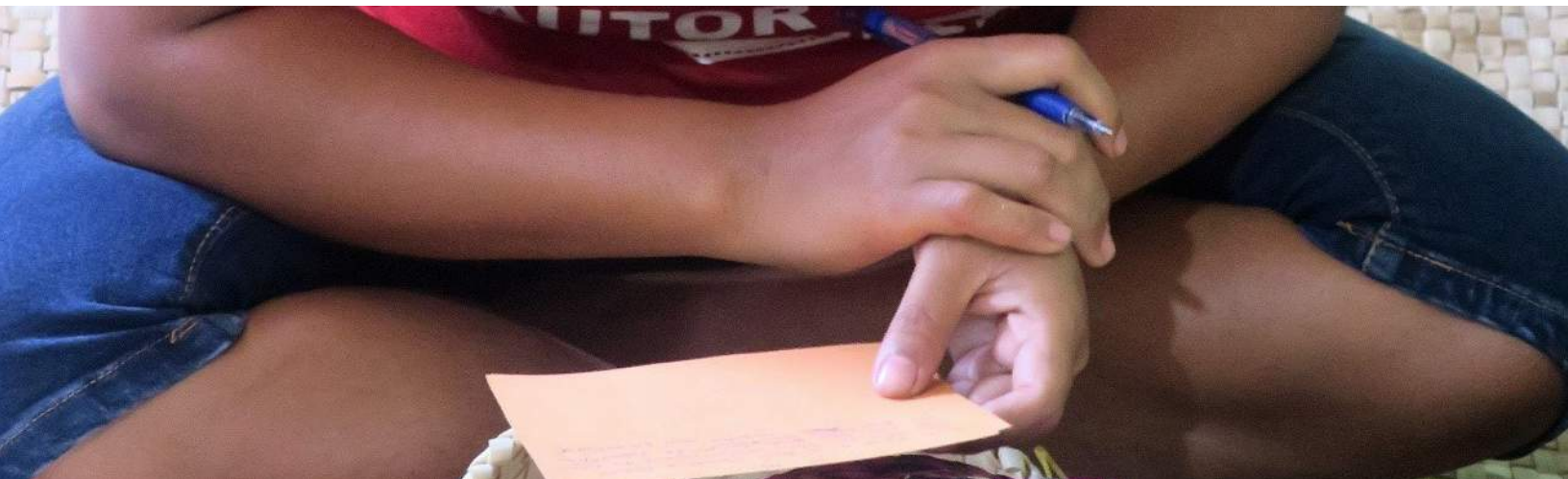
The most commonly discussed types of violence experienced in the past were sexual violence and other types of violence including detention, torture and threats committed by TNI, militia and police. Sexual violence included acts of rape, gang rape as well as sexual slavery where women were forced to 'marry' and held against their will for long periods of time. A total of 11 women explicitly said they had children from sexual violence.⁷ One woman spoke of being forced to take 'medicine' so she wouldn't get pregnant.

Participants also shared that their family members had been killed, especially husbands, but also mothers and fathers, siblings and children. Often losing the support of family put them at greater risk of further violence.

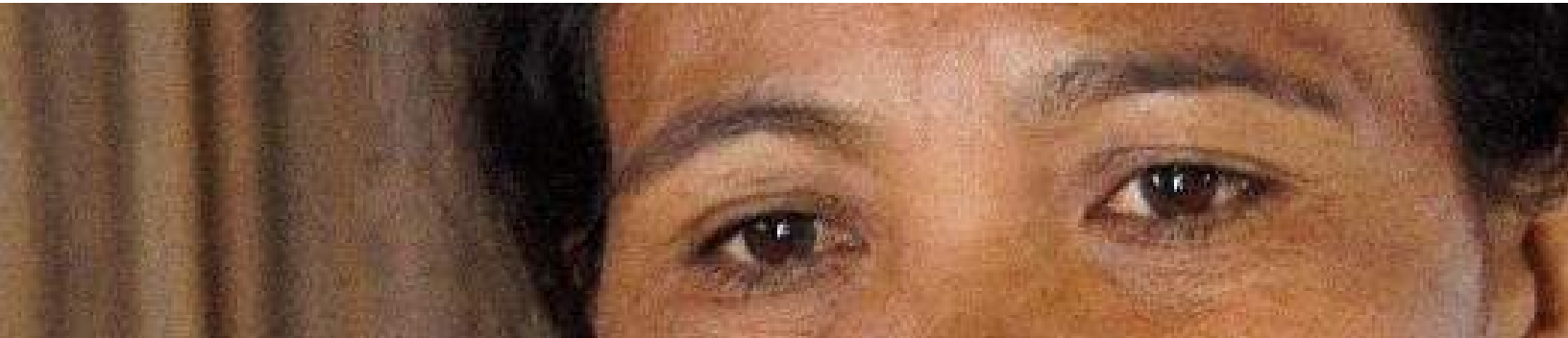
"I was ready to become a victim of sexual slavery for them to defend my family, because they said if I refused, they would shoot all my family members dead."

One participant shared how in 1974 she was member of OPMT and worked on a communal garden to support Falintil forces. She was captured by TNI and forced to be a victim of sexual slavery, becoming pregnant and bearing their children.

A participant spoke about how she was sexually violated from the age of 14 until 22. Most of her family were killed in the forest by Indonesian troops. She became a victim of sexual slavery during the occupation. She was detained in a locked room during this time. When she became pregnant, the perpetrators gave her medicine to induce an abortion.



7. As part of this project, ACbit is currently conducting participatory research with these children (now mostly adults) born out of rape. For more information, refer to the policy paper "Timor-Leste's Children of War: A Promise to Heal."



A total of 12 out of 161 victims talked openly about both past and current violations. These women spoke of a pattern of violence where they still have to grapple with the consequences of past violations while facing with new types of violence including abandonment by their partners and ongoing discrimination and violence from the communities resulting from the stigma of their past experiences. As one participant said, "We still feel heavy because of our initial problems and before they are finished, another problem begins."

Types of violence currently experienced by participants include domestic violence, abandonment, stigma and discrimination. A total of 18 women openly shared their stories of domestic violence including physical and emotional violence, resulting in impoverishment. Of the participants, 25 shared stories of being abandoned by their partners and being left alone to support their children. This put huge economic strain on these survivors. General discussions at the analysis workshops highlighted the issue of stigma towards survivors as an ongoing type of violence frequently experienced and eight women explicitly shared their stories of facing discrimination and abuse from community and family members. Six women disclosed cases of incest and another six spoke of being sexually abused by people in their communities.

"Before the Indonesian military men were our enemies, but now our enemies are Timorese themselves who commit acts of violence in the form of abandonment."

"Women become victims again when they face stigma, face discrimination.... if they want to do something, people accuse them of going out to look for men."

4.2 Causes and Contributing Factors

The women found that one of the root causes of violence against women during conflict and during peacetime is the same, that is: the inequality between women and men. The discrimination and unequal treatment that women face in Timor-Leste is fundamental to the violence they experience.

A range of contributing factors were identified during the research process including:

Conflict: The majority of stories shared by participants referred to acts of violence committed during the Indonesian occupation. Women were victimized because either their family members or they themselves were suspected of working with the resistance against the Indonesians, or they were caught up in military operations against civilian populations. Since Indonesia left Timor-Leste in 1999, there have been periods of political tension and local conflict. These situations have also contributed to a rise in violence against women.

Loss of family support: Many of those who had lost their husband, parents or brothers became impoverished, more vulnerable to other types of violence including sexual violence.. For example, many women found without their immediate social networks and their economic situation worsened, or that they were more vulnerable to sexual violence. The women identified as the most vulnerable frequently had limited family support. Widows were seen as particularly vulnerable and subject to abuse and violence from their husband's family.

Loss of land and property: A number of participants mentioned losing access to land, having no documents to prove their land ownership or having no land and having to stay with family members. Widows were particularly vulnerable, especially in the predominantly patrilineal cultures of Timor Leste and some found their access to land was revoked after the death or disappearance of their husband. This led to economic deprivation and struggle.

Cycle of violence: Because impunity is entrenched and the root causes of violence are not addressed, the abuse and violence is repeated in the next generation. Single mothers are often socially maligned and occupy marginal positions in their communities, and women with children born of rape are particularly stigmatised. In one case, the daughter of a survivor of sexual slavery became a victim of abandonment. Widows and single mothers are often unable to provide protection for their children, and unable to change discriminatory law processes (that govern marriage and pregnancy out of wedlock, for example). This constrains their ability to break out of the cycle of poverty.

"Before they had husbands and lived in their husband's village. But because their husbands have died they have moved back to their own village. But they do not have land anymore. Everyday they work like a labourer, working in the rice fields, gardening, weeding and watering crops. They get \$3 a day. Some people give them money, others give them food in kind."

"The root cause of the problem is the culture of patriarchy....men think they are at a higher level [than women]."

After losing her husband and her own family during the Indonesian occupation and being captured and detained herself, one participant spoke of the struggles she is facing while trying to come to terms with her husband's family who are claiming his veterans payment for themselves.

4.3 Consequences

The consequences of the violence participants faced are diverse and cut across all aspects of their lives. These are summarized below:

Physical: Women frequently spoke of the physical consequences of violence, including broken bones, and untreated sexual and reproductive health issues, which have impacted on their sense of well being, had negative repercussion on their mental health and affected their ability to earn a living and provide for their family. Further, of the survivors who participated in the research many were elderly: 25 were aged over 60 and a further 41 were aged between 50 - 60, highlighting the need for services sensitive to aged care.

Psychological: Women also frequently talked about the psychological consequences of the violence they have experienced. They spoke of shame, self-blame and dread. These feelings all have an impact on their ability to actively engage with their family and community, and hamper their ability to access much-needed services. Desire for justice, sadness, bitterness and anger that the perpetrators remain unpunished and the justice elusive were among the sentiments often voiced by the women. As a consequence they felt neglected and alone, further adversely affecting their mental health.

Social: Participants also shared their experiences of the social consequences of violence, in particular the ostracism and stigmatization by communities and the bullying from their families, especially that experienced by widows from their husband's families. This also affects their ability to engage in their communities and fulfill their social needs. As one woman shared, 'I am a victim, but when I leave my house people in the community say I am out looking for men. I was abandoned by my husband, so I want to be involved in community activities.'

Economic: Economic vulnerability was seen as a major issue facing survivors. The economic consequences of violence are diverse and include loss of land, livestock, farming equipment and personal possessions, the loss of family support structures and also loss of the ability to work through physical injury or social exclusion. The majority of women and their families were subsistence farmers or small traders and had little to cushion them in times of crisis.

"Survivors are really angry about the process... Their stories were collected by CAVR. But, especially for women victims, there has been no justice..."



"They took us and hid us and raped us again, even today I still have the wounds, there is no suffering like it..."

In the early years of the occupation, one participant was gang raped by Indonesian soldiers until she felt she was going to die. She still suffers physically.

4.4 Barriers to Accessing Services and Survival Strategies

4.4.1 Services Accessed and Barriers

Facing these diverse consequences of violence, survivors need access to a range of services and support to facilitate their healing. These services include medical, psycho-social and economic support, safe spaces, support for developing vocational skills or to resume educational opportunities, legal aid, and access to justice.

However, a review of the data on research participants shows that few are accessing justice or services. Only 33 women spoke about having access to justice with two of these being through customary processes. Of these, only 12 cases concluded with a final decision including cases of domestic violence, abandonment, incest, and sexual violence (by a perpetrator who is not a family member). This also included one case where a woman was able to get her husband's murderer convicted, a militiaman who committed this crime during the Indonesian occupation. This means that a total of 131 women out of 161 did not speak about accessing justice, either customary or formal.

Justice Mechanism	No	Comments
Just reported to police	4	Of these one case of infidelity was referred back to community level dispute settlement mechanisms and one case was referred back to the husband's family to resolve. No outcome with the other two cases.
Case Decided	12	DV 4, Abandonment 1, Husband killed during Indonesian occupation 1, Incest 3 and SV from non family member 3
Case in Process	12	There has been little progress on these cases for various reasons.
Customary Law	2	Both cases of abandonment
No justice mechanism accessed	131	

Participants provided the following reasons for not being able to access justice:

- Case is considered closed with unfavorable outcomes
- Lack of faith in the legal process
- Lack of clarity about the activities of CAVR (Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation) and how their contribution to the report has been used
- Lack of attention from local and national leaders to their cases and situation
- Lack of knowledge about how to obtain justice and their own legal standing

- Lack of knowledge and ability to organize documents to receive assistance and process cases
- The silence, embarrassment and trauma surrounding their experiences still renders the victims unable to report their cases
- A lengthy justice process makes them lose hope of ever obtaining justice
- The alleged perpetrators have fled to Indonesia
- Fear for own safety and security: many have received threats from their partners, husbands or other family members which prevents them from reporting or even talking about their experiences.
- Economic dependency on their husbands/partners for their own and their children's livelihood (including paying school fees)
- No possession of assets (land, property, livestock, etc.)
- Lack of time and economic resources needed to access justice

In terms of services, a total of 67 women did not mention any services or support from either government or non-government agencies. Of the remaining 94 women, some spoke of multiple sources of support while others only mentioned a single source. Of these, the majority was support from the government of Timor-Leste, with only one from the Indonesian government (Indonesian Embassy) and 15 from non-governmental sources including one woman who spoke of borrowing money from a friend. The vast majority of this support was financial and women most frequently mentioned using this for meeting their daily needs and supporting their children's education. One woman used the money to repair her husband's grave and three women spoke of using credit to start up a small business. Only one woman mentioned health services, speaking of support from ACbit to access health care, and two specifically mentioned counseling support from Fokupers.

Type of services accessed	No.
Veteranos/Matires (Government support for veterans and their family members)	37
Terceira Idade/Idozus// Elderly Pension	14
Bolsa de estudo// Study grant	3
Bolsa da Mãe// Small funds to families for primary education	14
Ministry of Social Solidarity	4
SEM	1
Osan Humanitarian// Humanitarian funds	2
Timor Aid	1
Fokupers	5
Indonesian Embassy	1
Alola Foundation	2
ACbit	7
Moris Diak Credit// Small Credit loan	1
Koperasi Kredit// Small Credit loan	1
Borrow from friend	1
No services mentioned	67

Types of Assistance Provided by the Government

Support Service	Function and Eligibility
Bolsa da Mãe	Supports vulnerable families to provide education and health care for their children aged 0-17 years (maximum three). The family must guarantee the children are enrolled in school and have received the required health vaccinations. The money is on a scale starting from \$5 per month and depending on need and is given in 6 monthly installments. Program is under review and currently closed to applications
Humanitarian Assistance	Emergency assistance for families and communities affected by natural disaster or crisis. Could include food assistance, housing repair, clothing or household items.
Veteranos	Veteran's pension given to veterans of the resistance. There are three different categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 4a7: Clandestine members are given a one-off pension ranging on their service. Most victims who have worked with ACbit if they have received a veterans pension have received this or Martires. ○ 8a14: Members from the armed resistance receive 276.00 USD every month ○ 15a19: Given to those who supported the resistance from outside of Timor-Leste. They also receive 276.00 USD per month
Martires	Martires is veteran pension given to the family member(s) of a fallen veteran.
Bolsu Estudu	Educational support for the children of veterans
Idozus	Also called Tercera Idade, is a pension for men and women aged over 60 years. They receive USD\$180 every 6 months.
Terceira Idade	This is an elderly pension given to citizens 65 years and above
SEM	Direct economic assistance (previously SEPI) through the Secretary of State for the Support and Socio-economic Promotion of Women

Participants spoke of the following barriers to accessing services:

- Lack of knowledge and information about available services and how to access them
- Fear of service providers and concern that they would not be safe, respected or their case would not remain confidential.
- Isolation from support network exacerbated by stigmatization from their family and community
- They are still traumatized, and not yet spoken about violence they experienced so feel overwhelmed with the idea of seeking help and having to tell their story.
- Lack of information about entitlements and processes and inability to fill out forms and engage with formal bureaucracy.
- They worry that seeking services will jeopardize the financial support they receive from their husbands/ partners.
- Medical services providers do no screen for histories of violence.

"I have experienced chronic headaches for years and the doctors always give me medicine (ai-moruk) but it never works. During the Indonesian time I was beaten by TNI soldiers and once they kicked me in the head. The doctors never asked me about my past so I never thought to mention this experience to them."

Participant in Ermera workshop

Access to Services [2015-2016]

Small funds for livelihood support	30
Referral to Health Department for Medical Care	2
Assistance for Housing	4
Total Number of Women Survivors Receiving Service/ Assistance	36
Total Number of Women Survivors Still Awaiting Support	125

Support for the 36 women came from the Ministry of Social Solidarity, the President's Fund, as well as the UN Trust Fund for Victims of Torture. On top of this list, 13 women survivors also received counseling support from Fokupers.

4.4.2 Sources of Support

The research importantly highlights the tenacity and resilience of women in the face of adversity. Despite losing economic and support networks and resources they have survived, working hard to support themselves and their children.

Participants mentioned a range of sources of support and strength including:

- Accessing small livelihoods assistance This was seen to be vital to facilitate some economic independence for women from their families/husbands/partners and enable them to move forward with their lives. Funds provided by MSS and facilitated through Acbit.
- Monetary assistance to help with educating and supporting their children Again, enabling economic independence was seen as particularly important, especially concerning their children. Regular assistance from government was mentioned as vital in this regard. Funds provided through one of MSS' services but facilitated through Acbit.
- Owning their own land and/or house and having the documents to prove it. Having these assets registered legally in their own name was noted as a great sense of security for survivors.
- Access to safe spaces. Women spoke of the importance of having a safe space in cases where they felt threatened for disclosing, reporting and seeking services. The women shelters, or Uma Mahon, run by Fokupers were mentioned as a particular source of support.
- Networks with other survivors. Survivor networks were frequently mentioned as a source of support. These were seen as particularly important to conduct joint advocacy, provide social support, encouragement and friendship. Importantly, these networks were also seen as an important way of obtaining information about services, entitlements, and the processes necessary to access support.
- Family support. Women deemed as the most vulnerable by community facilitators were those without any family support. Parental support, both economic and emotional, was mentioned as crucial by a number of survivors. Others noted that their children gave them the courage to persist and carry on.
- Accessing health care and trauma support. Women survivors who received assistance from NGOs, including ACbit and Fokupers, to access much needed health services and psycho-social support were able to become stronger and more resilient in supporting their families.
- Security and basic comfort for their homes. In many cases, women survivors who lived as single mothers had little security and comfort in their homes. Providing them with basic assistance enabled them to feel more secure about their living conditions, and more confident about their future.

"For us women, we see these cases and it's really sad that we face this violence but we continue to struggle for our friends."

Importantly, a positive outcome of the research process has been to bolster the sense of solidarity between women victims.

5. A Framework for Empowering Women Survivors Working to End Impunity for Sexual and Gender-based Violence

"As for my dreams about the future, I don't need other things although I live in an uncomfortable house. Whether people help me out or not it doesn't matter. All I care about is education for my two daughters and my granddaughter."

Survivor and community facilitator, Viqueque, 2015.



This participatory action research presented an opportunity to listen intently to the views of women survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. ACbit's team and community facilitators tried to capture the experiences and views of more than 160 women survivors, from 13 districts and across two generations. Their stories, photographs and words are captured in a photo-book about this research. Community facilitators together with ACbit, Fokupers and NVA, reflected on their key findings during the analysis workshops held in 2015 and 2016. During these workshops and group sessions, they discussed strategies to help survivors to best access existing services and advocate for their needs and rights.



Through this process, we developed a new framework to help guide a holistic long-term approach to working with survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. The framework involves four inter-related pillars: 1) Ensuring the foundations for sustaining life, including to meet their basic needs as human beings; 2) Strengthening women survivors' resilience of spirit; 3) Building recognition, security and access to justice. 4) Creating initiatives with the next generation to bring hope for a better future. We created a simple pictorial representation of this framework (above), enriched through discussions with facilitators and survivors in various workshops and group discussions. We believe that this holistic approach is required in the long-term work to end violence against women.

1. Ensuring the Foundations for Sustaining Life

The struggle against impunity for sexual and gender-based violence fail when victims cannot meet their basic needs such as food and water, shelter, health care, and education for their families. When the foundations to sustain life are on shaky ground, women must prioritize their survival. Government officials want to wish away the past by ignoring it. Women victims use their meager resources to deal with loss (of life, security, land, livelihood, shelter), while facing discrimination and exclusion. Thus, long-term strategies to empower women survivors and end impunity must include efforts to help them meet their basic needs. The participants of this research included the following strategies:

- Sustain efforts to strengthen the voices and agency of women survivors so they can demand resources needed to mitigate the long-term impact of conflict on women. This includes special programs to help women survivors of sexual and gender-based violence to secure the foundations for building a new life for themselves and their families.
- Facilitate skill sharing and strategies to fulfill basic needs and enhance economic livelihoods such as information on available support, credit opportunities, new technologies and skill development.
- Provision of information, accompaniment and advocacy to promote survivors access to services. Participants discussed using women's groups as a platform to provide specific information on rights, entitlements and available services (health, counseling economic support etc) and to ensure that women are accompanied to appointments with service providers and legal/justice actors to provide moral support and advocacy as needed.
- Outreach and awareness raising with service providers. At the same time, participants thought it was vital to continue outreach to service providers to ensure they are trained in the guiding principles of working with survivors (safety, respect, confidentiality and non-discrimination).

2. Strengthening the Resilience of Spirit

Women survivors spoke about the inner and spiritual strength they needed to recover after experiences of brutal violence and inhumanity. They suffer deep traumatic consequences of these experiences originating both in the past (during the conflict) and in the present context.

- Provide social support and motivation to women survivors so they can participate in social activities, facilitate peer-led trauma healing workshops, work together to conduct home visits to other survivors, and share stories to support each other.
- Establish women's groups as a forum for solidarity, mutual support and social and political action. Many survivors feel alone. Helping to create links between women survivors (of gender-based violence from the past and present) can break this isolation. The existence of these groups for survivors can also boost opportunities to meet with local government officials to obtain information or conduct advocacy on their needs. Women survivors can accompany each other to engage service providers to provide support and act as advocates, and conduct home visits to survivors (particularly those who are physically unable to attend community meetings due to illness or because they are elderly).
- Involve religious and traditional leaders (male and female) with progressive views on gender equality

3. Building Recognition, Security and Access to Justice for Women Survivors

Decades after their experience of violence, survivors still struggle for recognition from their families and communities. They continue to feel unsafe and unable to access justice in their daily lives.

Recognition

- Ongoing outreach to women survivors. This includes continuing efforts to reach other survivors through existing community groups or newly formed women's groups, and also more formally through rolling out the participatory action research and follow-up action. Community facilitators in two districts were particularly interested in conducting more research as they felt there are many survivors in their districts who would benefit from participating.
- Through the strategies mentioned above, women thought it important to continue working across groups of past and present survivors and supporting intergenerational work. They thought it important to bridge the divide commonly made in researching and programming on past and current survivors. This approach will also challenge the government's bias in providing assistance for new cases of gender-based violence while being silent about survivors from the past.
- Memorialization of significant sites and dates of past atrocities to promote social acceptance and respect and generate healing. Women felt that no official acknowledgement of the violence women have experienced sends a message that what happened has been accepted, that survivors deserved it and that it could happen again. Currently, most memorials and events focus on the experiences of men during the conflict.
- Security. Develop innovative approaches to ensure protection from discrimination and violence. The vulnerability of women victims makes them susceptible to new forms of violence, including violence from land conflict, religious or communal conflict, as well as domestic violence.
- Rebuild women survivor's trust in the legitimacy of state institutions, including the security sector and law enforcement. Survivors need support to restore their status as citizens. Being a citizen means removing barriers to basic citizenship documents such as ID cards, marriage and birth certificates, non-discriminatory practice in hiring for government positions and access to government benefits such as scholarships, housing and poverty assistance, and basic services such as education and health care.

Access to Justice

- Improve ways to ensure women's access to justice, for both serious and everyday issues that they face. This should include building a safe space around women survivors in order to strengthen and support them in seeking justice and overcoming the obstacles they face. This means allocating sufficient efforts and resources in legal assistance and support programmes at the local level, and helping survivors and their communities build their knowledge and understanding of their rights.

"We want to continue with the PAR activities because there are still many women survivors in our district and they have not yet received information like this."

"We ask the government to pay attention to these locations where violations against women occurred, so that [we] always remember."

4. Creating Hope for the Future

Women survivors must be able to maintain the hope to build a better life in the future for themselves and their children. These hopes may include ensuring access to education, information and technology, livelihood projects, for themselves or their children etc. Many survivors spoke about their own broken dreams, and their resolve that their children get a good education. Our approach must be transformative and long-term, working with the children of survivors to improve their future. Another element of hope involves creating initiatives with the next generation, facilitating an intergenerational dialog about violence and the potential for transformation.

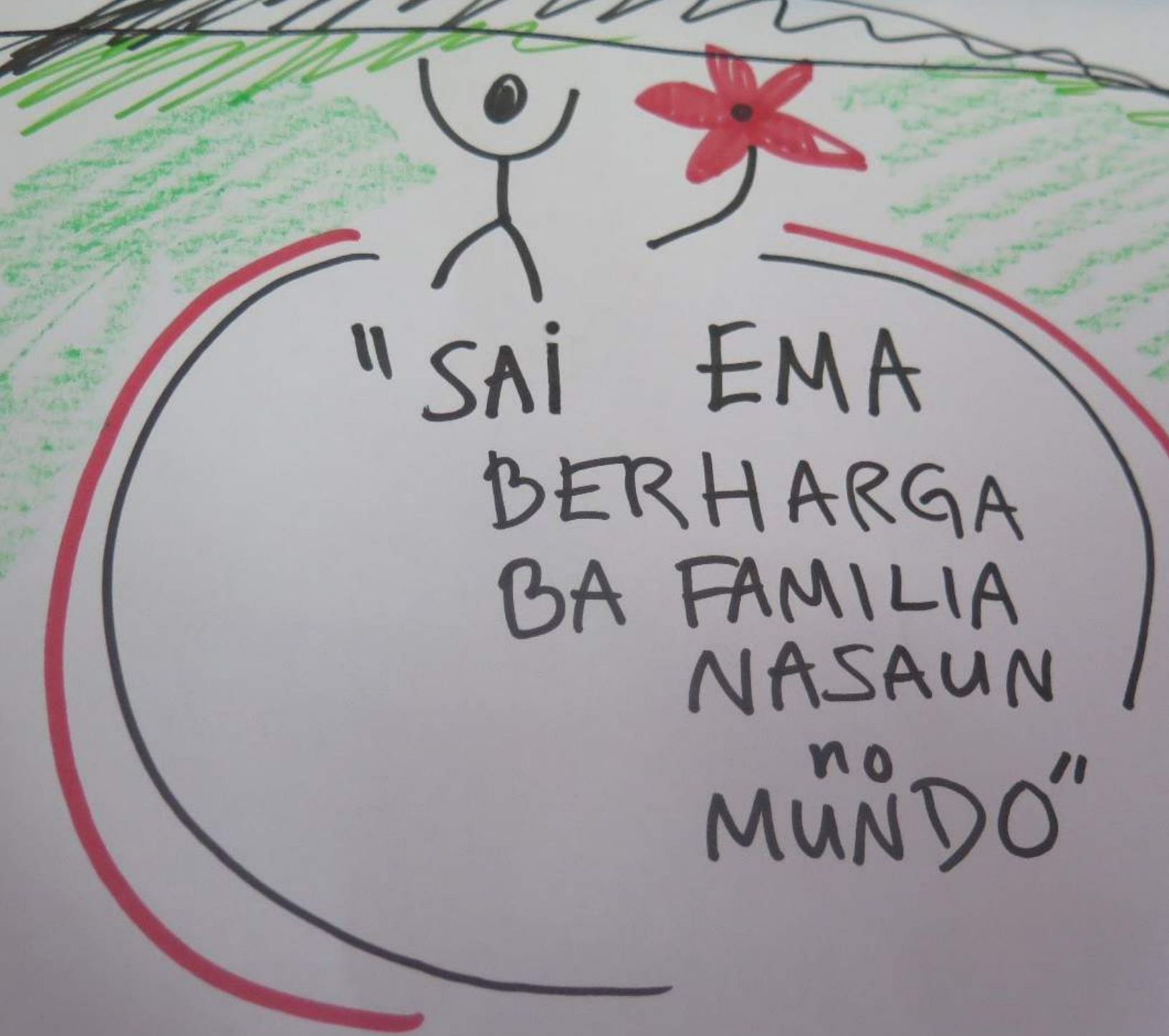
- Provide support for the children of survivors to assist them in accessing education and improve their livelihood, and reconcile with their family history.
- Ensure the meaningful engagement between women survivors and their children and other family members. This includes creating opportunities for intergenerational dialogue, and family-centered reconciliation based on truth and recognition.
- Involve members of the younger generation to document and understand personal and local histories, patterns of discrimination and inequality that shape women's experience in conflict.

6. Conclusion



This action research has provided ACbit with the strong reminder of the long-term and intergenerational impact of sexual and gender-based violence. The consequence of this violence demands a programming and policy response that is holistic: dealing with the trauma, psychological and socio-economic effects especially on women survivors of sexual and gender-based violence that happened during the conflict, and violence that is still taking place in time of "peace". We must improve ways to empower women survivors by helping them to access services, and by ensuring women's access to justice, assisting them to rebuild their lives during and after conflict, recognizing the violence they endured and its impact. Our approach must be transformative and long-term, looking to the future and trying to promote change in the underlying structures and conditions of discrimination and inequality that shape women's experience in conflict and post-conflict settings. We must look to address violations of civil and political, as well as social and economic rights. Finally, any kind of intervention must ensure the meaningful participation of women survivors. They must be actively involved in identifying and advocating for their own needs and priorities and in developing solutions.

We are indebted to the women survivors who participated in this action research, giving their precious time to learning to listen to each other and supporting each other. We hope that the government of Timor-Leste and their development partners will increase its attention to the plight of women survivors, by providing more resources to help empower survivor, enabling them to take on a critical role to end violence against women.



"SAI EMA
BERHARGA
BA FAMILIA
NASAUN
NO MUNDO"

"Become a meaningful person for family, nation, and world."

