



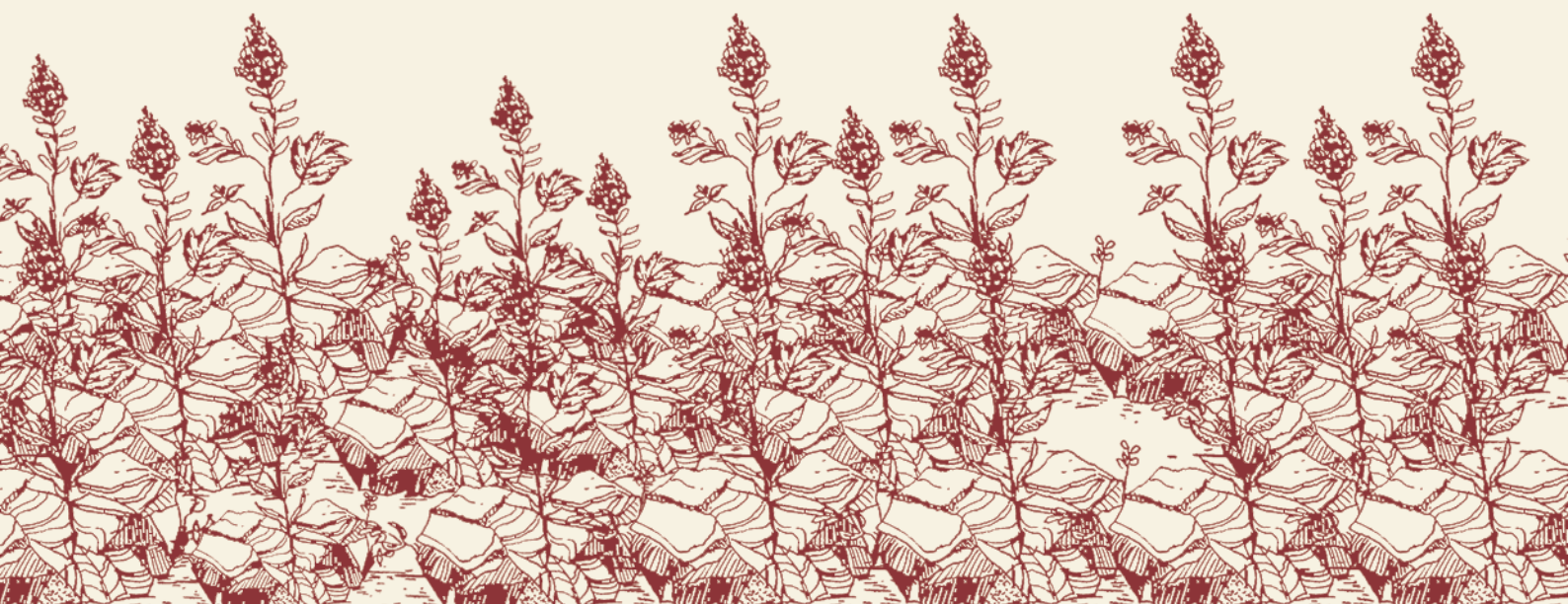
MISEREOR
DIE HILFSGEMEINSCHAFT DER DEUTSCHEN

TIMOR LESTE'S CHILDREN OF WAR

A PROMISE TO HEAL

POLICY PAPER

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Title

Timor-Leste's Children of War:
A Promise to Heal

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"I was not shunned by my family, but by the community and the church. When people called me names my father said, "Whatever the consequences, she is our child. Her sins are also our sins; it is a burden, a cross, that we bear as her parents."

"One day, my child and I were in a line in front of the altar to receive the baptism sacrament. There were only two people before we got to the priest, when we were pulled out by a church official... He said the priest told him to do this. My child was not allowed to be baptised because he was born out of wedlock. My parents and I were not allowed to take communion, confess our sins, or to pray during the month of Holy Mary."

Timor Leste's Children of War

A Promise to Heal



INTRODUCTION

The Chega! report published by the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR) about human rights violations committed during the Indonesian occupation of Timor-Leste (1975-1999) highlights the discrimination experienced by women victims of sexual abuse and their children born out of sexual violence. The Commission also made specific recommendations to redress these issues. However, more than a decade after the final report was launched, little progress has been made on this issue. In the past years, Asosiasaun Chega! ba ita (ACbit) has taken the first steps to understand the plight of these children (now mostly young adults) living in a newly independent Timor-Leste. Conducting an action research project that included two workshops, a simple survey, and with the participation of 22 survivors, we have compiled a rarely documented account of the emotional, legal and economic challenges these young individuals are facing.

This paper will review the relevant findings and recommendations of the CAVR report, provide an overview of the international legal framework and programmes in relation to children with similar circumstances, and, most importantly, present the key findings and recommendations from our participatory action research as articulated by the survivors themselves.



CAVR hatudu duni katak aifunan mos
bele moris iha kadeia ida

CAVR has shown that flowers can grow
in a prison



CAVR

FINDINGS

AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through its truth-seeking process, the CAVR found that women experienced different forms of sexual violence by the Indonesian military, including sexual slavery. The CAVR report states:

"It was common practice for members of the Indonesian security forces to keep East Timorese women in detention in military bases for reasons that were not related to a military objective. These women, who were sometimes detained for many months and sometimes years, were often raped on a daily basis or on demand by the officer who controlled them, and often also by other soldiers. In addition, they were forced to do unpaid domestic work"

"The victims of this form of sexual slavery were not free to move about or travel, or to act independently in any way. It was not uncommon for the "ownership rights" over these women to be passed on from an officer who was finishing his tour of duty to his replacement or another officer. In some situations, women forced into these situations became pregnant and gave birth to children of several different officers during the years in which they were the victims of sexual slavery"

"In general, Indonesian officers who were responsible for fathering these children through rape or sexual slavery accepted no ongoing responsibility to support their material well-being. Mothers of these children faced significant difficulties in providing for them. This was particularly problematic because former victims of rape and sexual slavery at the hands of the Indonesian military forces were often considered "soiled" and unsuitable for marriage by East Timorese men, and faced ongoing social stigma"

The Commission also found that women who gave birth to children of rape were blamed for their own misfortune and ostracised by their families and communities. This treatment extended to their children who were later ridiculed, mistreated, or sometimes completely isolated. More often than not, the children, being born out of

wedlock, were not accepted by the church, which led to further difficulties in obtaining a baptism certificate, citizenship documentation and, consequently, in accessing various services. The economic and social marginalisation of the single mothers often deprived them of the possibility to provide their children with necessary schooling. Only in cases where husbands or other male relatives gave their names to the children could these hurdles be avoided, but discrimination from the communities prevailed.

In response to the continued discrimination of women victims of violence and their children, CAVR made a number of key recommendations to the government of Timor-Leste, civil society, religious organisations and Timorese community leaders. These included scholarships for children and provision of special assistance for single mothers such as counselling, peer support, livelihood skills training, and access to micro-credit schemes to improve their day-to-day existence. Other recommendations included provision of educational and memorial programmes to recognize past violence and commit to ridding Timorese society of violence. The CAVR proposed the establishment of a follow-up institution to ensure the implementation of these recommendations. Unfortunately, it has taken 12 years since the report was launched in 2005 for the Timorese government to establish this institution, named Centro Nacional Chega! (CNC). This report will be submitted to the CNC to demand that the plight of victims, particularly women victims of sexual violence and their children, be addressed immediately.

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND INNOVATIVE PROGRAMMES

A growing body of international resolutions, treaties and guidelines aim to stop violence against women and children in conflict. Children born out of sexual abuse remain mostly invisible. Currently there is no recognition of children born out of sexual abuse as a specific, protected category, but several multilateral treaties outlaw discrimination on the basis of a wide range of factors, including illegitimacy and being conceived as a result of violence.

Timor-Leste ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that includes provisions against discrimination, and has an Optional Protocol on children in conflict.¹ By these standards children born out of sexual violence should not experience any kind of social stigma or reduction of their physical and economic security. Although other regulations protect children in war-torn environments (such as the Fourth Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols), these documents also do not explicitly cover the rights of children born out of sexual abuse committed during wartime.

Studies on the issue of “war babies” note that even though according to the CRC every child is entitled to a nationality (Article 7), statelessness is a common issue for children born out of sexual abuse. Being perceived as a

common issue for children born out of sexual abuse. Being perceived as a member of the enemy group can result in expulsion from the community. In addition to that, being born out of wedlock and the inability to name a father can compel religious (or state) authorities to refuse the registration of the child, thus depriving him or her of documents of identification, and consequently, lack of access to education, health care and other social benefits.²

Another aspect of the issue is the identity of the father, his rights and possibilities of contact between the child and father. In some cases this issue is not relevant as the identity of the father is almost impossible to trace. In some countries, the enforcement of the rapist's parental rights as a father may have long-lasting psychological effects for the mother, thus bringing about legislation that terminates a rapist's parental rights.³ In conflict or post-conflict scenarios it is rather the absence of the father that causes problems for the child.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Islamic authorities issued *fatwas* against the discrimination of children born out of sexual abuse.⁴ In 1993 Pope John Paul II stated in a letter to the Archbishop of Sarajevo that children born as a consequence of sexual abuse must be accepted and loved by both their mothers and their communities, as every child is innocent. These public statements by religious leaders can have a great impact on increased public acceptance. Globally, relatively few NGOs focus specifically on the needs of these children, providing services ranging from family tracing and counselling to medical care, skills trainings and sensitization of the general public.

Despite these positive developments and constructive ideas, the missing legal framework leaves these children vulnerable and devoid of the equal opportunities available to their peers.

An inspiring example is Rwanda where, according to estimates of Amnesty International, between 250.000 and 500.000 women were raped during the 1994 genocide producing at least 20.000 unwanted children. Although the plight of these women and their children remains on the margins of the state's attention, local NGOs are trying to provide psychological support for the survivors and access to health services as well as microfinance schemes. The Survivors Fund (SURF) cooperates with small survivors' organisations like Kanyarwanda to offer trauma counselling, secure livelihood opportunities and help children born out of rape gain access to education.

They have so far assisted approximately 500 children through primary and secondary education.⁵

Elsewhere the picture is less encouraging. Even though there is widespread knowledge about the atrocities committed against women in Bosnia as well as the existence of children born out of sexual violence during the conflict, until now no NGO focuses on helping them in particular, or attempts to cater to their specific needs, due to the widespread shame and stigmatization surrounding the issue.

- 1 CRC, PART I, Article 2, 1. "States parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, *birth* [emphasis added] or other status."
- 2 R. Charli, Carpenter, *Born of War: Protecting Children of Sexual Violence Survivors in Conflict Zones*, Kumarian Press, Connecticut, USA, 2006.
- 3 Michael, Goodheart, "Sins of the Fathers: War Rape, Wrongful Procreation, and Children's Human Rights," *Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 6, Iss. 3, 2007, pp. 307-324.
- 4 *Al-Šajh D'allulakk, Ali D'allulakk, al Ima al akbar, Hukmu at fali n-nisa l al-mugtesibati fi l-Busneti wa l-Harsaki* ("Regulations related to the children of raped women in BiH"), Buhnus wa fatawa
- 5 For more information see: <https://survivors-fund.org.uk/>



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ACBIT'S PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN OF SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE

ACbit was established to promote findings and recommendations of gender-based violence. The organisation has conducted several projects with women survivors of past conflicts. Through participatory action research methods ACbit has managed to gain a detailed picture of the challenges and difficulties these women face while empowering them to organise themselves and represent their interests to local and national authorities. In the course of this work, ACbit has encountered the children some of these women bore to their assaulters, children who are now young adults and



who all their lives have suffered the consequences of the violations experienced by their mothers. Discrimination and marginalisation have had long-lasting psychological and economic effects. In order to better understand and tackle these issues, ACbit initiated a series of activities with the focus placed specifically on children of survivors.



ACbit conducted two participatory action research workshops between 2016 and 2017, providing the children, for the first time in their lives, with a safe space to talk about their experiences and for the mothers to share their stories with them. The first workshop facilitated an intergenerational dialogue involving both the children and their mothers, while the second concentrated on the children themselves,

their relationship with the past, and their hopes for the future. The methods of story-telling and trauma healing were developed by ACbit and AJAR adapted from the manual *Unlearning Impunity: A Guide to Understanding and Action for Women Survivors* (AJAR, 2015).

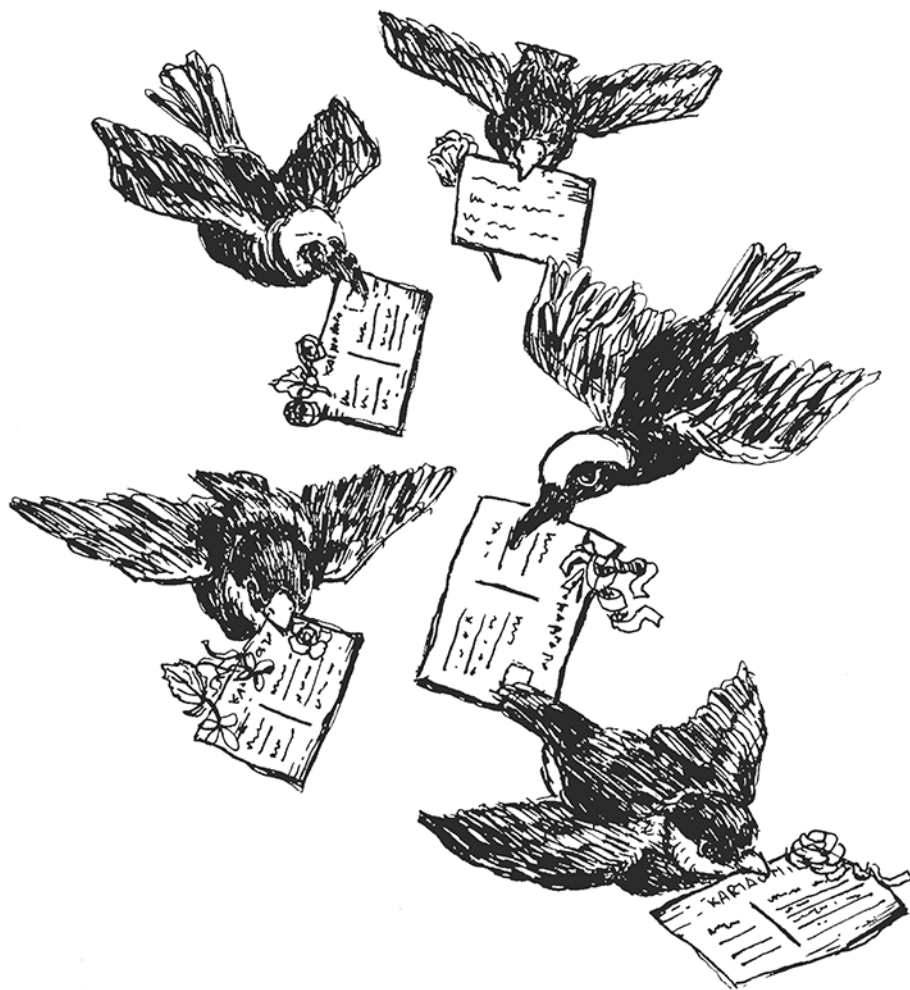


During the first workshop, held in April 2016, mothers and children shared their pain, thoughts, fears and dreams through a series of participatory activities. After an introductory session, the “Stone and Flower” technique enabled both the children and the mothers to share their understanding of truth, justice, freedom from violence and healing. Later both groups participated in an exercise to deepen their self-awareness and share their perception of themselves. ACbit facilitated an important discussion about who, if anyone, in their lives took on the role of father. Finally, the mothers and children wrote “Postcards of Love” to each other creating a channel of communication through which they could express their emotions and unburden their souls, even to those who had already passed away.

At the second workshop, a year later, ACbit presented its key findings from the action research, focusing specifically on the children's stories and their particular needs. The exercise *Mota Moris* (River of Life) highlighted formative life experiences, both positive and negative, and put these into context to achieve an overall hopeful view of the future. The same purpose was served by pairing symbols with their past and current situations, an exercise that also

offered feedback for ACbit’s work and possible changes that any future involvement may entail. Body mapping (*Mapa Isin*) provided further help to define spaces of sadness and hurt on the body, but also places of joy, and connect these to personal histories. The workshop also included a session for reflection with Madre Lourdes that brought most of the children to tears signalling the importance of acceptance by the religious community she represents. Finally the group visited the Resistance Archive where the children gained strength from information about the revolutionary struggle to continue their own fight for recognition and justice.

As a result of these activities, ACbit has identified four key issues raised by the children of survivors of violence.





Timor-Leste's Children of War

KEY ISSUE 1

DIFFICULTIES IN **ACCESSING CITIZENSHIP** **DOCUMENTS**

According to the Constitution, every child born in Timor-Leste as well as those born overseas to at least one Timorese parent has a right to Timorese citizenship. In independent Timor-Leste, newborn babies are registered in the hospital where they were born and this registration suffices during the application for further documentation. Most of the children in this research, however, were born outside of a hospital and most importantly during the time of the Indonesian occupation. Although there is no doubt that they meet the criteria for citizenship, they face difficulties in securing their citizenship papers. Out of 22 children involved in this research, 7 (32%) are still unable to obtain these papers to the present day.

Although Timorese legislation outlaws discrimination against any child based on the circumstances of his/her birth and parentage,⁶ in practice these children face many hurdles.

⁶ Kódigu ba labarik (2003): Parte I, Artigu 3° a) *Proibisaun ba diskriminasaun, iha termus ne'ebe la iha labarik ida sei sujeita ba diskriminasaun oin sa deit, independentemente konsiderasaun ruma ba nia rasa, kor kulit, seksu, lian, relijiaun, opiniaun politika ka seluk husi labarik, husi labarik nia inan aman ka ninia reprezentantes legais, ka husi ninia orijen nasional, etniku ka sosial, riku soin, inkapasidade, nasimentu ka husi situa-saun ruma seluk.*



Reliance on baptism certificate as basis for citizenship documents

Many of the mothers of these children first faced difficulties when they tried to acquire baptism certificates for their newborns. In many cases, local churches were unwilling to issue the document without the identification of a father. In most cases the women had no information about the father except that he was an Indonesian soldier. From the perspective of the church, these children were born out of wedlock.

Earlier I tried to get a certificate, but the "katekista" said that they couldn't give me a certificate because there is no father. But then I asked, "Why did you baptise me without a father? ... In the Bible they accept that Jesus is Mary's son, even though she is a virgin, so why can't I have the certificate without a father?"

Although no specific regulation states that a baptism certificate is required for the acquisition of an RDTL certificate, in practice this is almost always the case.

Reluctance to provide single parent birth certificate

Although Timorese regulations allow for mother-only birth certificates,⁷ the reality is more complicated. Officials from the civil registration office tend to insist that information about the father be supplied. More than a fourth of the children interviewed (6 out of 22) lack some documentation for this reason. In one case the mother was able to obtain a baptism certificate, but the civil registry officials still insisted on a name and information about the father.

When I took the children to church to be baptised, the priest asked, "Whose children are they?" I answered, "Because this is war, these are children of a military officer." The priest couldn't accept it. I brought the baptism certificate to the civil registration office, and they asked about their father, his address, and his family... I answered, "I have never been to Java. How could I know her father's family?" But they insisted...they would not process it."⁸

⁷ Law No. 9/2002, Chapter II, Section 8:1. An original citizen of Timor-Leste is one who was born in the national territory: a) A child of a father or mother born in Timor-Leste; b) A child of incognito parents, stateless parents or parents of unknown citizenship; c) A child of a foreign father or mother who, being over seventeen years old, declares to become an East Timorese national of his or her own accord.

⁸ Feto Iha Otel Flamboyan; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DhdMsW_78JE



Using a male relative's name as "father"

In order to get around this obstacle, many women put the name of other male family members under that of the father. The more fortunate ones had a husband who accepted the child or a male relative who took the child under his name, allowing for the documents to be issued. However, these documents reflect a jointly created un-truth that may complicate matters in the future and continues to frustrate the children who feel that their whole existence has been built on a lie.

I have a birth certificate and an RDTL [one], but my date of birth on it is incorrect. My mother had to use a false date in order to use the name of her dead husband as a father on the documents.

Enscribing "incognito" in place of the father's name

Another way officials have dealt with this issue is to write "incognito" (in Tetun, *inkonitu* meaning unknown) in the section for the father's name. Although this is in line with regulations that allow for mother-only birth certificates, victims feel the unfamiliar word may feed into the discrimination against them in their communities. One solution may be just to leave the section blank, as is the growing custom in many countries where single mothers register one name only on their children's birth certificates.

From junior high school until now, my father's name was "inkonitu" on all of my certificates, and I managed to finish university, but later it could become a problem.

Later amendments to the documents verges on the impossible as changes require additional documents (marriage certificate or father's birth certificate) that are almost always unavailable. Currently there is no regulation that would enable the correction of these mistakes or provide these children with an RDTL certificate. The lack of these essential documents may limit children's possibilities to access schooling, or basic health and social services, and hinder them from exercising their full rights as citizens of Timor-Leste.



Timor-Leste's Children of War

KEY ISSUE 2

CHILDHOOD POVERTY

AND ITS IMPACT

ON EDUCATION

Besides the technical difficulties caused by missing or incorrect documentation, the mothers' economic situations often created another hurdle for these children when it came to accessing education. Due to misperceptions about sexual violence, many of these women were ostracised by their families and communities. Many struggled to meet the basic needs of their children, including their education. Many of the children quit school to help their struggling mothers.

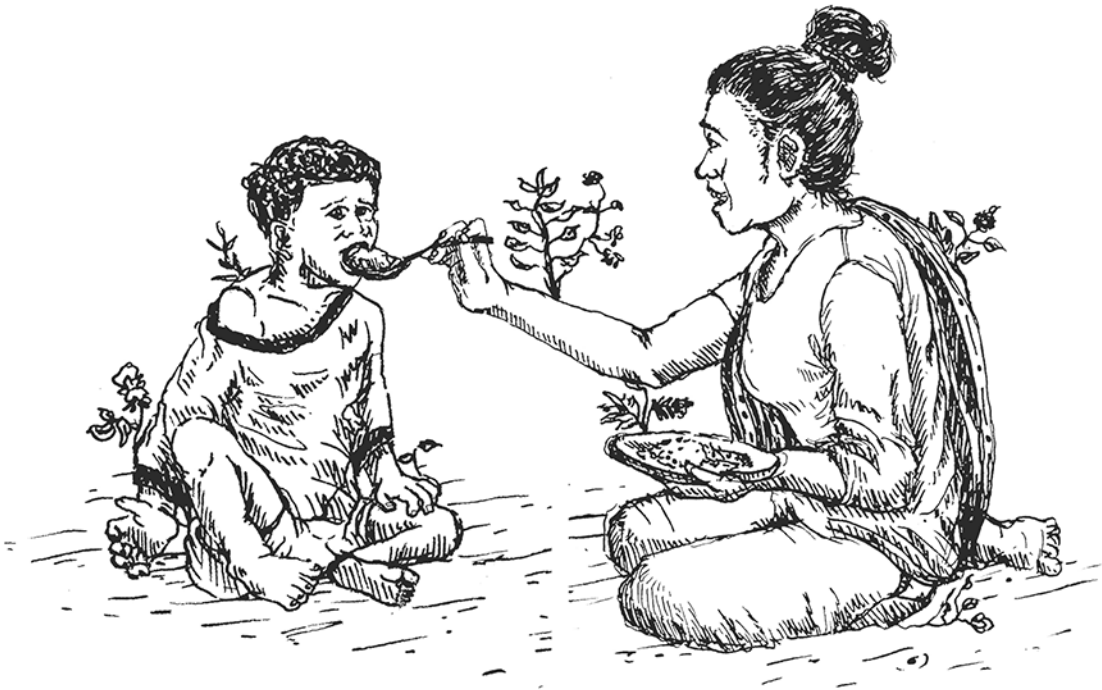
There were eight of us, four girls and four boys, without a father. Only my younger sister and I could go to school, because my mum did not have enough resources to support us all from selling vegetables at the market. Until I reached middle school I helped her there as well. When I reached the first year of middle school, my mum became really sick, so instead of going to school I went to wash the neighbours' clothes to earn money (but lied to my mum about it).

When interviewed by ACbit, 13 out of 22 children (almost 60%) named the completion of their education as one of their most pressing and important needs. Civil society has demonstrated its concern. Seventeen of them have received assistance from ACbit. Three were also identified by Fokupers, an organization for women's empowerment, and one of these three also received a study grant of 500 USD from Krystal, a private school. Another received a study grant from the Alola

Foundation, another NGO that supports marginalized women, as a consequence of ACbit's advocacy efforts. More than half of the children (54.5%) haven't received any kind of state support (direct or indirect) and have only been helped by ACbit. One of the young men opened a small garage with the help of the money he received through ACbit's assistance. Forty-five percent (10 out of 22) have received some kind of allowance from the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MSS), usually indirectly, through the mothers. Five of the mothers, for instance, receive *matires*, (a martyr's pension of 230 USD/month) on account of their husbands' sacrifices, while two mothers receive a pension for the elderly. One of the minors lost this source of income after her mother died. She expressed her frustration over the fact, that even though she applied through her village for a MSS student grant multiple times, the village head always rejected it without explanation. In some cases the children talked about how the mother's pension is usually spent by other family members who perceive both the mothers and their children born out of rape as undeserving.

None of my siblings went to school, just me, thanks to my grandmother's help. My uncle didn't want me to go to school, but to look for a husband and get married. I got a scholarship from the government, but the money was given to my uncle [due to the death of my mother], so I have never seen any of it. I didn't go back to school after that.

Three of the children received MSS study grants while still in school (usually for a two year period), and another recalled receiving a small MSS grant (Bolsa de família) of 360 USD received in two installments spanning two years.



Timor-Leste's Children of War

KEY ISSUE 3

INTERGENERATIONAL **CYCLES OF POVERTY** **AND MARGINALISATION**

Due to their lack of education and their mothers' marginalisation, it is not surprising that for most of the participants in ACbit's study, making ends meet is a day-to-day struggle. Thirty-six per cent of the children named food security as one of their most pressing needs. As their mothers were working in the informal economy, usually trading or farming, the opportunities of the children were also limited. Most of them still live with their mothers in a shared household that, more often than not, is in a deplorable state. Thirty-six per cent of them also identified a need for assistance with housing and/or land rights issues. The latter is a consequence of the mothers' status. Family members who deem the single mothers unworthy because of their past, are often able to deny the women's rights to land they once jointly owned with their husbands who are now deceased.

Access to healthcare was not so much a concern for the children. Only four of them mentioned it as an urgent need and of those four, at least one mentioned healthcare in relation to her entire household. The concern of the children regarding healthcare is not necessarily for themselves, but for other family members, most importantly for the mother. There is also a need to deal with psychological trauma, but only two of the children explicitly expressed a need for counselling.



Timor-Leste's Children of War

KEY ISSUE 4

EXPERIENCES OF **DISCRIMINATION AND** **THE DENIAL OF JUSTICE**

This is a drawing of a house with me and my mum, but around the house there are thorns, representing the neighbours.

Even though largely invisible to an outside observer, these children endured ongoing discrimination throughout the largest part of their lives. The mothers' stigma was transferred to their children and isolated them within their families and communities. Of the 22 children interviewed, 21 recalled experiences of mistreatment, usually in the form of verbal abuse. They were called the child of *Bapa* (Timorese slang for Indonesian soldier) or of Javanese, or called *aman laiha* (fatherless, a bastard), while some remembered their mothers being addressed with derogative or vulgar terms. They often feel sad and excluded from the family. One was even forced to quit her studies, even though she really wanted to continue, because of her teachers' discriminatory remarks.

They told me that a person like me should not go to school at all.

The discrimination was the most hurtful when it originated from the children's own families. They not only lost channels of financial support, but they also found themselves under extensive emotional strain. Their peers made

them feel less valuable. Through AC-bit's action research, recurring themes of continuous hardship, suffering and isolation have been identified. In the *Mapa Isin/body-mapping* exercise (see above), the children marked the head, heart, eyes and ears as sites of recurring hurt—head and heart are aching about the past, eyes are heavy with tears and ears are pierced by malicious words. Besides the obvious setbacks they've experienced due to restricted access to education, ongoing trauma strongly influences their expectations for the future as well as their sense of ownership of their own lives.

I was always told, "Look, here is the daughter of Bapa." So I always felt sad and my heart still hurts. I am like a boat drifting without knowing its direction.

It is no surprise that many of the children feel pessimistic about justice. One of them explained that the suffering of his mother made him question the existence of justice. They do feel, however, that they have the right to be treated equally, not be discriminated against in their communities, and to have the same opportunities as others to pursue their dreams and to develop. Some expressed that they also have the right to know the real identity of their fathers. Subsequent meetings that bring together children coming from similar circumstances have already had a positive effect on their psychological well-being and self-confidence. Nevertheless, some of them named counselling as being among their most urgent needs.

CHILDREN OF WAR:

A NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

ACbit conducted interviews with 22 children of war (17 women and 5 men) from 9 March to 28 April 2017. The average age of the respondents was 25, with the oldest being 33 and the youngest 16 years old. At the time of the survey four of them were still minors (under 18). They are residents in nine different districts (Lautém 2, Viqueque 7, Baucau 2, Manufahi 2, Aileu 3, Ainaro 1, Ermera 2, Dili 1 and Cova Lima 2), so represent a fairly good sample of the country in general. Six of them lost their mothers already, but only one of the six is a minor who is cared for by her older brothers.

The survey questions aimed to map the most urgent needs of the children that ranged from missing documentation to a lack of training and work skills to insufficient housing. Most of those interviewed were concerned with their interrupted education. The questions also attempted to document the possible sources (or the lack of) of government support, the level of recognition they have received as victims of the past conflict, and their experiences of direct and indirect discrimination. The children also shared their ideas of justice. They were unanimously grateful to ACbit for its work of bringing them together and empowering them to change their circumstances, a work they hope the organisation will continue in the future.





RECOMMENDATIONS

Our dreams are simple, just like any other young person. Our dreams are to have a nice house, to learn how to drive, to go to university, to swim in a pool. But we also dream about justice.

Unless the government of Timor-Leste commits to fulfilling the promises it made through the work of the CAVR, the children of survivors of sexual violence will continue to experience discrimination, and the subsequent economic impact of the violations visited upon their mothers. More than ten years after the Chega! report articulated the special needs of this vulnerable group, very little has been done. We urgently request that the government take direct action, with the following specific recommendations.

**THE CENTRO NACIONAL CHEGA!
SHOULD IMMEDIATELY:**

Consult with ACbit and survivors to develop a nationwide study and design a programme, to be led by CNC and implemented together with NGOs, to combat discrimination towards these children and empower them. This programme must ensure confidentiality and comply with the decisions of these children to disclose or not disclose their personal identities in any way.

Ensure that survivors of the past conflict, such as women and children born out of sexual violence, are represented among its staff members. As an institution that represents the values incorporated in the *Chega!* report, the CNC must adopt gender-aware policies and ensure the participation of survivors in all its programs.

Ensure that activities that are part of its mandate to support memorialisation include the experiences of women and children, and not only promote the images of heroic men.

OTHER BRANCHES OF THE TIMOR-LESTE GOVERNMENT SHOULD IMMEDIATELY:

1

Facilitate the provision of birth certificates to children born to single mothers, including children born from rape, and allow the mothers to keep the section regarding the father's identity blank. Also, the government should facilitate the revision of incorrect information on birth certificates if desired by these survivors.

2

In consultation with survivors, develop clear policies that recognize children born out of sexual violence during the Indonesian occupation as victims of the past conflict.

3

Ensure that the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Ministry of Justice implement their policies of non-discrimination at the municipal level in order to address the practice of withholding information

or denying assistance to victims. To achieve this objective an education/sensitisation programme for government officials and more central oversight is required.

4

Ensure that religious institutions also adhere to the principle of non-discrimination towards single mothers and their children, in particular in the provision of baptism certificates. At the same time, the government should ensure that the RDTL certificate can be obtained by those without a baptism certificate.

5

Ensure that the *Chega!* report, including its findings on sexual violence, and violence experienced by women and children, is included in the official school curriculum to provide a fuller picture of recent Timor-Leste history.

6

Establish a Victims' Trust Fund as pledged under Regulation 2000/15 or any other special assistance programme for survivors that includes children born out of sexual violence, as recommended in the *Chega!* Report.

7

Provide scholarships or *bolsa estuda* for these children to be able to continue their tertiary education if desired.

8

Establish an institution for special adult education courses for these survivors and others to complete their primary/secondary education that had to be abandoned due to economic circumstances.

9

Ensure the strong implementation of land laws (transitional and future) to protect widows' inheritance of land and consequently the rights of their children against traditional practices that threaten this right.



Timor-Leste's Children of War

ANNEX 1:
WORKSHOP REPORT
APRIL 2016

I feel sadness and sorrow when I remember the suffering I experienced when I was still a child. I was born without a father. My mother was a widow. A lot of people taunted me, "You are an Indonesian soldier's child." When I felt sad, I sat with my mother and prayed. We surrendered [our suffering] to God, even when people spoke badly to us.

During its mandate, Timor-Leste's Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR) uncovered women's experiences of systemic rape and sexual violence during the Indonesian occupation from 1975-1999. The CAVR also underlined the stigma against children born out of rape, particularly those whose mothers remain single. It recommended a reparations programme for those most vulnerable, including children born out of rape. However, more than a decade since its final report was launched in 2005, many of the recommendations have yet to be implemented.

Asosiasaun Chega! ba ita (ACbit), an NGO dedicated to promoting the findings and recommendations of the CAVR, has been working with women survivors of rape for many years. This year, together with Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR), ACbit began to work with children born out of rape in Timor-Leste. Most of the children are now young adults. Only one participant was under 18 years old.

SPEAKING ABOUT THE UNSPEAKABLE

For many of these families, this is the first time they have had space to speak about their family history amongst themselves. During the three-day workshop, ACbit facilitated an inter-generational dialog between the children and their mothers using participatory methods.

SYMBOLS

Each participant chose a symbol from a selection of items spread on a mat. Each person then used the symbol as a way to tell the group who they were, their experiences of discrimination and poverty, as well as their strengths. Here are some examples.

My name is D. For my symbol I chose a tree to tell the story about when we were little. There was no one looking after us. But our mother stayed strong, she provided shelter to her children until today, as we finish our studies.

...

This flower signifies the story of my mother, what she suffered long time ago and never spoke about. All the pain she never spoke about. When I grew up, I asked her what had happened and how. This flower is a symbol of my mother's story, how people treated her when it happened and until today. Until today people treat us badly. This blossoming flower is a reminder for the next generation to not forget their history, but to pass on their history.



STONE AND FLOWER, TRUTH AND JUSTICE

After these introductions, we separated the participants into four groups. One group was just the mothers; the other three groups comprised the children. Each group drew a large circle and divided into four quadrants that were labeled "truth, justice, healing, and freedom from violence". The workshop facilitator then asked each person to choose a flower (positive) or a stone (negative) to place in each quadrant, depending on what best reflected their lives in relation to each of the four ideals.

During this exercise, many participants described discrimination they have experienced from members of their communities, and their struggles to meet their basic needs. Another issue was birth certificates that a number of victims' children have been unable to obtain due to the inability to provide information about their father. The mothers have been excluded from social services due to discrimination. Some, who were ostracized by their families, were left to raise their children on their own.

DESCRIBING OURSELVES

After this very heavy Stone and Flower session, we handed out pieces of cardboard that had the outline of a flattened box drawn on it. Each person was asked to cut and glue the box together, then on each of the six sides write: 1) what I like; 2) what I dislike; 3) my talents; 4) my dreams; 5) what I love; 6) a burden from my past.

Our dreams are simple, just like any other young person. Our dreams are to have a nice house, to learn how to drive, to go to university, to swim in a pool. But we also dream about justice.

One group wrote about what they love: mother, father, boyfriend/girlfriend, swimming, but also reading about history. What they disliked was "other people talking about our past".

We discussed labels. Many have been called "Indonesian soldier's child" or "child of the jungle". One facilitated discussion between the children and their mothers explored if the children wanted to choose a name for themselves. While some of the mothers commented that they were children born from "conflict" or "war", the children steered towards the notion that they were simply "Timor oan", children of Timor.

POSTCARD OF LOVE

Workshop facilitators gave each participant a postcard. The children were invited to write a message to their mothers, including those who have passed away. The mothers

were also invited to write a postcard to each of their children. Some mothers were assisted by the facilitators as they were not comfortable holding a pen. Each person read his or her postcard out loud. It is difficult to describe the feeling in the room. Everyone felt so raw and full of strong emotions as they presented their postcards to each other, but the over-riding feeling was love.

On her postcard, L wrote this message to her mother:

Mother, during your struggle you suffered so much. For so long, I didn't know your history. I often felt angry at you. But now I have listened to your story and I realize it's because we wanted our independence, because you had to save yourself, you had to suffer like this. It was a heavy burden upon your shoulders. I cannot be sad because we always had you, our mother, by our side. We will reconcile what has happened. We will love you forever and always be together.

L's mother had written this on hers:

To my child whom I love, from the last two days of this activity I have been able to speak out about my past history where I encountered suffering and much difficulty. Today, you are so grown already. I love you, but how you were born I haven't spoken about to you. I felt afraid that you could not accept me. I love all of my children.

RECONCILING

WITH OUR TRUTH

One of the facilitators summarized the key themes emerging from the three exercises and the discussions related to them. It was the first time for the participants to contemplate their experiences as a group. The summary was offered in the form of a collective narrative as follows:

Because of the war, our mothers had to experience unthinkable violations, not once or twice, but many times; for a long time. But out of this darkness there was also a light. Our mothers became pregnant out of the violence they experienced. They chose to love and to cherish their children, and in return their children's love also helped free them from despair.

Together as a family we held on to each other when we had to face discrimination and unkind words from our communities. Some of us were embraced by our families; others were shunned.

As single parents, our mothers had to work very hard to meet our basic needs and to put us through school.

Who is my father?

Who in my life took on this role? For some of us, an uncle or a grandfather took on this role. Some of us think of God as our father. For others, our mother took on the role of being both a mother and a father.

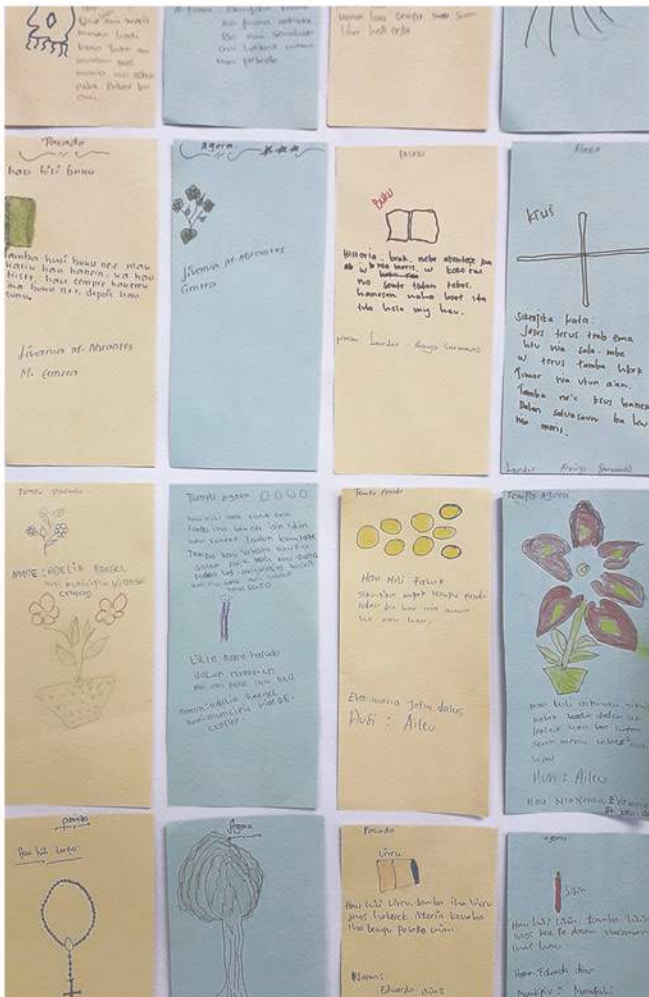
What needs to be changed? The state must pay attention to our plight that includes helping us with scholarships, assisting us to get our birth certificates, protecting our rights to land, and addressing many other issues. Our communities need to understand what happened and stop discriminating against us.

After this summary, the participants were invited to respond with their own comments and this led to a meaningful dialog between the children and their mothers.

CLOSING

The workshop closed with a visit to the CAVR museum, a former torture centre. To our surprise, one of the mothers had been held there in 1979. We even found the isolation cell where she had been held and her name included on a list of former detainees. That afternoon, back at the workshop site, a former CAVR commissioner, Father Jovito de Araujo, came to speak with the group. It was a much-needed spiritual affirmation and an important time of recognition for the victims. Father Jovito broke down in tears himself, after meeting M who was a toddler presented by her mother at one of CAVR's public hearings in 2002.

Timor-Leste's promise for a brighter future for all its citizens is incomplete as long as concrete steps are not taken to help heal these wounds of the past. In the words of one of the mothers at this workshop, "I want my daughter to study hard so she can build a better future for our people. So like a flower, we can blossom into a strong nation, our Timor-Leste."



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A daughter reads a postcard written by her mother in the “Postcards of Love” exercise. Acbit, 2017

» A presentation of past and present experiences through the use of symbols. Acbit, 2017





Learning from the experiences of the past, participants visit the Resistance Archive in Dili, Timor-Leste. ACbit, 2017 

