



New research amplifies the voice and aspirations of women vendors in four Timor-Leste marketplaces

MEDIA RELEASE

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The Timor-Leste Secretary of State for Equality and Inclusion (SEII), together with UN Women and the Australian Government's TOMAK program today shared the results of new research into the conditions, challenges and opportunities found in four marketplaces in Bobonaro and Baucau. The research specifically focused on the experiences and voices of women, who make up 75-85% of rural marketplace vendors in Timor-Leste. The Presidents of the Municipal Authority of Baucau and Bobonaro presented the findings to key stakeholders in Dili, including representatives from the Ministry of Commerce, Environment and Tourism, Ministry of Public Works, and Ministry of State Administration, as well as other government and international agencies.

The assessment was undertaken in two municipal marketplaces (Baucau and Maliana) and two administrative post marketplaces (Venilale and Atabae) through a series of interviews, focus groups discussions, and observational walks with women vendors and local authorities. Key priorities raised by women in all marketplaces was a need for increased access to clean water and toilets, better waste management, and strengthened marketplace management and governance. Women vendors also described a host of safety issues (including sexual harassment and theft), both in their journeys to and from the market, but also whilst trading or sleeping in the marketplace. Irregular and expensive transport to and from markets, along with aggressive behaviour from bus, microlet and anggun drivers was also regularly raised by women.

The findings underscore the often difficult conditions faced by women wanting to sell their produce and the need to incorporate their experiences when planning markets. One woman vendor from Atabae who was present at today's workshop shared a personal experience of harassment in the marketplace. "I said to my friend [after being repeatedly harassed by a young male in the market] *'We need to leave because we are not safe here and if we wait until morning, this young man will keep harassing us... It doesn't matter if I don't get money, as long as I do not lose my dignity.'*"

The assessment comes at an opportune time as new marketplaces are currently being planned for both Maliana and Baucau, and there is growing interest from municipal and national government in the potential of marketplaces to add value to local economies.

"Vibrant and safe marketplaces have the potential to bring important economic benefits to communities, especially for women who are often the most active as traders," said Sr. Armando da Costa, Director General of SEII. "This research shows us the importance of seeking out women's voices in marketplace planning, management and governance. It's time we listened to them if we want to increase the safety and efficiency of Timor-Leste's markets."



Municipal authorities, police and local leaders in Baucau and Bobonaro have been highly engaged throughout the research, and presentation of the initial results has provoked thoughtful discussion about potential solutions to existing challenges. Today's workshop brings the findings to the attention of key ministries and development partners at the national level to further consider how the challenges raised by women might be collaboratively addressed for the benefit of the wider community.