

## Leadership Development in Timor-Leste

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### Organisation description

Oxfam Australia is part of a global movement of dedicated people working hard to fight poverty and injustice. They have been working to create a better life for the East Timorese people for more than 30 years. Oxfam is supporting this new nation reach security and sustainability by working closely with the government, local organisations and communities.



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Oxfam's work seeks one overall outcome: to bring about positive change in the lives of people living in poverty. To realise this, Oxfam is committed to working in partnership with others to achieve four key goals by 2013:

- Economic justice - to support people to make a decent living, leading dignified lives free from poverty and hunger;
- Essential services - to help people to access clean water, healthcare, education and sanitation;
- Rights in crisis - to support people to live safe from war, violence and natural disaster; &
- Gender justice - to support women and men to enjoy equal rights, and live free from violence and discrimination.

### Context

To meet the four key goals listed above and achieve lasting change in Timor-Leste, the Oxfam Australia Timor-Leste office recognises it needs to be "an effective, rights-based organisation with human, financial and other resources".<sup>i</sup> To achieve this internal goal, major organisational changes have been instituted:

- Oxfam Hong Kong and Oxfam New Zealand's presences in Timor-Leste have been brought into the management structure of Oxfam Australia; &
- Oxfam Australia's programs in Timor-Leste have shifted from being directly implemented to being run through local counterparts.

Consequently, key HR strategies and indicators relating to staff and management development are outlined to ensure skilled East Timorese staff will be managing and implementing programs for their communities.

### Analysis of problem

The senior management team (SMT) in Timor-Leste has consisted of expatriates for many years. To achieve greater presence of East Timorese on the SMT a leadership and

management development program has been outlined as a key strategy. This strategy clearly recognises developing the skills of future leaders has important internal benefits. However, it also links to the external context. By developing the management and leadership skills of East Timorese managers, Oxfam's ability to support and develop the skills of their staff and the staff at local counterparts will lead to better programming in local communities.



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### Solution to problem

To deliver on the goal of a country office run by East Timorese staff, a long term and contextualised leadership and management development program was designed by the Oxfam Australia Timor-Leste Human Resources and Organisational Development (HROD) unit. With support from the HR, and Learning and Development teams in Melbourne, the program aims to build the leadership and management skills of Oxfam's East Timorese managers.

To develop a culture which enables effective management practice the key theme of the program is self-management. Participants set their own leadership development plan and activities which are supported by peers and the HROD unit. To achieve this, the program was based on Oxfam Australia's Supervisory Role Statements. These statements outline the minimum requirements Oxfam Australia expects of its supervisors and managers. These statements were developed following an organisation wide analysis on what makes for effective leadership and are linked to career progression and rewards.

### Reflections / Lessons learnt

While the program is still in the process of being delivered, the early feedback is positive for future sessions: "Need more management training in the future as follow up", "Helpful in our daily activities", "Everything already right on procedures, we just need to reflect and be more creative, disciplined and responsible". While the program was designed to take a long-term approach, the emphasis has been placed on contextualising the material to that which is challenging East Timorese managers. As an example, during the design stage there was a strong request to focus on managing friends. Clearly not a standard item in most leadership development programs, the ability to contextualise learning will be critical to the success of the program.

Even though it is easier to focus on the external environment when setting a vision for the future, recognising what needs to change internally to meet the vision requires conviction. Without this conviction there would not have been key strategies or indicators for leadership and management development in Timor-Leste or a program to meet these objectives.

Special thanks go to Oxfam Australia's East Asia team for having a vision where the country office is managed by East Timorese.

<sup>1</sup> Joint Oxfam Strategic Plan for Timor-Leste 2008 – 2013, pg. 18