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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN FISCAL AND ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have not exerted significant influence on fiscal and economic diversification policy development processes in Timor-Leste, for the following reasons:

- For the most part, CSOs' involvement in fiscal and economic diversification policy development processes has occurred at levels in which CSOs have little ability to set the agenda from the beginning, while they have not been involved in decision-making processes. The public participation methods most used by the Government are information-sharing meetings and consultations, which in practice tend not to result in the incorporation of ideas from CSOs in the resultant public policy.
- Mechanisms established by the Government to facilitate CSOs' participation in developing fiscal and economic diversification policies are inadequate, in that they are not designed to facilitate serious discussion between the Government and CSOs.
- CSOs themselves have not yet maximized their influencing activities due to various limitations and challenges, including subject matter knowledge related to fiscal and economic diversification policies, capacities for evidence-based research, analysis and advocacy, and capacity to mobilize CSOs to be involved in the policy process, particularly those groups which are based in the municipalities (outside the capital city, Dili).
- The lack of access to information related to fiscal and economic diversification policies is another challenge to the effective participation of CSOs, as they tend not to access sufficient information within the timeframe needed to conduct serious analysis in advance of making an intervention. The Government has attempted to increase public access to relevant documents, and now publishes documents which previously were not published. This is a positive development, and it must continue, particularly to guarantee that people with disabilities can access these documents.
- The Government tends to already have a fixed position on public policies about which it consults with CSOs and thus has no intention to change the policies based on recommendations from CSOs.



People with disability promotor group / Oxfam in Timor-Leste

CSOs have established various mechanisms and strategies to increase their influence over fiscal and economic diversification policy processes. These mechanisms have created space for CSOs to gain more control over how they communicate their ideas to decision-makers. However, there is no indication of any synergy between the mechanisms created by each CSOs. These mechanisms should be evaluated to understand their effectiveness in influencing decision-making processes, because even though CSOs have adopted various methods, positive results have been limited.

Few CSOs focus on issues such as fiscal and economic diversification policy. Furthermore, most organizations which nominally work on fiscal policy spend most of their time on advocacy related to economic diversification. Often, advocacy on these two issues is done simultaneously. Although the two topics are closely related, conflating them creates a risk that advocacy related to economic diversification depends on the General State Budget (GSB) cycle. The result is that CSOs can miss valuable opportunities to influence policies related to economic diversification.

The Government has not yet consistently facilitated the participation of people with disability or other vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as the LGBTIQ+ community, in fiscal and economic diversification policy processes. Policy documents are not produced in a format which facilitates people with disabilities to access them. Furthermore, the LGBTIQ+ community is an important part of Timor-Leste society, with the same rights as all Timorese people to have their aspirations represented in the State Budget. However, the State Budget document has consistently ignored the existence of the LGBTIQ+ community.

Respondents from the Government and development partners emphasize the role of CSOs as a bridge to make the voices of communities heard; voices which usually do not reach the government. Many CSOs can play this important role since they work closely with communities. At the same time, CSOs can take advantage of this unique role to maximize their influence over public policy development processes. However, CSOs need to have a clear understanding of the interests of the communities they represent, and also about how their recommendations can help to meet communities' needs.

CSOs believe that there should be a platform or mechanism which can facilitate the active participation of all CSOs in fiscal and economic diversification policies, including those based in the municipalities. On one hand, organizations which operate in the municipalities think there should be a new mechanism created, as the existing mechanisms do not function effectively. On the other hand, organizations based in Dili generally take the view that existing mechanisms merely require re-organization under FONGTIL and through CSO networks or coalitions.



Contact:

Oxfam in Timor-Leste

Web: <https://asia.oxfam.org/countries/oxfam-timor-leste-east-timor>

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