

**STOPPING AS SUCCESS:  
TRANSITIONING TO LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT**

# **CENTRE OF STUDIES FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT (CEPAD) AND INTERPEACE: A PARTNERSHIP TRANSITION IN TIMOR-LESTE**

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## CONTEXT

Timor-Leste is a former Portuguese colony known as Portuguese Timor until 1975. In November 1975, the Revolutionary Front for an Independent Timor-Leste (Fretilin) declared independence. Shortly afterward, however, the country was occupied by the Indonesian military. The occupation lasted until 1999 and was a highly violent experience for the Timorese, who suffered the brutal effects of conflict between Timorese groups and the Indonesian military.

Following a violent crisis, the Timorese voted for independence in a 1999 referendum, which was achieved in May 2002 when Timor-Leste joined the United Nations (UN) as the first new sovereign country of the 21st century. Post-independence, Timor-Leste experienced a high influx of foreign aid, as well as the establishment of the United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISET) from 2002 to 2006. This was replaced by the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT), which operated as a peacekeeping mission from 2006 to 2012.

In spite of international funding and support to governance process and elections, the country has undergone several waves of political crisis since independence. It has also faced challenges with corruption, continued violence, unemployment, and land disputes.

## STORY OF TRANSITION

The Centre of Studies for Peace and Development (CEPAD) was set up in response to the country's 2006 violent political crisis, its mission being to "use collaborative research and interactive dialogue to advance the understanding of conflict-related issues and the major challenges to the consolidation of democracy in Timor-Leste."

The origins of CEPAD lie in a joint peacebuilding program with Interpeace. Interpeace began its work in Timor-Leste with a local NGO called the Peace and Democracy Foundation (PDF). In response to the violent crisis of 2006, Interpeace shifted its support to the creation of the Programme of Research and Dialogue for Peace (PRDP), the objective of which was to bring Timorese communities face-to-face with key stakeholders in order to discuss the obstacles to peace facing the country, and what could be done to address them.

Interpeace then made the decision to connect with João Boavida, a Timorese professional with extensive humanitarian and peacebuilding experience, convincing him to set up – with Interpeace's support – an independent, home-grown civil society organization to address the root causes of conflict and corruption. Thus, CEPAD was born.

From the outset of their partnership, Interpeace supported CEPAD's technical work in areas such as grant applications, financial management, and software. At times,



Interpeace was able to provide financial support critical to ensuring CEPAD's sustainability. Interpeace does not have a representative or an office in Timor-Leste, but rather places its trust in CEPAD as its local partner. Interpeace has also supported CEPAD in finding additional funding from other donors.

The cooperation between Interpeace and CEPAD was formalized in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2011. This MoU recognized the complementarity between the two organizations and the value-added of working together. According to CEPAD, a key element of the partnership is the high degree of trust placed upon it by Interpeace, which despite providing funding did not impose unreasonable monitoring requirements.

Between April 2014 and December 2015, in the context of the Frameworks for Assessing Resilience (FAR) program initiated by Interpeace, CEPAD led a multi-phased process to better understand sources of resilience in Timor-Leste. At the end of the project, Interpeace began to disengage

financially from CEPAD. Initially, Interpeace was able to provide financial support to CEPAD through its own core, unrestricted funding, but this proved unsustainable in the long term. Interpeace, having witnessed CEPAD gain significant skill in program monitoring and implementation, judged that it would be able to successfully continue on their own. At the time, CEPAD was not solely reliant on Interpeace funding, meaning the gradual financial disengagement was not seen as jeopardizing CEPAD's operations and sustainability. By September 2016, the financial disengagement was complete.

Despite the transition, Interpeace and CEPAD remain close partners. They have signed a new MoU, which enables Interpeace to continue providing technical assistance as and when requested by CEPAD. Interpeace has been available to support CEPAD in other ways as well, for instance by lending money to cover the costs of CEPAD's ongoing work for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which is not able to provide advance funding due to internal restrictions.

## KEY LESSONS

**Strong local leadership is an important factor in the creation and sustaining of an NGO that can successfully operate when financial support from an INGO partner ends. Interpeace worked hard to involve João Boavida in the PRDP program.** Given his extensive experience with peacebuilding, and his work with the UN, he was well-placed to set up CEPAD.

**Adopting bottom-up, locally led models from the outset – as opposed to time-bound, top-down projects – contributes to a more sustainable transition process.** CEPAD's approach to PAR enables local ownership through involving communities and other key stakeholders in identifying the root causes of problems and possible solutions. This contributes to greater sustainability due to a range of local actors, rather than just one organization, being involved from the outset.

**It can be challenging for organizations who are reluctant to accept funding from their governments to achieve financial sustainability when INGOs withdraw funding.** In order to retain its independence when working on anti-corruption initiatives, CEPAD refuses to take money from the Timorese government. Since Interpeace transitioned out of providing financial support, however, CEPAD's director has found it increasingly challenging to push back against his board members, who have recommended that CEPAD apply for government funding.

**NGOs that do not accept funding from every available international source are better able to operate sustainably over the long term.** CEPAD has stuck closely to its values by not indiscriminately accepting international funding. It is discerning in its choices, ensuring that any funding it does accept furthers both its strategy and mission.