Family planning in Timor-Leste: collaborative governance?

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Background

- Indonesian occupation of Timor
- Catholicism as dominant religion
- Barriers to seeking provision of Family Planning services – street level bureaucracy
- Evidence of ‘covert, forcible injection of young women with hormonal contraceptives during 1987–1989’ (Sissons)
Need for Family Planning

• Population – 1.27m (2016)
• Median age 17.4 years
• Birth rate 5.6
• 24% first baby by age 20
• Domestic and sexual violence prevalence – Nabilan Report. Partner violence – 59%
• UNFPA report – coercion and control
• Maternal mortality - need for spacing
Collaborative Governance

• Collaborative Governance is a concept which is applied to the relationships between government and other actors. It is used as a means of approaching and explaining formal relationships between actors and the key elements required for effective outcomes.
Collaborative Governance

- Contested definitions
- Fragile states ‘lapsed’ into
- Using framework developed by Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh – context
- Requirement for trust building to continue over time
Methodology

• Three research trips to Timor-Leste (2017)
• Interviews (n = 40)
• Observations – Family Planning meeting 
  Ministry of Health
Preliminary findings

• Headline finding: good example of collaborative governance to begin; fell apart in 2017; future uncertain.

• Previous policy demonstrated good collaboration between key actors - Family Planning Working Group

• Ministerial intervention - Sarmento

• Influence of Church

• Redraft of policy

• Meeting at Ministry of Health July 2017
Draft Policy

• Predominantly Billings Method
• Prohibition on contraceptive provision to unmarried couples
MÉTODOS OVLULASAUN BILLINGS
PRESIDENTE DOMINIO MOB BA POU YU
TIMOR LESTE

PLANIU NA AMANHA NEIS HA RESPONSABILIDADE NISALU FAMILIA
NEISI HA RORBOLOK

MÉTODOS OVLULASAUN BILLINGS
PAPA PAVLO VI

PAPA JÔNIO PAVLO II

PAPA BENTO XVI

HAKARAK METAN OAAN

HERETAS NAHETAN AAN

99% EFEKTIVO

Husu ba orientador MOB nian atu taluh familia sira halo planu ba familia natural.

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Responses

• “They had discussion with some doctors from National Hospital but we were not invited” – clinician informant
• “…they were so concerned by what they saw that they actually took the time to go to the Vice-Minister directly to express their concern. And it does not often happen that way, it is quite unusual for it to have raised that kind of alarm…One of the biggest areas of concern for them was the Billings Method being pushed so heavily. It is not easy to do and you need to have some skills to do it, you have to have the time management, you have to have that agreement between a wife and her husband and that in Timor isn’t always possible.” – International informant
“It’s unfortunate that this is the time that you’re asking me this question,” one source said a few months ago, “because the answer would have been, ‘Yes of course and we’ve got a very big thing going to contain some of these very big things which are actually happening. It’s not clear what the institutional structure is about and the rules are not developed yet. It’s believed the constitution is not constitutional and denial of access to contraception is criminal and yet it could happen and happen and happen.” But this is a very, very big thing and we’ve got to deal with it. It’s not strong enough that we’re not doing the right thing.”
• Grupu Feminista iha Timor petitioned the Prime Minister - Articles 16 and 17 of the Timor-Leste Constitution: Guarantees equality of opportunities and treatment, and cannot be discriminated on based on marital status or age.
• Lobbying from United Nations and other stakeholders in health
• Outcome uncertain given political situation – new elections to be held in 2018
Limitations of the research

- Language of interviews
- Tetun limitations (Ross)
Key references

• Cummins D 2017, Teen Pregnancy and Early Marriage in Timor Leste, UNFPA, Dili
• Sissons, ME 1997, From one day to another: violations of women's reproductive and sexual rights in East Timor, East Timor Human Rights Centre.