

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



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 doing your research here because if you had asked me this questions a year ago or eight months ago, the answer would have been, “Yes of course we’re a partner.” But this is a very, very big thing, the National Family Planning strategy.... right now all we’ve got is whispers and rumours about what it’s going to contain and if those rumours are to be believed it’s going to contain some things which are actually against the constitution - denial of contraception to unmarried people...It’s illegal. It’s unconstitutional, it’s criminal and yet it could happen. It could happen because like I was saying, the policy framework and the institutional structure is not strong enough that everyone is clear what the rules are yet. It’s not developed enough yet, it’s not been tried and tested yet.”

(context – this quote was from an interview which took place prior to draft policy release and discussion in July 2017)

- 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
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