It takes two (or more) to tango: Partnerships within the education sector in Timor-Leste

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Recent international declarations stress the importance of partnerships between and amongst donors, the state and civil society, in order to improve service delivery and promote qualities of good governance, particularly in key sectors such as education. However, in conditions of state fragility—where high levels of distrust between and amongst these 'partners' may exist; large and often ungovernable flows of assistance are common; and the capacity of state institutions is weak or non-existent—the feasibility of such partnerships must be critically examined. This paper examines these dilemmas within the context of Timor-Leste's basic education sector, with specific attention paid to how external actors, internal service providers and the Ministry of Education have 'partnered' to qualify more than 8,000 teachers through in-service training. The author suggests that donors are increasingly compelled to work within a framework, which presents both practical challenges and deeper ideological conundrums. Ultimately, the interests of teachers and children are being left behind in the drive for alignment, coordination and harmonisation.

[Keywords: fragile states, partnership, education, Timor-Leste, foreign aid]

Introduction

The tango—the sensual, rhythmic, graceful, and elegant dance from Argentina—is the product of a leader and follower inextricably related and actively connected to each other, moving in tandem, as they glide across the dance floor. The expression, "it takes two to tango" comes from an understanding of the dynamics of such a relationship, specifically the need for both partners to be willing and engaged actors in the dance, and more importantly dancing in the same direction. For Timor-Leste (East Timor), a still nascent and evolving nation straddled between the Pacific and Southeast Asian regions, the role of the international community has been critical in the development and evolution of the state apparatus built following its independence in 1999. Immediately following independence, the United Nations Transitional Administration for East Timor (UNTAET), under *Security Council Resolution 1272*, was given authority for

administering the territory, establishing vital state institutions, and restoring basic services. However, since 2002, the role of multilateral and bilateral partners has shifted from one of substituting for the state, to building internal capacity so the state might then deliver services to its citizens effectively and efficiently. In this transition, and set against the backdrop of new frameworks for aid effectiveness, the international community is increasingly following rather than leading the state towards stability and long-term development.

The start of the 21st century saw a proliferation of accords, agreements and declarations that have intended to reshape the ways in which donors and recipients work amongst and between each other (OECD, 2008, p.7). Partnerships under such agreements have focused on the need for donors and the state to ensure more efficient and effective service delivery, while simultaneously ensuring that activities are state driven and based on broad consensus of 'what works' for that particular context. Initially, states labelled as fragile[1], were excluded from such compacts due to concerns around governance, the incoherence between short-term humanitarian and longer-term reconstruction responses, and gaps of trust in how such financing would be utilised or managed (Brannelly, Ndaruhutse & Rigaud, 2009).

By the end of the decade, recognition that many of these nations were the ones furthest from achieving MDG targets, prompted consideration of how to include fragile states within these partnership frameworks and the funding that is aligned with them (Leo & Barmeier, 2010). The *OECD-DAC Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations* (2007) and *Dili Declaration* (2010) both stress that donors should: "do no harm"; take context as a starting point; align with local priorities in different contexts in different ways; coordinate activity with each other and with the state; and focus on state building as much as possible.

There are a number of concerns regarding the feasibility and practicality of partnership arrangements between donors and recipients in such environments, however. Important concerns exist regarding whose interests such arrangements serve, and whose voices are excluded from them (Brinkerhoff, 2002; Roberston et al., 2007). If the "consensus" reached on specific development goals and activities lacks public legitimacy, or fails to recognise the actual capacity or will of the state and its partners to achieve these goals, credibility can falter. Thus writers such as Pavanello and Othieno (2008) have suggested that prior to considering partnerships, it must be ascertained if the competing goals and expectations of three distinct groups—namely the state, service providers and citizens—are best managed through coordinated and harmonised action. Concerns arise when the rhetoric of 'partnership' overshadows another important role for donors in fragile state environments—that of ensuring effective service

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[1] In line with evolving thinking on the labelling of nation-states as fragile states (see for example Davies, 2009, p.11), this paper considers fragility as typified by: deficits in governance, an inability to maintain security, an inability to meet essential needs of citizens, polarisation of identities, high aid dependency, a lack of transparency in decision-making; and perhaps most critically, a lack of will and/or capacity on the part of the state.

delivery. An overemphasis on working through and within state institutions may further exacerbate the divide between a political elite and their constituents, without effecting improvements in service delivery. Specific to the education sector, the failure of such efforts to lead to perceived improvements in the quality and relevance of schooling can serve as a potential trigger for future conflict or unrest (Smith & Vaux, 2003; Tawil & Harley, 2004; Rose & Greeley, 2006; Davies, 2010)

The argument advanced in this paper is that given the important need for these partnership arrangements to "do no harm" in fragile state environments, greater consideration may need to be taken about when, why, how and whether to enter into such arrangements. It follows in the critique advanced by Coxon and Tolley (2005) that false consensus through the language of 'partnership', on what aid should be directed towards within the education sector, and how these funds should be used, may do more harm than good. Such mechanisms can stifle critique of existing modes of service delivery promoted by donors and/or the state, effectively shutting down dialogue and discussion about viable alternatives and, worse, marginalising important contributions to policy and practice (Coxon & Munce, 2008).

This paper explores the dynamics of such cooperation in Timor-Leste's education sector, with specific attention paid to how the state, donors and service providers have evolved in their partnership arrangements to provide in-service training to the large percentage of the country's primary school teachers deemed under or unqualified. It begins by providing a historical overview on how such training provision has evolved in the country, from independence in 1999 to the present. As part of this discussion, it highlights how in-service teacher training has shifted from project-based donor activity, to more coordinated and Ministry-driven processes. Subsequent sections then explore what implications the imperative for greater partnership between the state and donors have had on service provision, and the communication and dialogue processes that should inform joint activity. The objective of this paper is to highlight the tensions involved in moving towards coordinated activity in fragile states, particularly from the donor perspective. It does not aim to make a definitive statement on the new partnership agenda being promoted at a global level, but rather to explore the complexities involved in such arrangements in fragile states through a case study approach.

Research Approach

The data presented in this paper is extracted from the author's ongoing doctoral study into reforms to teaching and learning in Timor-Leste, and the impact these changes have had on the perceptions and practices of primary teachers throughout the country. For this paper, relevant data from documentary evidence and interviews with teachers, head teachers, and key stakeholders within the donor community and Ministry of Education (Ministry or MoE) are presented. The majority of data were collected during doctoral field research conducted over five months between February and July 2010, supplemented with findings from a separate evaluation project conducted by the author in October 2010.

Documentary evidence collected and analysed included official and publicly available donor documentation, as well as Ministry policies and guidelines. This data helped to inform understanding of the evolving importance and purpose of in-service teaching training in relation to quality-based educational imperatives in Timor-Leste, as well as the fashion in which such activity has occurred either within or outside of Ministry auspices (McMillan, 1992). Additionally, evaluation and research reports conducted by external consultants on behalf of the Ministry or particular donors was considered; some of this being "grey literature" made available through key informants in Timor-Leste. All texts were actively scrutinised to gauge the discourses promoted, and stated and unstated intentions of action, serving to provide corroborating evidence for the arguments advanced in this paper (vanDijk, 1993).

Interviews were conducted with nine key stakeholders, all holding senior positions within their respective donor agencies and/or with direct responsibility for developing and/or monitoring activities related to in-service teacher training. Additionally, six national-level Ministry officials, with responsibility or oversight for in-service training provision were interviewed. A total of nine school directors, interviewed individually, and thirty-nine primary school teachers, interviewed in groups, were also spoken to as part of the broader research project. Discussion focussed on a variety of themes related to teachers' beliefs about their practice and the reform efforts occurring within the country. For the purposes of this paper, topics relevant to the issue at hand, namely in-service teacher training and the relationships between donors and the government, were closely examined. Analysis occurred through a grounded approach, where coding was done iteratively, inductively, and towards increasing levels of abstraction to develop major themes and issues relayed in this text (Charmaz, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). All interviews were conducted in confidence, and individuals interviewed were given the choice on whether to be identified by their organisational affiliation. Thus names, positions and, in some instances, organisational affiliations are not utilised when referencing quotes from these individuals in the text that follows.

Context

Building the nation

The turmoil and emigration that followed the Timorese vote for independence in 1999 left the new nation's schooling system woefully understaffed. Data from this period suggest that approximately 20 per cent of primary teachers, and 80 per cent of secondary teachers permanently left the teaching profession (UNESCO, 2008, p.122). A major challenge in the early years of reconstruction became recruiting and introducing a new teacher workforce into the system. Immediately following the cessation of conflict, the UN attempted to resume schooling by supporting 'volunteers' who were paid a small salary and given bags of rice to fill the void in each community. Beginning in 2000, successive attempts to fill vacancies through a merit-based process failed to yield the desired numbers of teachers. As a result, standards were relaxed in terms of who could enter and/or

remain in the profession, and the majority of teachers who eventually were employed were deemed under or unqualified for the positions they assumed in schools.

In the initial years following independence, large-scale opportunities for such training were ad hoc and not available to most teachers. The transition government had prioritised an emergency logic of intervention that treated teacher training as a second-tier priority (Nicolai, 2004). Between 2000-2004, Portugal was the most significant player in the realm of teacher training due to its "comparative language advantage" in meeting the demands of early governments to focus initial teacher training on the reintroduction of Portuguese into the classroom.[2] Besides this attention on language, none of the other training needs of teachers were effectively considered in these initial years (Quinn, 2005; Beck, 2008).

A series of reports assessing the progress of Timor-Leste's educational system in 2004-5 suggested that the 'access first, quality later' approach taken by UNTAET and the Timorese government, as well as donors, had led to a number of longer-term problems, in particular high student attrition rates, and poor student achievement (Millo & Barnett, 2004; Nicolai, 2004; World Bank, 2004; MEC, 2005; Beck, 2008). The development and implementation of a new Timorese primary curriculum, which articulated in policy the new content, methodologies and languages of instruction to be used in schools, also increased pressure on the Ministry to support in-service training opportunities for teachers. An assessment of the workforce of the time suggested they were woefully unprepared for this new curriculum, stating, "Few of the current stock of primary teachers have been properly trained and few have mastered more than simple classroom techniques and many have very limited subject knowledge" (MEC, 2005, p.12). Donors increasingly viewed in-service professional development as an imperative; to "improve the capacity of existing teachers" as "their relative youth and apparent openness to change suggests that investment in in-service training would be worthwhile" (Davidson, 2005, p.16). It is also recognised, however, that the current context of Timor-Leste makes this a task easier said than done, for the following reasons:

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[2] With less than 20% of the population fluent in Portuguese at the time the Constitution reintroduced it an official language in 2000, Portugal and Brazil, through their respective aid programs, have made the reintroduction of Portuguese a key area of intervention. Early Portuguese activity placed teachers from Portugal inside schools to directly teach students the language. However, the challenge, according to one representative interviewed from Portugal's Cooperation Agency, was that, "students had very little opportunity to actually learn the language well….in some schools [we tried] to teach Portuguese to the teachers during that time, but we had mainly teachers from Indonesian times, so they were very resistant to such classes". A longer-term programme for upskilling the qualifications and language competency of teachers was also initiated. However, the programme lacked adequate incentives to encourage teacher participation, and attrition rates were high, and the lack of assessment measures meant there was no way of tracking teacher progress (Lee, 2002).

1. Up to 75 per cent of the teaching workforce is deemed under or unqualified;[3]

2. Schools remain widely dispersed geographically, and vary widely in terms of the expertise and skill internal to them;

3. The current teacher workforce is perceived to lack motivation to participate in training;

4. In the short to medium term, pre-service institutions do not have the capacity or size to produce sufficient number of new graduates to replace the current workforce; and

5. Resources for such activities remain scare and difficult decisions must be made regarding the judicious allocation of Ministry budgets towards in-service rather than pre-service activities (Davidson, 2005; Romiszowski, 2005; MoE, 2009; World Bank, 2009; BELUN, 2010).

A changing landscape for in-service training provision

Within the Ministry of Education, the *Instituto para Formação Continuada*[4] (INFCP) has been the main service provider of in-service training since 2004. In its early years, however, INFCP was reported as being staffed mainly by foreign technical advisors, lacking appropriate infrastructure and resources, and without an appropriate mandate to develop activities autonomously (MEYCS, 2004, p.14). Thus, until 2008, in-service training provision was largely provided through donors such as Portugal, Brazil and UNICEF, alongside a number of smaller NGOs. Provision became plagued by fragmentation, duplication of efforts, poor coordination, poor systems of monitoring and accountability, leading to inefficient use of both teachers' time and the resources poured into such programmes, according to a number of donor reports (Davidson, 2005; Romiszowski, 2005; World Bank, 2009). The Ministry perception, according to one senior INFCP official, was that many training providers "had their own agendas, lacked an understanding of the Timorese culture and had no respect for government processes and controls." A lack of coordination between training providers also led to many actors feeling that they were 'competing' for teacher participation and engagement in a crowded field. According to a representative from Portugal Cooperation, "One day the teachers would be trained by Portugal, the next by another organisation like UNICEF and the next day with PROFEP, and the next with an NGO…there were just too many people sending different messages to these teachers." These inefficiencies meant that training was often unevenly provisioned across the country, and insufficient to the needs of the workforce (Heyward, 2005; Quinn, 2008; MoE, 2009; Shah, 2012).

Since 2008, however, there have been a number of significant changes to the fashion in which in-service training is regulated and provided for by the Ministry and its partners. The *Organic Education Law of the Ministry of Education* (2008)

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[3] The Education Act (2008) established the Bachelerato of Education, or an equivalent post-secondary qualification in teaching, as the minimum standard for the teaching profession. A 2009 World Bank report estimated that 75% of the current workforce did not meet this standard.

[4] Institute for Continuing Teacher Development

established the *Direcção de Formação de Professores*[5] (DNFP). DNFP was given responsibility for coordinating all in-service training efforts within the country, and ensuring that all training that was offered was aligned to a comprehensive plan for the large percentage of teachers who are deemed un/underqualified to earn the appropriate credential.

In its first year in operation, DNFP worked alongside these partners to pilot a new model for training. Using 250 trainers from Portugal Cooperation (IPAD), Brazil's teacher training programme (FROFEP), and INFCP, intensive training (*cursos intensivos)* was offered simultaneously to 8,000 un/underqualified teachers throughout the country in five regional centres during October and November 2008. Training focussed mainly on building the content knowledge of teachers, primarily in Portuguese language, but also in mathematics and geography/history. At the end of the training, all participants were asked to complete an assessment, which 90% of teachers passed, according to a senior Ministry official interviewed. Based on this initial success, these *cursos intensivos* have continued. Training has shifted to operate during three term holidays that occur during the school year (generally April, July and December) and has been further decentralised to occur concurrently in more than 50 sub-district centres. The intent is that through these modularised programmes of in-service provision, all teachers remaining within the workforce will gain a qualification by 2015, in a fashion that is flexible, efficient, and affordable. (World Bank, 2009; MoE, 2010b, p.141).

At the same time, DNFP has worked to more tightly regulate, align and coordinate in-service providers towards achieving this goal. In 2008, it issued guidelines, which specify that training providers need to: (1) register with the Ministry of Education; (2) align all activities with the Teacher Competency Framework; and (3) provide a full programme proposal to the Directorate for discussion and approval. Additionally, it was required that any training occur out of normal school hours, or ensure that there were provisions for coverage in the case of teachers being pulled out of the classroom during instructional time (MoE, 2008).

Working Within These New Arrangements of Partnership: Dilemmas and Paradoxes

Set against the backdrop of the *Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness, Accra Accord* and *the OECD-DAC Standards for Donor Engagement in Fragile States*, donors are acutely aware of the need to align their activities with government objectives and ensure that ownership and leadership are located within the Ministry. The past five years has seen most donors move from an arrangement of shadow alignment, to one where most activity occurs by using and supporting existing Ministry systems and budgets. This has led to new challenges for development partners, particularly in learning to work within a system where political will continues to exceed the actual capacity for change.

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[5] Directorate for Teacher Training

Partnership arrangements have shifted the locus of power from donor driven agendas to Ministry articulated ones. However, donor pressure to deliver on such an agenda has meant that end users (namely teachers and students) have become more marginalised in their work. Some development partners are concerned that the agenda of partnership at the national level, and political pressures on the Ministry to show progress, have led to this outcome. As one donor remarked, the new partnership agenda has led to an overemphasis on "on supporting national level activities", but "infrequent attention to what is happening at the chalkface." Donors attempting to address this imbalance often are ignored, or even chastised for operating outside of 'agreed to' agendas. For some development partners this has required a choice between supporting the state apparatus in its drive to efficiently 'qualify' all teachers; or target and tailor intervention to meet the actual needs of teachers. Each path entails its own opportunity costs.

Learning to work with and within the Ministry

The nature of Portugal's Cooperation Agreement with the Timorese government places it in a unique position, between that of donor and service provider (Cooperação Portugal, 2008, p.26). Its obligation is to follow, rather than lead Ministry decisions in regards to training. Through IPAD (*Instituto Português de Apoio Desarrolho Cooperação Portugal*), its support of teacher training programmes is classified under "technical cooperation", and its mandate circumscribed as "responding to the very concrete demands of the Timorese government" (Cooperação Portugal, 2008, p.51). The majority of its current effort in regards to in-service training focuses on supplying Portuguese teachers for the *cursos intensivos*. According to a representative from IPAD, this means that trainers, while hailing from Portugal and paid through Portuguese assistance, are effectively employees of the Institute.

From a pragmatic perspective, this has placed IPAD between the donor and the state, in the awkward position of having to mediate demands and dissatisfaction from both sides. Concern exists about the feasibility of accomplishing the task of qualifying all teachers within Ministry timeframes. As an IPAD coordinator stated:

> I understand the Ministry's rationale for doing so because they have a political problem to deal with...they want to implement the Teacher Career Regime and to do so you need to quickly qualify all the teachers…but to do this you need to train the trainers well…[we] are not capable of training 9,000 teachers this way. It is just not possible.

Despite his perspective on the feasibility of such an endeavour, the nature of Portugal's 'partnership' with Timor-Leste in this area (largely as a service provider) meant he was forced to go along with the Ministry's decisions. This was further complicated by the evolving nature of training provision from 2008 to present. The same individual lamented that, "in three years we have had three different models on how [intensive training] is offered". For IPAD this has serious implications in terms of being able to forecast and provide a sufficient number of trainers to meet last-minute demands. Often the organisation was asked to provide trainers less than a month prior to the commencement of each

curso intensivo, despite Ministry recognition that recruitment and training of new teachers was a lengthy process. Additionally, poor information flows between the DNFP, INFCP and IPAD meant that advance planning for training modules proved difficult, and limited the preparation that trainers could make in advance. One Ministry of Education official acknowledged that, "because training gets done across the whole country at once, it doesn't get managed as well as it could be".

For IPAD, in more than one instance, it failed in being able to provide the required numbers of trainers, thus compromising both service delivery and public faith in the government's capacity to meet promises.[6] Similarly, Portuguese trainers spoken to in the field often expressed frustration with the lack of promised resources and materials from the Ministry, and felt they were often left to their own devices in terms of training content. Trainers had little direct communication with the local Ministry of Education office, and felt unsupported in their roles. IPAD and its trainers often came under criticism for the quality and organisation of training from teachers, as was witnessed at more than one location in April 2010. Agitated and frustrated teachers were observed directing anger at these trainers in personal attacks and acts of resistance (walking out of training, protesting in front of the classroom), with little external Ministry support in mediating these tensions.

Other donors felt that partnership had become a "give but not take" relationship, with donors expected to provide funds and assist in implementation but given no opportunity for assessment or dialogue once projects commenced. As an example, UNICEF's *Eskola Foun* programme[7] is currently embedded within the INFCP. The agency funds and builds the capacity of INFCP trainers who then train teachers on implementing child-centred methodologies in schools. Despite outward Ministry recognition that the UNICEF approach had been successful in shifting teacher practice towards more child-friendly methods, key decision-makers showed little interest in considering what made its initiative different in

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[6] While Ministry officials state that teachers should receive between 20-24 hours of face to-face instruction for each of the three weeks of training, the reality was that many teachers were receiving much less than this. During observations of this training in April 2010 at 13 different locations across the country, teachers received between four and ten hours of face-to-face support per week. The reason for this was largely due to an insufficient number of trainers available to conduct the training simultaneously in the 52 sites across the country. Trainers often needed to travel (sometimes great distances) between locations to reach teachers, cutting into effective delivery time. In interviews and conversations, teachers, particularly those who travelled great distances to attend training sessions, suggested that the limited hours that actually were offered made them question whether attendance was worth the effort.

[7] This pilot program, operating in 39 schools is built around four main modules: helping teachers and students to establish and use active learning in their classroom; fostering linkages between the school and home; encouraging student and community participation through the establishment of student government; and helping teachers to use books based on the curriculum to promote integrated and practical learning. As part of each module, Institute trainers receive training in Dili, and then spend a week at each of their schools providing training and supporting teachers in implementing messages from each of the modules.

content and structure from the *cursos intensivos*.[8] This proved difficult for UNICEF who felt that school-based programmes of training focussed on continuous monitoring and support were necessary if professional competencies of teaching methodology or professionalism were to be achieved. While UNICEF had been able to convince those within INFCP of this message, highly centralised and hierarchical decision-making processes precluded discussion of how this *Eskola Foun* programme fit into a broader Ministry plan for in-service teacher support. According to one UNICEF manager,

> We do work with the Ministry and they do get excited about what we are doing…but you know it is hard, because the national directors themselves do not take leadership and…advocate for us enough with the Minister and Vice-Minister. It shouldn't have to be UNICEF going in to defend what we do and our rationale for action…it should be the national directors…But yet, when we go into a meeting, we usually end up explaining what is occurring, and then it becomes us who is driving the agenda.

The sentiment was that no space existed for engaging in discussion about changing the structure of the *cursos intensivos* or considering whether and why particular training efforts were effective. Rather the concern was that of expediency, and ensuring that the Ministry achieved its goal of qualifying all teachers by 2015. Thus continuous, school-based support remains on the fringes, rather than an integral part of in-service provision.

Delivering on what is promised

Mounting internal and external pressure to show results quickly has led to 'success' being judged by quantity served rather than quality of training delivered. National directors interviewed within the Ministry of Education often discussed the relative merits of various donors' professional development programmes by *how many* teachers they had trained. Thus, UNICEF's programme was seen as a "success" according to one national director because "working with UNICEF, we have worked with nearly 4,000 primary school teachers on improving their practices, in only two years". Lacking, however, was a sense of whether and how the messages from training would be sustained in teacher practice. For one UNICEF representative, this was a frustration, stating that their "goal is to get the Ministry to continue to follow up on the interventions we initiate...the trainers themselves are eager to do this…but the problem is that the system doesn't recognise the importance of that yet".

While a number of development partners spoken to understood the political imperative of the Ministry providing in-service training en masse to all unqualified primary teachers through the *cursos intensivos*, many expressed concern that it would not lead to the necessary changes in outcomes that underlie such action. As a representative from one development partner questioned,

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[8] Reasons given in one report suggest that this is due to the *Eskola Foun* programme being school-based in terms of the location of training, offering ongoing support/monitoring using the same group of trainers, and using Tetum for modules on professionalism or teaching methodology (MoE, 2010a).

> How do you teach twenty years worth of experience in five weeks, or two hours, or three weeks? It takes a lifetime to learn, so it is a little unfair to expect teachers to be everything. They are trying to promote 'fast food development,' the motto being 'if it is not delivered in 30 minutes then it should be free.' There is real danger in doing this with teacher professional development…there is not enough understanding [amongst the donors] that to become skilled takes time.

Instruction in larger groups in sub-district centres for short period of times may be an efficient and cost-effective way of training en masse, but for many of the teachers interviewed their perception was that it wasn't always effective. One teacher argued that "three weeks, three times a year is not enough…there is not enough training at the moment". Or put even more strongly by another head teacher, "it is not enough to have teacher training for one or two weeks…instead it is better to offer something proper than to waste everyone's time".

The focus on "coverage" of training has tended to marginalise smaller NGOs, who may not have the same breadth as larger partners, but who were or are providing programmes of support that are more sustainable in the classroom. Thus, for Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), a smaller, but successful actor in the field of teacher training, a significant challenge in gaining Ministry ownership and/or acceptance of the programme they developed, was that they were small fish in a big pond (Shah & Leneman, 2010, p.19).

Serving the needs of whom?

In fragile state environments, donors must find the balance between supporting and building the state, and ensuring that development activities support 'pro-poor', or in this case 'pro-student' outcomes (Pavanello & Othieno, 2008). Recognition of this trade-off led some actors to maintain autonomy and control over all aspects of project management, rather than to utilise Ministry staff and processes. One such case was NRC's Compact Teacher Training Programme (CTT), which operated as a one-year pilot programme in 2010. Implemented in 30 remote schools, across two districts of Timor-Leste, the programme's intent was to offer a field-based and contextually driven programme of training on the teacher competency related to professionalism. In developing and implementing this pilot, NRC maintained control of all aspects of project management, rather than utilise Ministry processes for several reasons—including its need to operate within tight timeframes, maintain a methodology and approach to training that was at 'odds' with Ministry philosophy (namely teaching in Tetum and working in a small number of schools), and employ and train its own cadre of Timorese trainers. However, the training programme aligned itself in both its form—by being context-based, flexible and recurrent as dictated by the *Teacher Training Policy*; and function—by developing a curriculum focussed on teachers demonstrating mastery of the domain of professionalism within the *Competency Framework for Teachers*. An evaluation of the programme found the programme to be successful in introducing child-friendly methodologies into the schools they worked in, gaining ownership and understanding from teachers over the value of

such techniques, and providing teachers with practical and contextually based activities they could immediately employ (Shah & Leneman, 2010).

When school directors and teachers were interviewed regarding their current perceptions of training provision, many of them felt increasingly disillusioned with the quality and content of Ministry offerings. In addition to issues related to the brevity of the training on offer, many felt that locating the training in sub-centres ignored the unique constraints faced within particular school locations. Lacking from the *cursos intensivos* but present in UNICEF's and NRC's programme of support were, "practical suggestions, immediate feedback, and new methodologies and techniques that we can apply immediately in our classroom", according to one teacher spoken to. Another head teacher, cognisant of the needs of his teachers, felt that training needed to be a continuous process, such as that offered under the UNICEF model, rather than the modularised programmes offered through the *cursos intensivos*. He felt that, "the best way to have a good quality teacher is to train them more individually rather than as a whole group. Building capacity is a process…teachers need time and individual practice". Finally, echoing the recommendation of UNICEF, strong support existed for training to occur in Tetum, rather than Portuguese. While teachers understood the importance of developing Portuguese competency, this created problems when the focus of training was centred around content or pedagogy rather than language. One teacher felt that, "in order to learn in the training, you have to have a good understanding of Portuguese first. And this is a challenge for us …because we don't understand the language in the courses all the time".

These interviews made it evident that NRC's experiment on how to reform in-service support resonated strongly with those who ultimately are the beneficiaries of such activity. Despite this, NRC struggled to gain the cooperation or commitment from senior Ministry officials for building on their model, largely because it chose not to work within existing Ministry channels. As the final evaluation of the programme notes,

> Success [of the programme]…is due to the excellent management and timely execution of intended activities by NRC. Based on the experiences of donors who have handed over management of activity to the Ministry, or used existing Ministry systems, it is quite likely that [NRC's] degree of short-term success would have been more muted. However, NRC's challenge in getting higher level buy-in indicates that projects working independently of government systems for teacher training and project management may suffer in their long-term durability. (Shah & Leneman, 2010, p.7)

In recognition of this, several donors maintain that partnering with the Ministry in such activities is more important than achieving successful short-term outcomes, particularly if sustainability is desired. A World Bank representative interviewed suggested that, "The international community should not be too heavily involved in training," and that development partners should "let the Timorese decide for themselves what they want". This viewpoint was reiterated by a senior UNICEF official who indicated that, "ownership of our programme must rest with the government, rather than the donor, for it to be a sustainable

model that can then continue after donor support ceases". Much of this response was tied to the accountability these donors had to being good partners above all else. The opportunity cost within the current atmosphere of the Ministry is that donors are forced to accept, rather than challenge, processes and decisions regarding in-service training that contribute to poor outcomes and fail to acknowledge the needs of teachers and schools.

Conclusion

Recent years have seen donors shift their attention to working within and through the state apparatus, the result being that national mechanisms for service delivery have been strengthened with the Ministry now seen as taking a clear leadership role. This is an important step as the nation moves out of its reconstruction phase and into longer-term development objectives. Donor alignment, coordination and harmonisation with government priorities in the area of in-service teacher training has led to increased efficiency of provision, but this efficiency has come at a cost. Increased sensitivity to being seen as 'willing partners', on the part of donors, has led to a situation where little scope exist to challenge, discuss or question the best possible way to support the current teacher workforce through a period of rapid transformation. Those that choose to stand and operate outside the Ministry, in the belief that service delivery is being sacrificed, have come to be seen as non-compliant or uncooperative actors, as was the case with NRC.

The data from this study suggests that teachers (and students) have been effectively excluded from this partnership, despite the fact that they are (or should be) the key driver for joint action. Instead, what has been prioritised is political expediency, the drive for results, accountability to frameworks of good governance/partnership and efficiency. Lacking is a real sense of accountability to the teachers themselves, despite recognition on the part of the government that, "ownership comes with a responsibility to define our needs and be accountable for delivery."

As previously stated, the OECD-DAC Principles (2007) state that the most important objective for donor engagement in fragile contexts should be that of "doing no harm." The teachers and school directors spoken to as part of this study may not go so far as labelling current training provision as harmful, but there was broad consensus that current approaches were ineffective and in their eyes a waste of time. Resistance to current training provision has mounted over time, with teachers assembling to boycott and protest the poor quality of what is being offered by the Ministry with its development partners. Given that teachers are the largest group of public sector employees in the country, this discontent should be of concern to both donors and the state, and seen as a potentially harmful outcome of harmonisation, alignment and coordination that partnership discourses have created.

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