

Dynamics of martial arts related conflict and violence in Timor-Leste

NGO Belun Research Report May 2014



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NGO Belun

Belun is a local NGO Belun works in three key areas: Conflict Prevention, Community Capacity Development, and Research and Policy Development. Based in Dili, the capital of Timor-Leste, Belun has a dedicated team of over 40 staff, supported by 86 volunteer district monitors across the country. Belun's vision is Timor-Leste's society has the ability, creativity and critical thinking to strengthen peace for development. Belun is among the largest national non-government organizations in Timor-Leste and holds the most extensive community outreach program across the country.

The DAME Project

Belun, in close collaboration with Search for Common Ground is implementing the *Democracy and Development in Action through the Media and Empowerment program* (DAME). DAME complements and supports Belun's *Early Warning, Early Response* (EWER) program in enhancing community capacity for conflict transformation and prevention. Belun's activities under DAME include a capacity assessment of the 43 sub-district based Conflict Prevention and Response Networks, training in conflict transformation, conflict prevention related research and policy development, and small grants to support conflict sensitive activities. Through these activities, Belun is building local capacity to prevent conflict and reduce tensions within communities.

Disclaimer

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Methodology

This research was conducted using a combination of research techniques including a literature review, media monitoring, conflict incident monitoring through the Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) system¹, participatory methods including focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews, and a survey.

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews and FGDs were conducted in five districts: Dili, Ermera, Baucau, Bobonaro, and Cova Lima from May to July 2013. These districts were selected on the basis of their identified vulnerability to martial arts related conflicts through EWER data monitoring in addition to consultations with local partners and stakeholders. Interview and FGD participants included community leaders, PNTL members, leaders and members of Martial Arts organisations, youth, students, religious entities, and community members. This qualitative method and open questions were used to facilitate a comfortable space for participants with different levels of literacy and access to information to share their opinions and ideas. In total, there were 140 participants across the FGDs and interviews (excluding those involved in informal discussions) – 18 females and 122 males. The survey was conducted in collaboration with The Asia Foundation through their Public Opinion Poll, with a random sample of 831 people across all 13 districts of Timor Leste.

Several challenges were faced, particularly the low participation of women in the FGDs and interviews. This difficulty was two-fold, with women not having the same level of access to information regarding MAOs and therefore unable to share and contribute to the same extent as males, as well as the cultural aspect of women not being as actively involved in public discussions. Another challenge faced was the sensitive nature of the topic. As a result, some participants may have been reluctant in the opinions and information they shared, out of fear of speaking out against MAOs or individuals.

¹ For more information on the EWER, please visit www.belun.tl

List of Acronyms

CNJTL	National Youth Council of Timor Leste
CPRN	Conflict Prevention and Response Network
CRAM	Martial Arts Regulatory Commission
EU	European Union
EWER	Early Warning and Early Response Network
FESTIL	Timor-Leste Martial Arts Federation
F-FDTL	FALINTIL – Democratic Forces of Timor Leste
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FRETILIN	Revolutionary Front for an Independent Timor Leste
IKS	Sacred Monkey Union
KORK	The Wise Children of the Land
MAE	Ministry of State Administration
MAO	Martial Arts Organisation
PD	Democratic Party
PNTL	National Police of Timor Leste
PSD	Social Democratic Party
PSHT	Brotherhood of Sacred Heart – Lotus
SEJD	Secretary of State for Youth and Sports
SEPFOPE	Secretary of State for Professional Training and Employment
TAF	The Asia Foundation

Introduction

Whilst members of some Martial Arts Organisations (MAO) were seen as clandestine heroes of the resistance struggle in Timor-Leste, their notoriety since independence has grown following frequent incidents of violence and ongoing inter-group rivalries in many parts of the country. Trails of MAO graffiti remain a visible reminder of how some members of the now outlawed groups have misused their MAO identities to engage in gang-like behavior, and to inflame or settle personal and political disputes.

Incident monitoring through Belun's *Early Warning, Early Response* (EWER)² program from February 2012 to September 2013, showed that of all reported incidents (1356), only 22 were related to martial arts organisations (MAOs). The issue of MAO-related violence has continued to attract substantial attention from the general public and media, with a number of organisations deemed as threats to community security and stability. The Government has taken a strong stance on MAOs, using legal measures to impose strict restrictions and sanctions. Resolution No. 35/2011: *Guaranteeing Public Order and Internal Security* (and revised through the Resolution No. 24/2012) and most recently, Resolution No. 16/2013: *Extinction of Martial Arts Groups* outlawed the three most well-known MAOs: *Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate* (PSHT), *Ikatan Kera Sakti* (IKS), and *Kmanek Oan Rai Klaran* (KORK).

Until now discussions around incidents of alleged MAO violence have focused mainly on the identity of these actors. On one hand, it is argued that the existence of MAOs actually threatens public security and peace, contributing to the escalation of and continued violence in the country. On the other hand, it is viewed that the organisations do not encourage, condone or tolerate any criminal actions or violence by their members. In which case, those individual or groups actions should be seen as independent of their affiliation and membership to that organisation. The complex layers of relationships, networks and loyalties that characterize the MAO's identities can mean that certain individuals or groups within an organisation may abuse or take advantage of their affiliation to the organisation. This report seeks to extend beyond the circular debate around the identity of perpetrators, and to identify the underlying drivers of this kind of conflict.

This report finds that a ban on MAOs will not be effective as a 'stand-alone' solution to end MAO violence. This kind of violence stems from deep-set structural tensions relating to unequal access to public goods and services (such as education and security); intense competition and unequal distribution and access to resources and opportunities (such as land and employment); as well as the jealousies that are borne out of such social and economic conditions. Growing numbers of disaffected youth should be considered a warning sign, due to their potential to drive into political violence and instability.³ Figures 1 and 2 (below) show that based on EWER data, MA related incidents have stabilized at relatively low levels in comparison to other categories of youth violence.

² EWER or *Early Warning, Early Response* is the monitoring system for conflicts in Timor-Leste which was established in 2008 in cooperation with Columbia University's Center for International Conflict Resolution (CICR). For more information on the EWER, please visit www.belun.tl

³ E Brennan-Galvin, 'Crime and violence in an urbanizing world', *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 56, 2002 pp. 123–146.

Communities are expressing concern that these kinds of violence will continue, and may escalate, unless the underlying causes are resolved.

The purpose of this research is to bring to the fore the various causal factors (socio-structural problems such as economics, education, and politics) from which youth, and thereby MA-related violence in Timor-Leste is derived. In doing so, this report has identified a list of recommendations to serve as more *preventative* solutions and responses that target these underlying factors. Various perspectives from community members, MAOs, civil society, academics and Government at both the local and national levels are considered in this report. It is hoped that this approach engenders a more constructive discussion on the existence of MAOs, in order to develop more effective, comprehensive, and inclusive responses to this type of violence.

The report is structured in four parts, as follows: 1) An overview of MAOs in Timor Leste including a general background, common perceptions and representation of MAOs, and characteristic of MA related incidents of conflict and violence; 2) Identification and discussion of the key casual factor for the occurrence of MA-related violence and conflict, 3) An examination of the challenges Governments and MAOs have faced in relation to regulating MAO activities, instilling discipline and ending MA-linked violence, and 4) Conclusions and policy recommendations for a more holistic approach to addressing the issue of MA related conflict and violence in Timor Leste.

Martial Arts, Student and Youth Violence – EWER Incident Data⁴

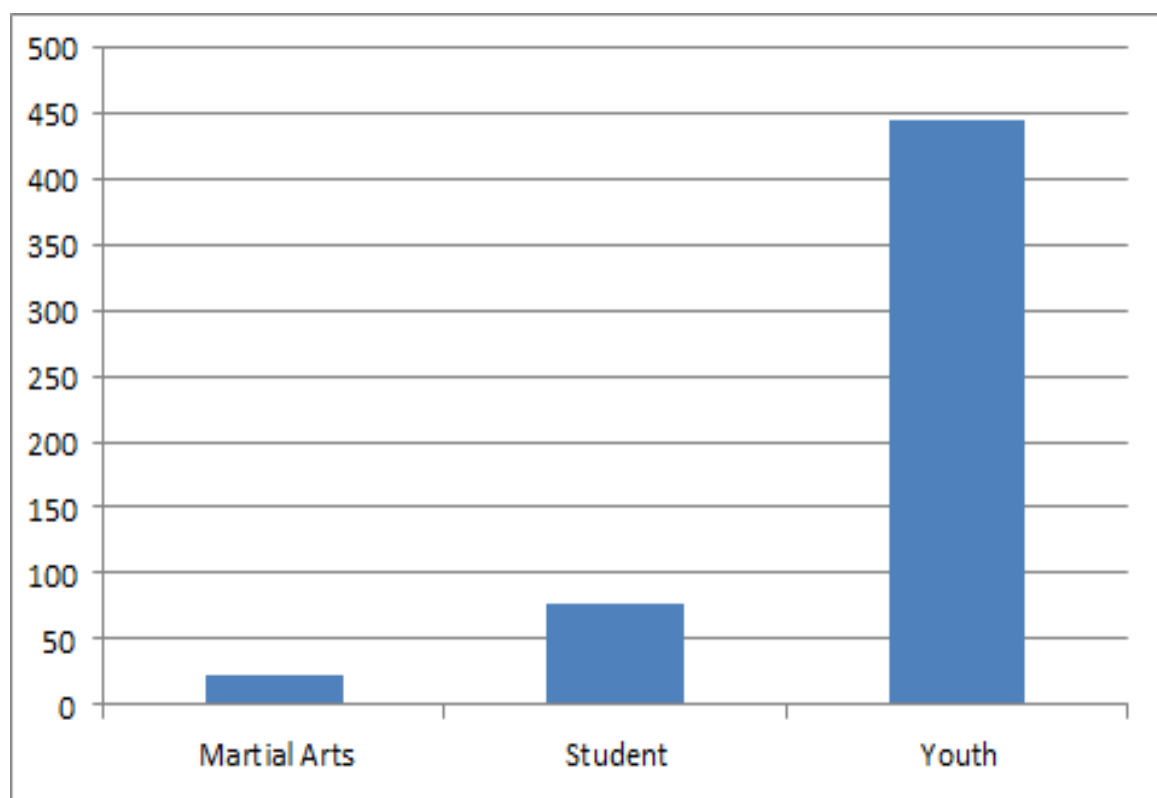


Figure 1: Number of MA, Youth & Student related incidents - February 2012 to September 2013, EWER.

Figure 1 shows that 545 incidents were initiated by youths, students or MAG members between February 2012 and September 2013. Youth incidents are considerably high (445) compared to student- (78) and Martial Arts- (22) initiated incidents. A total of 1365 incidents were recorded throughout this period.

Figure 2 shows the proportion of Martial Arts, Youth & Student initiated violence, calculated as a percentage of the monthly incident total, for the months of February 2012 to September 2015. The data shows that youths account for the highest proportion of total incidents since it was introduced in February 2012. While the proportion of violence initiated by students and MAO members is much lower than youth proportion (less than 10% on average).

⁴ All data is from Belun's *Early Warning, Early Response* (EWER) conflict monitoring system. For more information on EWER, please visit www.belun.tl. As the incident category 'youth' was introduced in February 2012, youth violence data for before February 2012 is not available.

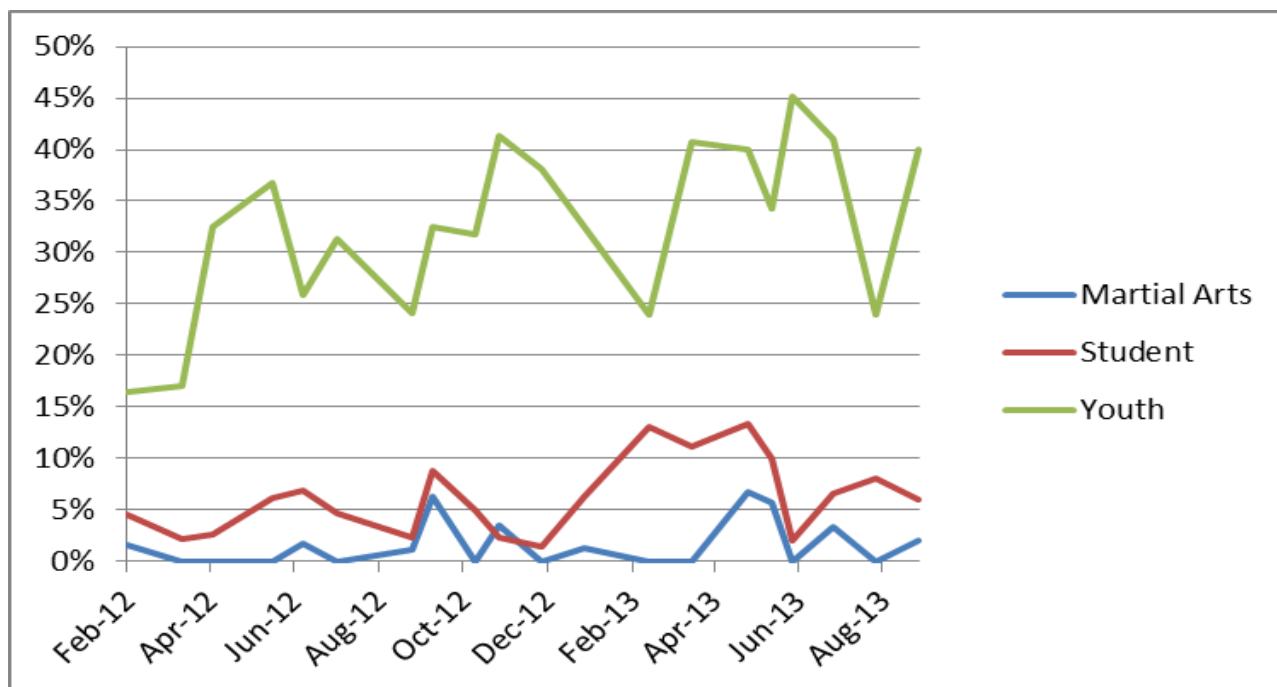


Figure 2: Proportion of Martial Arts, Student and Youth violence – February 2012 to September 2013, EWER⁶.

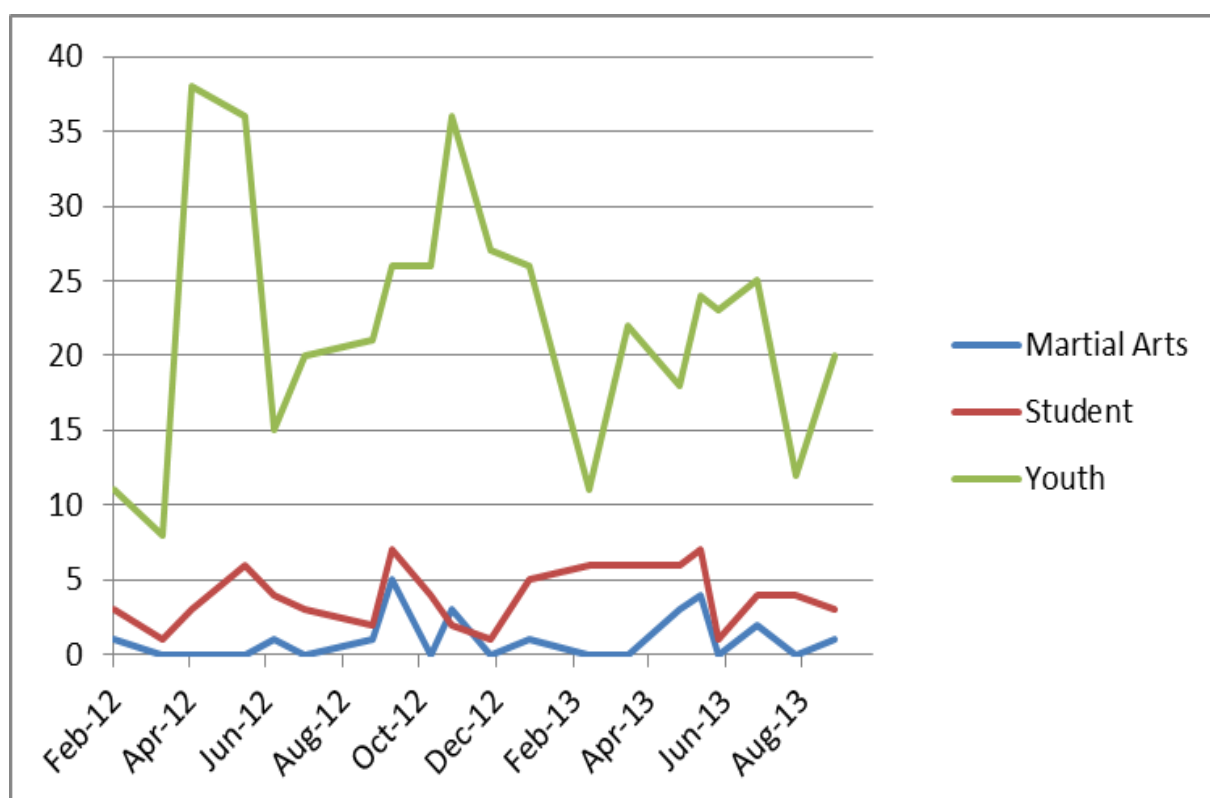


Figure 3: Number of MA, youth & student related incidents recorded per month – February 2012 to September 2013. EWER

⁶ Calculated as a percentage of the total number of incidents recorded through EWER for that month.

Part I. Overview of Martial Arts Related Violence and Conflict in Timor Leste

In Timor-Leste, defining the term Martial Arts Organisation (MAO) is not straightforward. There are an estimated 15 – 20 MAOs, each with long and complex histories, both pre-and post-Independence.⁷ While some are celebrated for their contribution to the resistance struggle, a number were introduced from Indonesia - such as PSHT, PD, Seruling Dewata, Padjajaran, and IKS - further complicating members' political and personal affiliations. Some observers say these groups were introduced to complicate the social fabric, cause internal divisions and distract people from resistance politics. This however, is not straightforward. For example Indonesian introduced PSHT formed a clandestine network named *Fuan Domin* to support the self-determination process, as did Padjajaran (*Kombat*). Other organisations were founded within Timor-Leste, such as KORK, which was established in Ainaro. A number of MAOs were introduced from abroad such as Korea (Taekwondo) Japan (Karate) and China (Kempo). Ritual Arts groups, such 7-7 and 5-5, also arose locally around the same time.

Since independence, communal violence and rivalries between numbers of these groups has sporadically created insecurity. Members of three groups in particular: Kera Sakti, KORK and PSHT, are well known for their involvement in continued rivalries and incidents of violence and were allegedly involved in much of the violence of the crisis from 2006-07.⁸ In response to this issue, both the Government and civil society groups have made concerted efforts to address the problem. Initiatives such as the Communication Forum for Timor-Leste Martial Arts were established by then President Gusmão, organizing MAOs as well as involving them in peace-building processes. However, due to a lack of support and funding, the Forum was unable to continue. Various other mechanisms and strategies have been initiated by Government, local and international NGOs, the United Nations, the Church, and local authorities to respond to MA-related violence and conflicts through mechanisms such as dialogues, oath-taking, *Nahe Biti Boot* (customary conflict resolution), public vows, laws, and suspension. Nevertheless, these efforts were unable to end the occurrence of MA-related violence. Finally in July 2013, the Government through the Council of Ministers issued a resolution outlawing the three MAOs: PSHT, IKS, and KORK.⁹

Not all MAOs have such a notoriously bad reputation. A number have steered clear of street violence and are well-regarded as disciplined and peaceful sporting organisations. Despite the murky reputation of MAOs generally in Timor Leste, Tae Kwan Do, Karate and Kempo have been ideal role-models, contributing significantly to the development of sports in Timor-Leste. For example, Kempo is the latest MAO became the champion at SEA Games in Myanmar 2013 bringing home gold medals. Gold medals were also obtained in 2011 at SEA Games in

⁷ James Scambury's 2006 report, *A survey of gangs and youth groups in Dili, Timor-Leste* is a useful reference for further information on the various MAOs, their constituencies and their histories.

⁸ J Scambury, 'Anatomy of a Conflict: the 2006-2007 Communal Violence in East Timor – Conflict', *Security and Development*, Vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 265-288.

⁹ Timor Leste, Government, 'Government Resolution No.16/2013 'Extinction of the Martial Arts Groups', *Jornal da Republica*, Dili, July 2013.

Indonesia. Timor-Leste is proud of their performance and efforts. The same organization has also provided entertainment through a MA performance for youth and communities at the National celebration of Independence Day in 2013, at the invitation of the Prime Minister.

By representing the perspectives and concerns of a wide range of stakeholders, particularly members of a variety of MAOs, this report acknowledges the diversity of motivations of and contributions by various MAOs in their communities, as well as the complexity of the drivers of violence related to MAOs.

Characteristics of the MA-related violence – who is involved and how?

Whilst there is a diversity of members within MAOs (age, personal and professional backgrounds such as those working within Government entities and security institutions) research participants declared that male youth aged 15 - 25 are the primary provocateurs for MA-related violence. **Figure 1** shows the number of incidents perpetrated or initiated by the individuals of MAOs, students, and youth. From February 2009 to September 2013 about 136 recorded incidents were linked to MAs. This number is smaller than those related to students (151) and youth (445). Although the total number of incidents does not significantly increase, the portion of youth and students involved in violence has increased. This differs to the portion of MA-related violence, which has continuously decreased since the introduction of the resolution. Characteristics for such violence are quite varied and different, such as the use of weapons, alcohol, land disputes, and so on.

Participants recognised that types of violence that occurred incessantly were rock-throwing, brawls in the street, property destruction and in some serious cases, even murder. Victims of such incidents are most commonly MA members and their communities. MA are often victims in incidents over territorial disputes. In some conflicting areas, community members are caught in between rock-throwing between groups, threatened due to their association with other MAOs, compelled to become members of dominant groups, or suffer disturbances with no clear motivation. The types and reasons for violence are vast, and there are no specific forms of violence attributable to specific groups. Generally, rock throwing, brawling, house burning and stabbings were the kinds of incidents reported to be perpetrated by MAO members.

Male youth are the key actors linked to MA-related violence. In some conflicting areas, actors or perpetrators are students, with incidents occurring in close proximity to their schools. Many perpetrators are quite young, however it is possible that they are encouraged by older youth to enact the violence. None of the research participants suggested that high level leaders within MA were involved in violence. Officially, MAO leaders have consistently publically rejected displays of violent attitudes by their members.

Community perceptions of martial arts organisations

In Timor-Leste there are varying community views toward MAOs. Throughout the field research the polarization of perceptions was evident, with some equating MAOs as criminal organisations which contribute no value to communities, whilst others regard them as valuable sporting resources that provide not only entertainment but also support the physical and social development of youth.

Based on survey data gathered across all 13 districts of Timor Leste, communities predominantly hold very negative perceptions of MAOs, and associate them with insecurity and instability, rather than with the provision of sporting activities. The results of the survey show that 509 out of a total of 831 respondents (61.3%) considered MAOs to offer *no benefit to communities*. Only 140 (15.9%) respondents declared that they thought the MAOs had a *beneficial impact on communities*. 649 out of 831 respondents (78.1%) said that they *absolutely supported* the Government's resolution for the outlawing of MAOs PSHT, IKS and KORK. Only 68 respondents (8.2%) did *not support* the resolution. These figures demonstrate very negative reputation of MAOs in Timor Leste. PSHT, IKS and KORK, the three outlawed MAOs are the most renowned in Timor Leste and also more likely to be equated with street violence. It is highly likely that most survey respondents' answers considered these groups, but did not capture other groups such as Taekwondo, Kempo and Karate.

There is concern that the reputation of legitimate MAOs has been unfairly tarnished and that MAOs are not given due credit for the contributions they make to communities and the nation, as legitimate sporting organisations. The need to improve the profile of such sporting organisations was raised by many participants in the research. A local government representative who used to be a district advisor for FESTIL noted that dissemination activities in rural areas by involving MA members actively would reinstall MAO's fame in the community.¹⁰ In the wake of Government Resolution number 16/2013 which outlawed problematic MAOs - PSHT, IKS and KORK- it is indeed important to acknowledge the contribution of and promote the continued contributions the remaining, legitimate of MAOs.

The main objective of MAOs is to provide opportunities for community members to become involved sporting activities, both recreational and professional. This is reflected in the activities of groups such as Karate, Taekwondo, and Kempo who participate in training and competitions starting at the local level, through to the national, regional and international levels. Through their efforts and the attainment of numerous silver and gold medals, Timor-Leste's profile in the regional and international sporting arena has grown. For example, the

¹⁰ Interview with local government representative in Baucau, 29 May 2013.

Federation of Timor-Leste Self-Defence Arts (FESTIL) participated in regional level (ASEAN) competitions in Vietnam in 2009 and the SEA Games in Indonesia and brought home some silver medals.¹¹

Aside from providing sporting activities, many MAOs support and contribute to their communities through the provision of community services. Examples of this include the setting up tents or temporary shelters for community events (IKS Loilubo)¹², providing physical labour to build sacred-houses (KORK Ermera)¹³ and involvement in the community security council (PSHT Comoro).¹⁴ Leaders of FESTIL in Bobonaro identified that MAOs are able to facilitate natural disasters works by virtue of their physical capacity, but have been unable to take action because of a lack of access to funding.¹⁵ It is clear that legitimate MAOs have the potential to contribute to the communities and indeed the nation, and that this potential should be promoted and harnessed.

Media representation of martial arts organisations

The media has a key role to play in influencing public perceptions of MAOs. Information published through the media has focused predominantly on reporting negative aspects of MAOs, and this has contributed to the predominant (mis)perception that MAOs do not have a legitimate role, as sporting organisations, to play in communities. Furthermore, in some cases the media was found to incite escalation of violence among groups within the MA. For example, interviewees in Covalima and Baucau stated that sometimes the information published regarding alleged incidents of MA-related violence is inaccurate. A key interviewee from within from the media industry suggested that sensationalized reporting on such incidents may be driven by the motive of profits rather than standards of good journalism.¹⁶ Accurate and impartial reporting on alleged MAO violence and conflict is required, in order to acknowledge and address the true causes of such incidents, and avoid the unhelpful scapegoating and generalisation of youth violence as an MAO issue.

Martial-Arts related violence: personal motivation, group actions?

"I went to Samalete because I heard the incident was related to martial arts and I wanted to investigate. In the end, it wasn't a Martial Arts related dispute, but a long standing private dispute related to land ownership."

-MAO Leader, Ermera

¹¹ Antara, "Timor-Leste wins first gold medal," November 20, 2011. <http://www.antaranews.com/en/news/77783/timor-leste-wins-first-gold-medal>

¹² Focus Group Discussion, Loilubo, 27 May 2013.

¹³ Interview with members of KORK Ermera, 23 May 2013.

¹⁴ Interview with members of PSHT in Beto area, 15 May 2013.

¹⁵ Interview with FESTIL Bobonaro, 20 June 2013.

¹⁶ Interview with a local media director in Dili, 13 July 2013.

Polarised perceptions on the motivations and identities behind so-called MAO violence led to contentious and circular debates in the FGDs, although most participants recognised that *officially*, MAOs do not get involved in violence. While participants acknowledged that such organisations do not officially involve themselves in conflicts or violence, some strongly argued that the networks of members were often involved in group violence, based on the loyalties and relations established through the MAOs. Researcher Arnold (2009) also finds that most youth violence in Timor Leste is committed by small groups and through group coordination.¹⁷ However, all MA leaders interviewed declared that their organisation never mobilizes its members in clashes against other MAOs. A number expressed that any sub-groups or individual members are not authorized to represent MAOs in conflicts, such as settle personal disputes or communal violence.

It is true that MAO members or individuals involving themselves in violence do not usually use their MAO identities, such as uniforms and symbols. However, the loyalties and networks within MAOs often appears to be a key dynamic in such violence. This can be done through mobilizing co-members for support or involvement in a crime or personal conflict, by invoking the loyalty of fellow members. In this way, a personal or private matter draws in the organisation, and as a result the organisation as an institution becomes associated with the acts of violence that their members initiate or are involved in. More than this, it can mean that other members of the organisation not involved in the crime, can be held responsible and become a victim of reprisal attacks. Group identities and emotional linkages among members are most probably the basis for the provision of support in retaliation against adversaries.

The group dynamics of MAOs may drive conflicts. Residents in conflict-vulnerable areas – such as Beto (Dili) and Caibada (Baucau) – stated that risk of violence can increase when youth get together. They considered that when groups of youth with the same identities get together in streets, it can easily lead to incidents such as rock-throwing, provocation and threats, fighting, and other violent acts.¹⁸ The group dynamics of MAOs provide opportunities and challenges for peace-building, which require more attention.

Sub-culture of the MAOs – culture of loyalty divided?

There have been well established concerns that the strong sub-culture within MAOs can compete with wider social values, resulting in contradiction between traditions and modernisation as well as causing divisions and rifts within families and communities. This can create ‘borders’ within communities.¹⁹ Many respondents observed that some MAO members lose respect for or become disobedient to their parents and communities, only showing obedience to their cohort within their MAOs. Other respondents also suggested that the MAOs'

¹⁷ M Arnold, 'Who is My Friend, Who is My Enemy'? Youth and State-building in Timor-Leste, *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 379-392

¹⁸ Interview with a resident in Caibada, Baucau, 30 May 2013

¹⁹ Interview with Sub CRAM Baucau, 29 May 2013.

sub-culture contributes to the erosion of respect for traditional practices and customary laws such as Tara Bandu, and furthermore shows a disregard for the formal law system. Belun's 2011 report, *Culture and its Impacts on Community and Social Life* showed that variances between traditional values and loyalty to the MAOs can ignite the social tensions.²⁰

In terms of values system, MAOs and familial groups in Timor-Leste place great emphasis and value on community and collective living. As such, in-group loyalties are strongly embedded and deeply cultural. Participants stated that the MAOs sub-culture is demonstrated through an organisational structure and culture which requires loyalty to colleagues, mates, and/or brothers within the organisation. Many also declared that this obligation often extends to defending peers and vengeance against common enemies, in response to individual members' personal problems and disputes. In contrast, all MA leaders interviewed totally rejected the formal involvement of the organisation in such violence. Indeed, there is a 'taken for granted' indication that the sense of loyalty and emotional-bound instituted among members of the MA may provide the basis for fellow members to support each other in issues outside of the MA sporting arena.

Another blurred boundary between MAOs and communities stem from strong familial and kinship bonds. The concept of inter and intra-familial relationships is deeply embedded in Timorese culture. For example, the traditional value of *fetrosaa-umane* (*wife-takers* and *wife-givers*) compels familial groups to support each other by way of exchanging resources for certain traditional celebrations. In addition, the values of collective culture that place importance on family linkages and obligations also demands that children pay respect to the older ones. This culture of respect and kinship is layered over other sub-cultures. As such, strains and tensions may easily arise at the familial and community levels, and spill over into and escalate at the MA organisational level.

In Timor-Leste, men are commonly deemed as defenders for their own family. There is a tendency of using violence to settle certain problems. Myrtinnen (2009) argues that strong patriarchal values as well as the resistance history upholding the rhetoric of male war-fighters has led to the establishment of a 'social carte blanche' for men to use violence.²¹ This tendency for violence does not necessarily portray specific attitudes for MAOs' sub-culture, but is more so based on an acceptance on violence that has been embedded in the national culture. This will be discussed further in Part II, 'Perpetuating Violence: A culture of violence?'

MAOs have become the *scapegoat* for many incidents of rural and urban violence. They have to some extent become (mis)regarded as the almost exclusive source of incidents of youth violence. In Samalete, a particularly macabre incident which resulted in the burning of a number of residences and the violent murder of 4

²⁰ C Brandão, 'Culture and its impacts on social and community life', AtReS Policy Report No. 5, 2011, <http://belun.tl/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Relatoriu-Politika-VI-Impaktu-Kultura.pdf>

²¹ H Myrttinen, 'Poster Boys No More: Gender and Security Sector Reform in Timor-Leste'. *Policy Brief no.31*, Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), Geneva 2009.

community members including an elderly woman and a child, was widely alleged to be related to MA. This allegation became one of the reasons for the government to renew suspension through its resolution no.35/2012.²² In informal discussions with youth in the area, it was revealed that a long history of personal intra-familial disputes and conflicts had occurred in the years leading up to incident, relating to theft, accusations of sorcery, and political views.²³ Concerningly, this negative focus and scapegoating of MAOs precludes constructive dialogue and the creation of holistic and participatory strategies to address various problems that give rise to conflicts within communities.

Political manipulation of MAOs – still a risk?

MAOs made a considerable contribution during the resistance, with some acting as networks for the dissemination of information for the resistance movement. For instance, PSHT's contribution to the struggle was proved by establishing a resistance group called 'Fuan-Domin' (the Loving Heart), with members spread across Timor-Leste. After independence was gained, some of the key figures in *Fuan Domin* assumed various positions within Government institutions. In an open letter accessed through the Timor Post newsletter dated September 25, Martial Arts Regulatory Commission (CRAM) recognised that the MAOs have diverse members including high level public servants within the State's institutions. Despite this, a significant proportion of MAO members, have a lower socio-economic standing, are somewhat marginalized from national development processes and are increasing disaffected. This dynamic, in addition to organisational weaknesses, has left MAOs vulnerable to political manipulation. Consequently, there is a real risk may also act upon their frustration through violence, as was reported to have happened during the communal violence that began in 2006²⁴. Goldstone explains that when youth are released from political participation, they can become involved in violence to express their frustrations.²⁵ Unmet political promises and the manipulation of youth as instruments for political gain can contribute to youth disappointment and frustration that may be expressed through violence.²⁶

James Scambary notes that there are clear linkages between MAOs and political parties, such as KORK with FRETILIN and PSHT with PD and PSD parties.²⁷ During the research, some participants declared that there are numerous senior members of their MA who allegedly hold key positions within the Timor-Leste Government. Deputy General Commander of PNTL, Afonso de Jesus in an interview declared that the current Secretary of State

²² Timor Leste Government, 'Resolution no.35/2012, Guaranteeing Public Order and Internal Security', Jornal da Republica, Dili, December 2012

²³ Informal discussion with Samalete youth, May 24, 2013.

²⁴ See for example: James Scambary (2009), *Anatomy of a Conflict: the 2006-2007 Communal Violence in East Timor - Conflict, Security and Development*, 9:2, 265-288, who suggests that MAGs were mobilized for communal violence during the political crisis of 2006.

²⁵ J Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*, University of California Press, Berkely, 1991.

²⁶ Consultation with Director of Local NGO, 11 April 2013.

²⁷ J Scambary, op. cit, 'Anatomy of a Conflict...' pp. 265-288.

for Land and Property was formerly a senior figure in PSHT.²⁸ With such linkages, it is not hard to see how manipulation potentially could occur, in the name of political interests or goals.

Many leaders of MA recognise their members' affiliation with various political parties, however these are supposed to be personal views and not a representation of the organisation's interests. MA leaders suggested that the organisations do not allow the *official* affiliation of the organisation with any party. In the interests of democracy, an individual member's engagement in political parties is not officially regulated, or within the explicit control of organisations. Whilst the outlawing of MAOs has reduced the risk of political manipulation and political violence from the groups, the masses of unemployed and marginalized youth including former MAO member, and the networks within which they chose to (re)organize themselves, will require careful monitoring and attention in order to avoid potentially destabilising or violent mobilization.

²⁸ Interview with Deputy PNTL General Commander, Afonso de Jesus, June 26, 2013

Part II: The drivers of MAO-linked violence

One of the intentions of this research was to identify the causal factors underlying incidents of MA-related violence. It was found that various structural factors can be considered as drivers, triggers or root causes of much MA-related violence and conflict in communities and of youth violence more generally. The factors identified, as detailed in this section, include weaknesses in education, high levels of unemployment and inequality, rural-urban migration, as well as the normalisation of violence. Strong actions from the Government and key stakeholders to address these underlying factors are vital, to both prevent future conflicts and to reduce the escalation and incidences of such violence. Since the strong, reactive measure of outlawing of three of the big MAOs, on the basis of Government Resolution No. 16/2013, it is now time to more holistically respond to the causal factors and more effectively alleviate the issue violence within our communities.

Education: teaching for a peaceful and prosperous future

“Creating an environment that is conducive to positive adolescent development entails addressing the values, attitudes, and behaviours of the institutions in the adolescent’s domains – family, peers, schools and services... Promoting open, fluid and honest communication supports adolescents in their interaction with parents and families, communities and policymakers, and helps adults and communities positively appreciate their contributions”

- Adolescence: An Age of Opportunity, UNICEF 2011²⁹

Quality and access to education is the subject of much debate and scrutiny in Timor-Leste. The impact of education on childhood and adolescent development is irrefutable, not only in terms of knowledge and skills, but also values, attitudes and behavioural patterns. There is a well-established argument that education is one way of reducing incentives for conflict, violence and crime. At the most basic level, increasing one’s knowledge and skills through formal schooling will increase their ability to source income and employment through legitimate means. However attitudes and a propensity for violence are also influenced by the role models present in an adolescent’s environment, beginning in the home. In this way, education (both formal and non-formal contexts) occurs across 3 spheres – household and family, community and formal schooling.

The education sector in Timor-Leste has faced many challenges over the years. Issues relating to the quality, access and coverage of schools across the country encompass challenges such as the qualifications of teachers as well as teaching methods and styles, physical infrastructure, and resources.³⁰ In our interviews, the majority of

²⁹ UNICEF, ‘The State of the World’s Children 2011: Adolescence – An Age of Opportunity’, New York, 2002, P.68

³⁰ For more details of challenges in access, quality and coverage of education in Timor-Leste, see the World Bank’s Report ‘Education Since Independence – From Reconstruction to Sustainable Improvement’ (2004)

The 2014 State Budget’s increased allocation of funding from \$92 million (2013) to \$106.6 million to the Ministry of Education will attempt to address some of these issues through plans to construct over 150 new schools, infrastructural-rehabilitation (equipment, water & sanitation facilities, and electricity) curriculum improvement, and the professional development of at least 1500 new teachers through a training course that improves their pedagogic and educational capacity.

respondents emphasized the importance of strengthening the formal education system in Timor-Leste to ensure that all children have the opportunity to learn and develop. A lack of basic literacy numeracy skills not only prevents young people from entering and accessing the job market, allowing them to establish themselves as independent adults, but as organisations such as UNDP state, can also increase their susceptibility to political manipulation and involvement in criminal activity and violence.³¹

Males aged 25-29 represent the highest percentage of both the total population over 5 years of age, as well as the total number of males that had left school (66.9% and 64.7%, respectively).³² Furthermore, the number of those that had left school is almost always higher than those that had never attended school at all. These figures are significant in terms of the causal-relationship between education and the high occurrence of youth and MA-related violence. Scholars such as Collier have made the connection between the extent of value-based and higher education received by children and male youth, and the risk of becoming involved in groups that engage in violent behaviour and/or criminal activity.³³ This is on the basis that if they have employment opportunities through education, they are less likely to seek income through illegitimate means. In the context of Timor-Leste, this is exacerbated by a rapidly rising youth population competing against each other to access education. In light of such bleak prospects, it is not surprising that youth who are not productively engaged in society and have insufficient skills to take control of their own future express their frustrations through violence. In an FGD held at Comoro, participants argued that youth and MAO members are sometimes frustrated by on the lack of employment opportunities for them, and that this situation leads some to use drugs and to get involved in violence.³⁴

In addition to these basic literacy and numeracy skills, the Peace Education Working Group (UNICEF) cite the importance of 'life skills education.'³⁵ Nurturing these skills empowers young people to make smart and informed choices and decisions, making them more likely to 'avoid risky activities such as drug use or criminal activity and to navigate their way through the array of challenges they encounter on their journey to adulthood.'³⁶

Beyond the formal education system, many respondents also raised concerns over the lack of family accompaniment and guidance, civic education and extra-curricular activities. FGD participants in Maliana felt that guidance and education from within the home was critical for the positive youth development, and that there could be serious repercussions if it did not exist.³⁷ In an interview with Radio Timor-Leste, the Salesian Provincial

³¹ UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (2004), 'Youth and Violent Conflict: Society and Development in Crisis' p.39

³² Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2010, 'Population Distribution by Administrative Areas', Vol.2 NSD and UNFPA, 2011.

³³ P. Collier, P 'Doing well out of War: An Economic Perspective' in Mats Berdal and David M. Malone (eds.) *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder and London, 2000 pp. 91-111.

³⁴ FGD Comoro, 13 May 2013

³⁵ "Life skills enable children and young people to translate knowledge, attitudes and values into action. It promotes the development of a wide-range of skills that help children and young people to cope effectively with the challenges of everyday life, enabling them to become socially and psychologically competent. Life skills can include cooperation, negotiation, communication, decision-making, problem-solving, coping with emotions, self-awareness, empathy, critical and creative thinking, dealing with peer pressure, awareness of risk, assertiveness, and preparation for the world of work" – Fountain, S. (1999) Peace Education in UNICEF, p.11

³⁶ UNICEF (2011), op. cit., p.68

³⁷ FGD Maliana Vila, 18 June 2013.

Priest (Fr. Joao Aparacio Guterres, SDB) raised the issue a lack of guidance and attention from parents as one of the causal factors contributing to youth becoming involved in violence.³⁸ This observation was also made by the World Bank in 2007, who noted that a lack or absence of 'connectedness' to parents as being strongly correlated to increased risky behaviour.³⁹ In addition to this, some FGD participants in Maliana expressed that some children involved in MA-related violence were not disciplined and faced no consequences from their parents. Similarly, some respondents in Baucau suspected that some parents in fact supported their son's involvement.⁴⁰

It is evident that parents must fulfill a role as constructive role models, however when there are more pressing issues required for survival such as income-generation – which can often lead to moving away from home – physical distance and diminished communication places strain on the parent-child relationship.⁴¹ Our research also strongly indicated that repressive forms of discipline and education had negative impacts on youth attitudes toward violence. Firsthand observations of domestic violence can lead to the understanding and normalisation of violence as a means to deal with problems or as an acceptable outlet for frustrations.

As has been identified in this section, behavioural change and attitudes toward violence does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it is 'nested within the context of the family, peer group, the community and the larger society.'⁴² While education and support for positive youth development must be initiated at all levels of society and include a multitude of actors, many respondents identified the education system as an important platform and channel through which to prevent and respond to youth and MA-related violence. They noted activities such as mediation, dialogues and peace education programs that promoted non-violent attitudes. While addressing the inadequacies of the education sector will go a long way in responding to the structural concerns such as up-skilling youth and increasing knowledge and employability, a vital part of the curriculum should be about learning 'life skills' which will transform attitudes toward and involvement in crime and violence.

Jobs, income and inequality: the disproportionate burden on youth and rural communities

Parallel to concerns about the quality of education in Timor Leste, are concerns about levels of idleness, unemployment and inequality and the resulting pressures and tensions that this places on communities. Youth entering the labour market are those most heavily impacted by these problems. According to the Asian Development Bank, Timor Leste has a youth unemployment rate of 40 per cent.⁴³ The economic and psychological hardship accompanying unemployment can have destructive on families and communities. Minister of Justice, Dionísio Babo, stated that unemployment is a serious threat for the people of Timor-Leste because there is a high possibility that those experiencing the pressures of unemployment and subsequent economic

³⁸ The discussion was broadcasted on Radio Timor-Leste, 10 June 2013.

³⁹ World Bank, 'Timor-Leste's Youth in Crisis: Situational Analysis and Policy Options,' The World Bank, 2007, p.12

⁴⁰ Interviews in Suco Caibada, 29 May 2013.

⁴¹ Interview with Parish Priest, Maliana Villa, 20 June 2013

⁴² Fountain, S. (1999). Peace Education in UNICEF, Working Paper, Education Section, New York, 1999, p.4

⁴³ Asian Development Bank, *Youth Unemployment – 12 things to know in 2012*, retrieved 20 March 2014 from: <http://www.adb.org/features/12-things-know-2012-youth-employment>.

difficulties can become easily involved in "problematic attitudes", such as theft, prostitution, inter-youth conflicts.⁴⁴ The International Labour Organisation also notes a serious cost of high youth unemployment as being "dysfunctional behaviours, rising levels of crime, violence and political extremism."⁴⁵

MAOs are often organised into patronage and kinship networks, with loyalty sustained through the provision of services. James Scambury suggests that in Timor-Leste, the networks of the larger MAOs are often used to provide security for industries traditionally dominated by organised crime groups, such as nightclubs, brothels and gambling rings, thereby giving a financial incentive for membership.⁴⁶ Marginalised and impoverished youth may be more at risk of involvement in criminal activities and violent behaviors as a way to cope with the material uncertainties and emotional frustrations of that are the reality of high youth unemployment. In this way, systemic youth unemployment can be seen to distort the purpose of MAOs in Timor-Leste, driving dysfunctional behaviors and group violence.

"The problem is not the MAGs themselves but the lack of activities and employment for youth. When young people have no responsibilities they sit in the street and make trouble. If you ban martial arts, they'll still be unemployed, and they're still be sitting in the street causing problems. Young people today need the assistance and direction of the Government and their families to help them become peaceful and successful"

– Community Leader, Dili

The majority of participants in the research noted that a significant source of tension amongst youth is the high level of competition for relatively few jobs. For example, a community leader in Comoro, Beto area, noted that when local youth do not find jobs, they sit idle on the street and are easily drawn into street fighting and MA related incidents.⁴⁷ This youth unemployment problem will continue to intensify unless job creation can keep up pace with population growth. In Timor Leste, 46 percent of the population is under 18 and the birthrate is estimated to be amongst the highest in the world.⁴⁸ The high birthrate and youth bulge means that every year a larger cohort enters the labour market. This highlights the urgency for a clear policy to address job creation and to build appropriate human resource capacity.

In the absence of labour intensive industries in Timor-Leste, and given the need to diversify the economy away from natural resource reliance, the exportation of labour through bi-lateral agreements and foreign worker

⁴⁴ East Timor Legal News. (2011). 'Correlation between High Unemployment and Violence in Timor-Leste'. Retrieved 20 March 2013 from <http://easttimorlegal.blogspot.com/2012/08/correlation-between-high-unemployment.html/>

⁴⁵ International Labour Organisation (ILO), *Decent Work Country Program*, Retrieved 20 March 2014 from: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/program/dwcp/download/timorleste.pdf>

⁴⁶ J Scambury , 'Timor Leste Armed Violence Assessment: Groups, Gangs and Armed Violence in Timor Leste', *TLAVA Issue Brief 2*, April 2009.

⁴⁷ Interview with a Community Leader in Comoro, May 14, 2013

⁴⁸ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *At a glance: Timor-Leste*, retrieved 3 March 2013 from http://www.unicef.org/infoby country/Timorleste_statistics.html.

programs provides a valuable opportunity to ease pressure on the domestic labour market. The Overseas Employment Program which is being implemented by the National Employment Department within the Secretary of State for Professional Training and Employment Policy (SEPFOPE) has bilateral agreements with South Korea and Australia to send Timorese to work in fisheries, agriculture, hospitality and factory production. Such programs could contribute to the development of more skilled and experienced workforce upon return. Furthermore, remittance of foreign earned incomes could contribute to alleviating economic hardship and tension within communities. The Secretary of SEPFOPE recorded total remittances of US\$2,946,839 for 2013⁴⁹. Community leaders and members in the MAO conflict prone area of Comoro (Dili) related a high level of interest from youth in seeking work overseas through this scheme, and further noted the easing of community tensions as unemployed youth left the area to work overseas.⁵⁰

Professional education and training was an issue of concern to many participants. As new labour market entrants, youth often face the challenge of not possessing the skills and expertise that employers demand. According to many participants in the research, youth who have already graduated from high school or university still face difficulties finding employment. Staff of Sub-CRAM Covalima noted that in spite of there being more access to education with higher numbers of school and university graduates, the ability of graduates to find income through employment appears unchanged.⁵¹ Although education and training is delivered with the expectation of preparing youth for future jobs and making them more employable, expectations are very often not met, and youth are unable to find opportunities to put their learning and skills into practice.⁵² Whilst the Government, through SEPFOPE, delivers youth training programs in various locations throughout the country, as stated by a number of participants, many communities have not yet seen progress in youth employment rates. This skills mismatch indicates that young people are receiving education and training which is often not suited to the types of jobs available in the labour market.

“A lot of youth development programs, such as those from the Secretary of State for Professional Training and Employment (SEPFOPE) are centralised. People in rural areas haven't yet felt the benefits of such programs and are feeling abandoned. Because of this, there needs to be more dedicated rural programs to build rural people's skills and develop rural human resources”

—Community leader, Maliana Villa

Another issue identified in relation to professional education and training is that youth in some rural areas have not yet had access to the youth training programs delivered by SEPFOPE, as the implementation of these

⁴⁹ B Soares, 'Sending People Overseas, Generating Money', Published through ETAN, 2, April 2014.

⁵⁰ Interview with community member & interview with community leader, both Dili, 22 July 2013

⁵¹ Interview with a member of Sub-CRAM Covalima, 9 July 2013.

⁵² Idem.

programs remains somewhat centralized.⁵³ Indeed, the problem of youth unemployment is particularly intense in rural areas, where the incidence of poverty is higher in comparison with urban centres. This drives the phenomenon of rural-urban migration, which leads to the concentration of unemployed youth in certain urban centres which are becoming increasingly conflict prone and contributing to MA-related conflict in urban spaces.

One way of easing this pressure on urban centers is through rural job creation and capacity building that targets skills appropriate to rural and private sector development. Although self-employment programs are being conducted in the field of agriculture, according to some participants there is not yet a deep understanding of effective business strategies to earn higher incomes and sustain a good standard of living. FGD participants in Covalima recommended a strategy to provide youth groups with small-grants and entrepreneurial assistance to support rural small businesses.⁵⁴ A commendable example of a youth run small business can be found in Suco Fatubosa/Daisoli (Aileu), where a group of youth who were previously involved in MA related violence pooled their money and formed an agricultural cooperative. Using income from the sale of fresh produce, the first investment group made was to purchase a set of musical instruments and sound equipment, which they now use to put on free performances at community events. The cooperative continues to run, and community members credit the young men for taking the initiative to end the conflict and restore peace in the community.⁵⁵ For more information on this cooperative, please see the case study: Building Peace through MAOs – The Transformation of Judas, below.

Further compounding youth frustration about high unemployment and poor access to employment and training programs are parallel concerns about inequality, particularly in rural communities. Whilst there have been significant ongoing efforts towards rural-development through infrastructure projects, such as road building, social jealousy continues to be an issue that leads to conflict within beneficiary communities.

Youth in FGDs Suai and Bobonaro expressed anger over a perceived favoritism of veterans and apparent nepotism toward a small group of political elites in the implementation of government programs and allocation of government contracts and resources. For example, security service contracts are allegedly allocated to particular groups without formal selection, creating tension and protests among youth in Maliana Villa and Suai. Indeed, recruitment and job allocation in Timor Leste is often based on preference for extended family members or those associated with certain political parties, groups or organisations, rather than on an assessment of merit. Youth in Covalima expressed particular frustrations over Government-allocated contracts and jobs for veterans, as there is already the provision of social assistance to this target group through the veterans' pension. Furthermore, companies often feel more comfortable employing workers who have demonstrated experience and abilities, rather than hiring local youth which can lead to resentment and tensions in the areas where these

⁵³ FGD Maliana Vila, 18 June 2013.

⁵⁴ FGD Camanasa, 9 July 2013.

⁵⁵ Casa de Produção Audiovisual, Televisaun Timor Leste (TVTL), aired 6 November 2013.

projects are being implemented. In a FGD in Railako Kraik, participants declared that in rural electrification projects such as building the electricity poles, local companies tended to prefer Indonesian workers rather than local youth.⁵⁶ These inequalities and perceptions of injustice contribute to heightened frustration and disaffection of youth, which in turn increases the conflict potential of the communities in which they reside.

Rural-to-Urban Migration – New boundaries, new challenges.

Trends of rural-urban migration often accompany heavily centralized development efforts and the concentration of resources in capital cities. As discussed in the previous sub-sections, seeking access to, and opportunities for education and employment is a key motivation for migrants. With limited opportunities for economic improvement and a hope that moving to the capital will improve their standard of living, urban centers are an attractive option for many people. The most recent census conducted in Timor-Leste (2010) showed that the number of people living in the capital city of Dili was the highest proportion of people residing in urban centers (district capitals) – with 192,652 out of 316,086 people.⁵⁷

Compounding the impacts and pressures of rapid urbanization, is the issue of a *youth bulge*, in which teenagers and young adults represent an exceptionally high proportion of the population. Curtain identified that youth in Timor-Leste aged 15 – 29 were the members of society that predominantly make the choice to relocate to urban areas.⁵⁸ Similarly, Neupert and Lopes state that this particular stage of life is ‘disproportionately associated’ with migration, as they reach the realization for the demand or desire for obtaining employment and a better life.⁵⁹ Of the number of males residing in urban centres across the country (166,163), 102,900 of them are in the district of Dili. A further breakdown found that almost half (80,909) of them are aged 15-39 years.⁶⁰

The high density of youth in urban centers is further exacerbated by a dislocation from traditional methods of conflict resolution and positions of authority, with serious implications for urban violence. Firstly, a distancing from parents and relatives, communities and trusted figures of traditional authorities can mean that youth are more vulnerable to negative influences, and there is also a looser regulation and discipline of their behaviour and attitudes. Secondly, as Timor-Leste is an ethno-linguistically diverse nation with unique beliefs and traditions, methods of conflict resolution and the appropriate authorities deemed as having the legitimacy to facilitate

⁵⁶ FGD in Railako Kraik, May 23, 2013

⁵⁷ Timor Leste National Statistics Directorate, *Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2010*, Vol. 2, National Statistics Directorate and United Nations Population Fund, Dili, 2012.

⁵⁸ R Curtain, *Timor Leste Population and Housing Census 2010 - A Census Report on Young People in Timor-Leste*, National Directorate of Statistics (NDS), United Nations Population Fund and United Nations Fund (UNFPA) for Children (UNICEF), Dili, 2012.

⁵⁹ Neupert, Ricardo, Silvino Lopes (2006) ‘The Demographic Component of the crisis in Timor-Leste’ London School of Economics.

⁶⁰ Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2010 Vol. 2.

resolutions are grounded in physical locality and genealogy. Accordingly, the impact of a migration away from place of origin can be two-fold. Firstly, the customary practices that the individual has been used to may lose their significance the longer they stay away; and secondly, the customary practices that exist in the location they move to may have little or no resonance to them. This means that traditional practices such as *Tara Bandu* can be difficult to implement, as it loses its value and influence. Furthermore, traditional leaders require a 'longstanding social and familial relationship with members of the community in order to consolidate their authority and exert influence.'⁶¹

The link between high levels of youth rural-urban migration and urban violence is demonstrated through *EWER's* conflict monitoring data where the district capitals of Dili, Baucau and Maliana record a higher number of incidents. These are mostly characterized by youth involvement, including martial arts. Dili has the highest population density (3004 people per square kilometer) in the entire country.⁶² The risk of conflict escalates as competition steadily and severely increases in the face of decreased opportunities, and as rural-urban migration results in an 'overshoot of the city's structural and economic carrying capacity.'⁶³

Hopes and expectations of prosperity and success are mismatched the reality of limited and extremely competitive opportunities, and are a significant source of social pressure, manifesting itself in various ways. Goldstone is one of many researchers who assert that a concentration of youth in small geographical areas can trigger negative attitudes such as disaffection and resentment toward the Government because of perceived injustices and perceptions of inequality over economic opportunities and policies.⁶⁴ Housing and the job market can also become the main 'arena of antagonism' when diverse populations engage in strong economic and political competition.⁶⁵

Perpetuating violence - A culture of violence?

This section is not intended to depict Timor-Leste as an inherently violent society. Rather, that violence is an action observed and learnt within households and families, societies, and schools, and which can become normalised as a result. Timor-Leste's colonial experiences and oppression under the Portuguese dictatorial regime for 450 years was immediately followed by the illegal and violent occupation by the Indonesian dictatorial and militaristic regimes for 24 years. Under both these regimes, Timor-Leste experienced and observed the

⁶¹ Jutersonke et. al. 'Urban Violence in an Urban Village: A Case study of Dili, Timor-Leste', Geneva Declaration Secretariat, Geneva, 2010 p.42.

⁶² Timor Leste National Statistics Directorate, *Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2010*, Vol. 2, National Statistics Directorate and United Nations Population Fund, Dili, 2012.

⁶³ Neupert, R. & S. Lopes, *The Demographic Component of the crisis in Timor-Leste*, Political Demography Conference, the London School of Economics, September 2006.

⁶⁴ Goldstone, J.A., 'Demography, Environment and Security' in Paul F. Diehl & Nils Petter Gleditsch, eds., *Environmental Conflict*, Westview, Boulder, 2001 pp. 84-108.

⁶⁵ R. Neupert & S. Lopes, op. cit.

enactment of much violence, often used by the occupying regime as a form of control. Force has been considered the ideal method through which to achieve outcomes or performance. Communities came to understand and associate discipline and education with dictatorial forces. It is not hard to see how this can contribute to a situation where violence is perceived by many as a normal behaviour, method of discipline and education and acceptable attitude. It is this that contributes to the perpetuation of violence as a way of resolving or dealing with problems. The following paragraphs will elaborate on a few historical factors that have contributed to the normalisation of violence, and the perception of violence as a means of resolution.

Historically, political competition in Timor-Leste has been associated with violence. In his research entitled *Histories of Violence, States of Denial – Militias, Martial Arts and Masculinities in Timor-Leste*, scholar Henry Myrntinen writes that the resolution of political competition has always been through violent means.⁶⁶ This has contributed to the violence becoming a part of Timorese culture and society, because no strict sanctions are applied. Many parents educate their children by means of violence to frighten them, as respect also means fear.

Lastly, without proper condemnation, acts of violence will continue to flourish, and will become difficult to eliminate. This constitutes a serious threat for peace-building efforts in the country. Lack of strong implementation of laws and sanctions for addressing violent actions and crimes throughout the country will continue to foster the existence, use and perpetuation of violence in the future. “RDTL laws are loose, people easily kill each other” (*Timor Post*, 11 October 2013). In general, acts of violence are seen as solutions for resolving inter-youth problems within Timorese societies. Frustration with the justice system and slow court hearings can motivate youth, mainly groups within the MA, to get involved in violence and often take the law and vengeance into their own hands.

⁶⁶ H Myrntinen, *Doctoral thesis: Histories of Violence, States of Denial – Militias, Martial Arts and Masculinities in Timor-Leste*, University of Kwazulu-Natal, Westville, 2010.

Part III. Challenges to regulating MAOs – formal laws and internal discipline

Rules and regulations should define the culture and conduct within an organisation and provide the framework for leading and directing members' good behaviour. This section focuses on 1) the challenges of official government and security institution regulation of MAOs, and 2) the challenges faced by MAOs in communicating and enforcing internal rules and regulations, as a means of preventing MA-related violence.

Formal Laws and Resolutions on MAOs

Official regulation of MAOs is provided through Government Decree Law No.10/2008, Resolution No. 24/2012 and Resolution No. 16/2013, with the objective of diminishing tensions related to MA. Based on survey data survey from TAF and Belun's public opinion poll, 78.1% of the total 831 participants said they supported the Government's Resolution as it enables a reduction of conflict related to MA. Similarly, results from FGDs and interviews demonstrated the same level of support for the resolution and laws. In spite of their support however, many participants noted that such legal measures are yet to have a strong effect due to poor implementation. Indeed, according to some participants, despite the regulations, violence and conflict related to MA has continued to occur. Some participants in Baucau also declared that MA trainings and activities have continued, despite the resolution banning MA activities.

There are various reasons as to why the laws and resolutions have not been effective, the first being the clumsy dissemination of information about the laws to those who they affected. At the time of fieldwork, important target groups such as MAO leaders and members, as well as many community leaders, still did not understand the contents or implications of the law. Secondly, there is an observable lack of coordination in efforts to disseminate the laws. In Ermera and Bobonaro, for example, CRAM staff lamented over insufficient resources to disseminate information to target groups in rural areas⁶⁷. Thirdly, varying education levels of members and leaders of MA means that the technical terms within the laws are not well-understood, even if they are able to access the documents⁶⁸. Fourthly, the enforcement of the laws by the police has been called into question by many observers, with some suggestions that often Police are involved in MAOs, or partial in their responses to MA-related incidents⁶⁹.

⁶⁷ Interviews in Ermera & Bobonaro.

⁶⁸ Interviews in Dili and Ermera.

⁶⁹ Interviews and FGDs in Dili, Baucau, Ermera, Bobonaro, Cova Lima.

“Sometimes the police have family members who are involved and when police finally respond people’s houses are already burnt down and the children responsible have already run away. The suspects are never captured to face justice... they say it’s been resolved but to date nothing has truly been resolved and the problems continue.”

– Community Member, MAO conflict-prone area

On this point, it is important to note that the PNTL have taken positive measures in the right direction to begin addressing concerns of partiality, by introducing a ‘zero-tolerance’ measure for police involvement in the banned MAOs, based on Resolution No. 16/2013. As a result, official ceremonies were held, where as many as 801 members of the police forces publicly handed in their MA uniforms and renounced their MA memberships.⁷⁰ A lack of institutional capacity within the judicial system and the apparent limits in police capacity to efficiently process reported cases remains of concern to many within communities.

Despite expressing concerns over police performance with respect to MA-related incidents, overall most respondents recognised the importance of police presence. Many participants requested the establishment of permanent Police posts in their areas to guarantee security and stability. Respondents from all 5 districts covered in the field research felt that a Police presence in communities could reduce conflict potential.

Aside from formal mechanisms of regulating MAOs, communities also acknowledge the important role of culture in preventing and resolving the MA-related conflicts. While some respondents suggested that cultural mechanisms are not ideal for responding to MAO violence due to the attitude and sub-culture within MAOs, others felt differently. Community leaders of Suco Estadu and Samalete (Ermera) asserted the importance of culture in conflict prevention & response. After implementing Tara Bandu in Estadu, conflicts related to both martial and ritual arts are considered to have declined. In Samalete, community leaders suggested that a sustainable way to guarantee stability in the country is through ceremonies such as dialogues and ‘Nahe Biti Boot’ (Spreading out the Big Mat) in which youth get together to make an oath. In particular, it was suggested that this can be helpful when there is not a police presence.⁷¹ Indeed, while cultural mechanisms might be able to prevent some degree of strains and conflicts in village and sub-village levels, a combination between customary and formal laws, as well as more impartial and effective policing, is required to fully respond to community concerns about cases of MAO-related violence.

⁷⁰ Suara Timor Lorosae, January 16, 2014

⁷¹ Interview with Chief of Sub-Village Aiurlaran, 24 May 2013.

Internal Regulations and Discipline within MAOs

“Often MAG members don’t follow the internal regulations of their group. MAG leaders need to constantly remind members that it is a sport. MAG members need to understand the principles of self-control and discipline that should be central to Martial Arts”

- Youth representative, Ermera

Codes of conduct and internal rules are an important method of creating a respectable organisational culture and of ensuring good conduct and discipline of members. Their success, however, depends on how well they are able to be instilled and enforced amongst members. A number of participants noted the difficulty of effectively communicating and enforcing codes of conduct and disciplinary regulations within MAOs in Timor Leste. The key challenges to the effective dissemination and enforcement of internal regulations are as follows.

The sheer quantity and spread of members throughout Timor-Leste was found to be a significant challenge to communicating and instilling the desired values and behavioural standards amongst members. In FGDs in Maliana (Bobonaro), MAO member participants confessed that while their organisation has a code of conduct, they have but been unable to communicate it because there are so many members and it is therefore difficult to prevent and control all the acts of violence involving or initiated by their members.⁷²

Poor quality of leadership, particularly at local levels, was another factor found to inhibit the effective enforcement of internal regulations and discipline. In Baucau, one MAO leader suggested the promotion of leaders who were too young or immature for the task resulted in street fighting and poor discipline⁷³. Other participants suggested there were sometimes coordination issues between leaders which resulted in mixed and contradicting messages being passed on to members. According to a number of participants, when incidents occurred, declarations made by leaders often contradicted each other or had little impact. Whilst at a national level, leaders often took oaths and made declarations about their group’s behavioural standards, there was very little impact on ordinary members at a local level, who continued to be involved in incidents. During an interview, a local government representative in Baucau declared that even though MAO leaders made an oath before the altar at Baucau Cathedral, days after, conflict continued to occur.⁷⁴

Codes of Conduct and internal regulations appear to be poorly documented and inaccessible. The absence of written documentation of rules and regulations, with a reliance on information being passed along by word of mouth only was raised as a challenge to the effective enforcement of discipline. In Ermera, a MAO member

⁷² FGD Bobonaro, 18 June 2013

⁷³ Interview with a leader of Martial Arts in Baucau, 30 May 2013.

⁷⁴ Interview with local government representative in Baucau, 29 May 2013

stated that such documents were not provided to leaders and members at the local level. It was further found that members are often not aware of the contents or importance of codes of conduct and disciplinary regulations, or not aware of their existence at all. In an interview conducted in Bobonaro, a member of KORK confessed that he was entirely unaware of any internal regulations of his MAO.⁷⁵ As a result, discipline can become a weak pillar. As a result of the factors discussed above, the effectiveness of codes of conduct and the enforcement of discipline within MAOs is often questioned.

⁷⁵ Interview with a member of KORK in Maliana Villa, 19 June 2013

Part IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

In considering the future of MAOs in Timor-Leste, the complexity of motivations and various drivers of MAO-related violence, and the challenges to regulating MAOs should be considered. Violence committed by groups and individuals from MAOs – including inter-youth violence – are sometimes brought about by those with low education levels, as well as frustrations relating to social vengeance, inequality and competition for limited resources and opportunities. The violence also often stems from pre-existing conflicts such as land dispute. Inadequate formal and non-formal education also contributes to violence related to youth and MAO members.

While Resolution no. 16/2013 outlawing MAOs has provided a strong and punitive official response to the continuation of MAO-related violence, the resolution itself does address the roots of conflicts and violence involving MA members. This report has shown that there have been weaknesses in the implementation of the formal government regulations of MAOs, has further emphasised that the existence of MAOs is generally not, in itself, the cause of such violence. Rather, much of the alleged MAO-related violence can be viewed as a symptom of various socio-structural strains. As explored in this report, strains contributing to MAO violence include unemployment, poor education, rural-urban migration and a culture of violence. This has important implications for how to address community concerns about not only MAO-related conflicts, but also the broader issue of youth violence.

As organisations, MAOs inspire the loyalty of marginalized youth, and there is significant potential to use these networks to contribute to stability, prosperity within communities. To stem the increasing levels of youth involvement in violence, youth must be prioritized and given access to, involvement in and benefit from national development initiatives. Specific recommendations to address youth and MAO violence are detailed below.

Case Study: Building Peace through MAOs – The Transformation of Judas.

In the District of Aileu, venturing 90 minutes from Dili into the depths of Timor-Leste's central mountain range, is an area known as Daisoli. Here, cabbages, tomatoes, green leafy vegetables and carrots thrive in dark, fertile and often precariously steep terrain. In this area are 13 young men who collectively make up the group *Juventude Daisoli* (Youth of Daisoli), also known as 'Judas'.

In the wake of violent conflict and amidst the challenge of high youth unemployment, inequality and poverty, Judas have beaten the unfavorable odds stacked against them. They have broken out of a cycle of violence and made an inspirational self-transformation that has promoted stability and development in their community.

Gone are the years of martial arts group clashes that once menaced the public market place and dragged young men down in destructive spirals of violence. Today these one-time street rivals work together in the fields, growing fresh produce to sell at the same market they once terrorized, using the proceeds to support nonviolent youth activities in Daisoli.

The initiative to build a cooperative business together was entirely their own, and the young members of Judas have never received any financial support from government authorities or NGOs. It wasn't the pursuit of wealth that originally united the young men behind the enterprise. Judas found their common ground in a love of making music, prompting a truce between the groups and decision to pool their money and build an agricultural cooperative. Using income from the sale of fresh produce, the first investment the group made was to purchase a set of musical instruments and sound equipment, which they now use to put on free performances at community events.

The size of the harvests and the profits received have grown modestly but steadily over the years for Judas. The young men hope to continue expanding their agricultural activities once the rainy season sets in, and are looking to build on their understanding of commerce and entrepreneurship in order to sustainably manage the expansion of their cooperative.

Angelino Tilman, Deputy Coordinator of the group, explains that many of the girls from the community are still studying but in the future they hope to invite women to join. They recognise that women have valuable contributions to make, particularly for the sustainability and good management of the group.

The young men are humble, admitting that they aren't perfect and that it hasn't always been easy. Initially, there were disagreements and tensions between members over how to use the proceeds from the cooperative. It's been a learning process, they explain, and over time they've learnt to get along and to manage their activities using a simple leadership structure. Judas remains dedicated to continuing in the future and to overcoming any further obstacles that may arise.

In Daisoli, many people credit Judas for restoring peace and stability in the area, and continue to encourage the group to grow. These days, the young men reject violence and urge the government, civil society and young people themselves to take more direct action to ensure that the potential of youth as actors of community peace and development is fully realised.

As with young men and women all across the nation of Timor-Leste, the young members of Judas are fast growing into the future leaders of their community. There is much to appreciate and learn from the inspirational example set by these transformed young men from Daisoli.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the prevalence of land-related disputes

In order to avoid confusion and the escalation of tensions once the land laws are implemented, and in order provide accessible, reliable and non-violent mechanisms for the resolution of land disputes which are often the cause of MAO related incidents:

- The National Parliament should immediately continue discussions with the objective of passing the draft Land Laws;
- Government and civil society should continue to work together in raising public awareness of the contents and implications of the Land Laws as well as the available pathways for Alternative Dispute Resolution and mediation;
- The Ministry of Justice, through the National Directorate for Land, Property and Cadastral Services', Department of Mediation and donor agencies should expand funding for continued support of dispute mediation programs.

On alcohol & drug fuelled violence

In order to reduce the levels of alcohol and drug abuse that often fuels MAO and youth related violence:

- The National Parliament should discuss and develop a law to regulate the production and distribution of alcohol, with an age limit to prevent the sale of alcohol to youth;
- NGO PRADET should continue to be supported in its well-regarded education programs for PNTL and community members on the harmful impacts of illicit drugs and alcohol on physical and mental wellbeing, as well as community cohesion;
- These programs should be expanded through public awareness campaigns led by the Ministry of Health in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and Secretary of State for Youth and Sport (SEJD). These should be conducted through school curriculums and within communities;
- The Ministry of Security and Defence, and Ministry of Finance should initiate more systematic inter-agency coordination of F-FDTL Maritime Police, Border Patrol Unit and Customs Unit in preventing the production, importation and circulation of narcotics in Timor-Leste;
- Belun welcomes the inclusion of Timor-Leste under the mandate of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to promote the rule of law and health to address drugs and organized crime in Timor-Leste.

On the ease of access to deadly weapons

In order to reduce the circulation and misuse of deadly weapons such as guns, samurai swords and machetes which are often used during incidents of MAG and youth violence:

- The National Parliament should discuss and develop a law to regulate the production, sale and ownership of weapons including guns, samurai swords and machetes;

- PNTL should systematically investigate any reports of civilian possession of firearms and confiscate and destroy any firearms detected within communities.

On the pressures of rural-to-urban migration

In order to alleviate the pressures of rural – urban youth migration in densely populated urban centres:

- The Ministry of Education and the Secretariat of State for the Promotion of Employment and Vocational Training (SEPFOPE) should prioritise the development of formal higher-education institutions and increase the number of vocational training opportunities at the sub-district level to better serve the needs of rural youth.

On weak disciplinary mechanisms within MAGs

In order to establish sound communication, control and discipline mechanisms within the remaining MAGs and promote good behavioural conduct of members:

- The Secretary of State for Youth and Sport (SEJD), through the Commission for the Regulation of Martial Arts (CRAM), must oblige all MAGs to document and make publicly available their internal regulations. Furthermore, CRAM should assign resources to providing technical assistance to MAGs to i) review and improve internal regulations and ii) create processes and structures that ensure the regular dissemination of this information to all members;
- MAG leaders must enforce regulations and apply sanctions to those members who do not comply, as well as cooperate with police and community leaders to resolve cases where members have been involved in violence or crime;
- MAG leaders, community leaders and community members should cooperate fully with police in order to ensure that all violent crimes committed by members are reported and they are held accountable for their actions.

On the partiality of policing and impunity for violence

In order to address concerns about the partiality of law enforcement and to prevent a culture of impunity from perpetuating MAG and youth violence:

- The Ministry of Justice and the Secretary of State for Security, through PNTL and in cooperation with CRAM should actively enforce all criminal laws, including Martial Arts Law no. 10/2008, to the full extent without partiality or prejudice. This should apply to all citizens, regardless of affiliation to MAG groups.

On high youth unemployment and inequality

In order to address the job shortages, competitive tension and jealousy amongst job seekers, and reduce the economic hardship in rural areas which leads to the concentration of disaffected and unemployed youth in urban centers:

- The Secretary of State for Professional Training and Employment (SEPFOPE) should expand existing programming focusing on rural youth employment, and identify and fosters the specific skills and

capacities required to drive agricultural and rural development and further develop sustainable and ongoing initiatives linked to labour intensive private sector development;

- The Government and private sector should prioritise local youth access to employment, contracts and training opportunities rather than imported labour and veterans, in the implementation of rural infrastructure and development projects;
- SEJD, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, civil society and donor agencies should prioritise programs and policies that promote and provide financial and material support to activities that facilitate self-employment (such as agriculture and small businesses), particularly in rural areas;
- Noting that access to rural markets is a key barrier to rural employment and economic development, the Government, through the Ministry of Public Works, is encouraged to prioritise the development of good road and transport infrastructure across the country;
- SEPFOP should seek to expand and increase the number of programs that send Timorese workers overseas in order to reduce competitive pressures on the domestic labour market.

On growing youth boredom and disaffection

In order to provide activities and entertainment that unites and motivates youth within their communities, as well as to replace the outlawed MAG activities with peaceful and constructive alternatives:

- SEJD, civil society and donor agencies should work together to provide incentives such as seed funding, training and mentoring for local youth entrepreneurship and small business activities;
- SEJD, community leaders and civil society should expand support for the development of sporting & cultural activities and entertainment, implemented through schools and SEJD youth centres, at the sub-district and suco level;
- SEJD should work together with MAG leaders and community leaders to provide financial support that promotes the continued development and expansion of well-run, peaceful martial arts sporting organisations such as Tae Kwan Do, Kempo and Karate.

On the normalisation of violence within communities

In order to counter the increasing normalisation of violence, and to promote peaceful, non-violent attitudes and behaviors amongst students and youth:

- The Ministry of Education should take strong action to stamp out corporal punishment which normalises violent behavior to students. This should be included within the Code of Conduct for Educators across all levels of schooling, which should be finalized and enforced immediately. Non-violent methods of discipline should be employed, and non-violent engagement should be promoted through the school curriculum in conjunction with civic education on conflict transformation. This could include speakers from government, civil society, and community leaders;
- The Ministry of Education with the support of development partners working in the education sector, should make funding available and open a call for proposals for the delivery of a talk-back style early childhood education promotion program, through TVTL and/or national radio stations;

- Communities, parents and parental-figures are encouraged to provide good guidance and role modeling to children, particularly through improved and increased communication and through the use of non-violent methods of discipline;
- Belun applaud and encourage the continuation and extension of civil society-led programming such as Plan International Timor-Leste's delivery of parent education and support groups and community pre-schools, and Ba Futuru's delivery of teacher training for early childhood development and promotion of non-violence in schools;
- Community leaders should work together with parents, through local and cultural mechanisms (such as community dialogue) to build consensus that education is not the sole responsibility of the school system. Education and guidance of children should come from within the home and community;
- Government, civil society and community leaders must continue working together to combat domestic violence and violence against children by challenging and speaking out against harmful cultural norms associated with this form of violence. This requires strengthening the implementation and education of the domestic violence law at all levels of society, accompanied by the reliable provision of public support services and access to formal justice for domestic violence victims. It is important that these services are readily accessible from rural areas;
- The Ministry of Education, civil society and community leaders should continue to raise awareness and understanding of conflict transformation methods, particularly targeting students by building these programs into the school curriculum.

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