

Aid distribution and Equity in a Post Conflict Environment: A Case Study – Covalima, East Timor (Timor Leste)

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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a case study which addressed the question: is the social justice principle of equity compatible with the cultural, political and economic factors that existed in the District of Covalima in Timor Leste in the distribution of aid within this District during the post conflict period between 1999 and 2004.

Rawl's theory of justice underpinned the analysis and framed the concept of equity. The qualitative methodology drew from ethnography and case study and was based on the principles of participatory research within the emancipatory research paradigm. The design involved three areas of enquiry: framing the concept of equity; defining the economic position of the District; and analysing past and present resource distribution practices.

The principle of equity as applied to aid distribution was found not always to be compatible within this environment. One major barrier was the fact that the lingua franca of Timor Leste, *Tetum*, used the same word for equality and equity with the literal meaning being more associated with equality. The living situation for most East Timorese families was one of hunger as a daily experience, where poverty was defined in terms of food not money and one where there was no realisation of social justice in their own lives.

Traditional resource distribution practices were still being embraced at a community level. These were based on principles of fairness, justice and reciprocity. However external resource distribution practices were often inconsistent with these practices, inadequately negotiated and poorly articulated. Clear procedures for distribution of aid within the District, that respected the cultural integrity of the community, were in existence but knowledge of these procedures had often not reached international aid organisations. Recommendations targeted international aid organisations, the National Government and District Administration.