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Women Acting for Women

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Women Acting for Women

GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING IN TIMOR-LESTE

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Abstract

In the new country of Timor-Leste, women constituted in 2011 32 per cent of the parliament, a relatively high figure in the world and in the region. But to what extent has the presence of women in parliament contributed to progress towards gender equality? In this article we argue that the passage of a parliamentary resolution on gender-responsive budgeting in Timor-Leste was an act of substantive representation, and we draw on a range of data to examine what made it possible. We find that while 'newness', international norms, women's movement unity, women's machinery in government and parliament and networks linking them were important, it was the development of a cross-party parliamentary women's caucus that was crucial to success. The role of gender-focused parliamentary institutions in supporting critical actors has rarely been examined in the literature on substantive representation. This is in contrast to the rich literature on institutions such as women's policy agencies. Our study suggests that more focus on parliamentary institutions is needed to discover what enables women parliamentarians to become critical actors.

Keywords

gender-responsive budgeting, substantive representation, Timor-Leste, women's parliamentary caucus

In the 1990s, the issue of women's presence in the political sphere, or descriptive representation, gained significant international traction, often fuelled by the suggestion that women would change the substance and style of politics and act in the interest of and in a manner responsive to women. The concept of acting to benefit women has been termed 'substantive representation', and there has been increased interest in how and when such

substantive representation occurs (Sawer 2006; Celis and Childs 2008; Franceschet and Piscopo 2008).

Central to an analysis of substantive representation have been the useful concepts of critical actors and critical acts. Critical actors influence the policy process and mobilize others around women's concerns, while critical acts are actions that lead to changes in the positions of minority groups (Dahlerup 1988). We argue in this article that gender-focused institutions can play a vital role in supporting critical actors and in enabling critical acts in the policy process.

Such gender-focused institutions may include women's movement organizations, women's wings within political parties, women's policy machinery in the bureaucracy, parliamentary institutions with a gender mandate and, importantly in the case of developing democracies, international agencies and donors. Some scholars such as Laurel Weldon (2002) have already suggested that to understand substantive representation, women's movements, women's state agencies and the interaction between them need to be brought into the picture.

There has been, to date, less scholarly interest in the role of parliamentary institutions mandated to focus on gender equality – whether cross-party caucuses, single-party caucuses, parliamentary committees or parliamentary friendship groups. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has found a growing number of such bodies¹ and has observed that women's caucuses offer a unique avenue for women legislators to work with each other and with other partners, including women's groups. Significantly, the IPU notes that in countries with a women's caucus there is a strong sense that they have 'been successful at influencing parliamentary or legislative activities and providing oversight' (Ballington 2008: 68). Broadly speaking, women's cross-party caucuses have emerged as an initiative of women legislators rather than being a permanent fixture of the parliament covered by standing orders. A variety of models have been adopted in terms of structure, decision-making mechanisms, level of integration into the structure of the legislature, operating rules and scope (Gonzalez and Sample 2010). Despite the enthusiasm of the IPU, so far there has been little academic study of such bodies.

The very small number of case studies that have been undertaken do suggest a positive link with substantive representation, but one that can be achieved in various ways (see Tripp 2001). In the Philippines, women politicians in both houses of parliament, together with women's policy agencies and the women's movement, secured the passage of the 1991 *Women in Development and Nation Building Act* (Reys 2002). The subsequent gender and development budget policy required each government agency to allocate a minimum of 5 per cent of their budget to gender equality initiatives (Sharp *et al.* 2010). In South Korea, a standing committee, the National Assembly's Gender Equality and Family Committee, and particularly its chair, were instrumental in achieving a legislated requirement for gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) (Elson

et al. 2009). In Canada, both a single-party women's caucus and a standing committee (the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women) played a significant role in holding ministers accountable and auditing the performance of gender-based analysis in the federal government (Steele 2002; Grace 2011). In Australia, a single-party women's caucus similarly held ministers to account and was responsible for temporarily salvaging that country's women's budget statement (Sawer 2002). Also in Australia, a parliamentary friendship group helped build trust across party lines that enabled co-sponsored legislation and the lifting of a ministerial veto on chemical abortion (Sawer 2012).

Despite such evidence of the positive contribution of feminist institution building to the substantive representation of women, there is also need for caution. An emerging feminist institutional literature helps illuminate the constraints within which new institutions operate. Fiona Mackay's (2009: 3) work on institutional reform in the Scottish parliament suggests that 'new' institutions 'are neither blank slates nor free-floating'; rather they are shaped by 'past institutional legacies and by initial and ongoing interactions with already existing institutions ... within which they are "nested" and interconnected'. Her concept of 'nested newness' alerts us to how progress in locking in gender equity issues in new institutions can be curtailed by old gender norms and the way political business has always been done (Mackay 2009: 16).

In this article we examine the genesis of a critical act, a parliamentary resolution on GRB in Timor-Leste. Our process tracing was concerned with the factors that made this critical act possible and, in particular, whether existing propositions concerning a positive link between the existence of women's caucuses and the substantive representation of women could be confirmed. Our case study provides the most detailed evidence to date on this question. It is based on twenty-nine semi-structured interviews (nine men and twenty women) conducted in Timor-Leste in 2008 and 2009.² These interviews involved women legislators and other critical actors from non-government organizations (NGOs), international agencies and the public service. All women legislators are members of the women's caucus and the interviewees are referred to as respondents and numbered (e.g. R1, R2, R3). Data were also collected from published academic research, grey literature and email communication with various stakeholders. The interviews and other data cover the themes of why, how and in what circumstances women legislators went about 'acting for' women by improving the scrutiny of policy and budgets.

The terms 'women' and 'gender' are both widely used in Timor-Leste. At the policy level, Timor-Leste is saturated with United Nations (UN) discourse and our interviewees were comfortable with using the term 'gender' in relation to initiatives to make policy more women-friendly and to ensure both women and men benefited from budgetary outlays. However, at the political level women mobilized around a collective identity as women in order to achieve these initiatives. The term 'feminist' is applied in this study to those advocating policies promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

Timor-Leste's political institutions are new, having emerged in little over a decade. The transition to democracy is a period of great change and a 'critical juncture' in terms of setting institutional trajectories (Waylen 2011: 149). Within this transition, women's rights have been a striking feature of public discourse. By 2000, some 400 women from across the country gathered in the first Congress of Timorese Women and adopted a comprehensive and broad policy document – the Platform for Action for the Advancement of Timorese Women. This policy document gave impetus and political legitimacy to the demand for a quota of at least 30 per cent women in party lists, with women in winnable positions. Crucial to the campaign was the establishment of a women's network known as Rede Feto, which brought together a large number of women's organizations and provided important political support.

The campaign for a 30 per cent quota was a critical act that set in motion training in political leadership, incentives for parties to field women candidates and ultimately the reform of the electoral law. Criticism of the members of the National Council who voted against the quotas led some parties to embrace informal internal quotas in the 2001 Constituent Assembly elections (Pires 2004). In the aftermath of these elections, women constituted 27 per cent of the eighty-seven assembly members.

To maintain this presence, leading gender equality NGOs, along with the women's machinery and senior women in government and the UN, worked in combination ahead of the 2007 elections for the national parliament. The drafting of the 2006 electoral law offered a new opportunity to lock in gender equality. The new law (n. 6/2006), required that one woman be included in every four positions on party lists and that a *deputada* leaving parliament be replaced by another female candidate on the list (Parlamento Nacional (PN) 2006a). *Deputada* is the term used in Timor-Leste to refer to a woman member of the parliament and is the term that will be used in the rest of this article. The struggle around quotas culminated in 2011 with another change in the electoral law ahead of the 2012 parliamentary elections. This now required that one woman be included in every three positions in the party lists (see PN 2011). In late 2011 women constituted 32 per cent of the parliament and Timor-Leste was ahead of every country in the Southeast Asian region (IPU 2011).

THE TIMOR-LESTE CROSS-PARTY WOMEN'S CAUCUS IN PARLIAMENT

Given that numbers alone are not sufficient to guarantee attention to issues of gender equality, institution-building within parliament can play a vital role in facilitating the substantive representation of women (Sawer 2010: 219). The establishment of a cross-party women's caucus in Timor-Leste has proved to be a significant step in raising issues of gender equality in the legislature.

Timing was critical, however. While a 2004 proposal for an ad-hoc committee on gender affairs, equality and children was rejected, a core group of activists persisted in sensitizing their parties to the need for institutional arrangements for women. This advocacy was reinforced at the international level by the establishment of a network of *deputadas* from across the Portuguese-speaking world in 2005. By March 2006, a cross-party women's caucus was formally established through a parliamentary resolution (PN 2006b) proposed by all but one *deputada* and approved by a majority of the parliament (Ospina 2006). A formal institutional space for women in parliament had finally been achieved.

A second generation of the women's caucus emerged in 2007 with the new legislature (Resolution n. 16/2007) and with support from all *deputadas* (PN 2007). It was backed by a political platform signed by the women's wings of twelve of the fourteen political parties competing in the election (PST *et al.* 2007). For legitimacy it drew both on the Timorese constitution and a range of international frameworks, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (known as CEDAW) and the Millennium Development Goals.

Comprising twenty-one members, the women's caucus retained a broad cross-party base with representatives of all major political parties. The histories of these women are diverse, including national heroes of the resistance, judges and former senior government members. Their education varies not only in terms of level but also in where it was obtained, including Indonesia, Timor-Leste and Australia. The caucus is led by a president, vice-president and secretary, elected for a two-and-a-half-year period. To institutionalize the women's caucus within the parliament, significant efforts have been directed to laying out a five-year gender strategy and action plan 'to make concrete actions for the improvement of women's equal political participation and gender equality' (Costa 2009: 4). Its current activities are ambitious, including both the development of a gender equality law and the development of a more inclusive approach to policy consultation and policy-making. The 2007 resolution (PN 2007) that brought the women's caucus into being includes a specific provision that the budget should 'ensure to the Timorese Parliamentary Women Caucus the necessary means for its adequate functioning'.³ This came into effect in 2009.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

The broader political institutional arrangements are important for understanding the context in which *deputadas* go about acting for women. Timor-Leste has adopted the brand of semi-presidentialism common to Portuguese-speaking countries. With seven parties represented among the sixty-five members of parliament, a genuine 'competitive multi-party system' emerged (Leach 2009: 231). But political parties remain far from

structured along a left–right political spectrum, and political support relies on leaders' personalities and regional elites (Saldanha 2008; Leach 2009). Over the past decade the parliament has established a working organizational structure, including a parliamentary committee system. Gender equality was given formal institutional recognition in 2007 with the establishment of a specialized committee on poverty reduction, rural and regional development, and gender equality (designated Committee E). Committee E has a membership of nine members of parliament (MPs), of which four are women (Costa 2009: 4). A 2012 IPU report described Timor-Leste as a good example of the complementarity possible when a parliamentary committee on gender equality and a women's caucus work well together (Palmeri 2012: 45).

With the separation between legislative and executive powers, ministers cannot serve as MPs; any MP appointed to a role in the executive has to be replaced in the parliament from the party list. Ministers are recruited by the prime minister and hence being elected is only one of the avenues for women to access senior political positions. In 2007, three women gained senior ministerial briefs (16 per cent of the total), of which two were not elected. These women have gained significant international recognition: Minister for Social Solidarity, Maria Domingues Alves, was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2005 for her work in the independence movement and for women's rights, and Minister of Finance, Emilia Pires, is well respected by international institutions (see Ellis 2009; Peace Women across the Globe 2011). The individual careers of these women and the way in which they were recruited for a ministerial position may have a significant impact on whether they pursue policies and practices that advance women's substantive representation. The lack of research on ministerial recruitment remains a major gap in understanding how such representation occurs.

The interactions between the national women's machinery in government, the Secretary of State for Promotion of Equality (SEPI) and the *deputadas* are another critical element of substantive representation in Timor-Leste. SEPI has made significant headway in establishing a gender mainstreaming structure across ministries (Rodrigues 2011). SEPI's mandate is coordination and oversight of gender equality and women's empowerment policy. From a small unit in 2007, SEPI has expanded to a team of forty-seven, of which thirty-one are women, and resources have been invested in strengthening the capacity of its staff. Recently the national women's machinery, with assistance from UN Women, has started training budget officers in gender analysis in preparation for the 2012 state budget.

As described above, the women's movement has been a critical actor in feminizing the political agenda in Timor-Leste. One of the characteristics of the women's movement is its unity and strong umbrella organization. By 2003, Rede Feto involved twenty women's organizations, including high-profile NGOs such as Fokupers and the Alola Foundation, as well as

the women's wings of political movements and religious and cultural organizations (Pires 2004). Another important feature of the women's movement in Timor-Leste is its agreed policy agenda, outlined in its Platform for Action and updated every four years through a broad consultation process with women and a national women's congress. The role of the women's movement in linking legislators and political parties with women was illustrated in the lead up to the 2007 parliamentary elections, when Rede Feto conducted a range of activities to promote women candidates and the women's agenda (Rede Feto Timor-Leste 2008).⁴ The women's movement has continued to press on the issue of women's unequal representation in politics, using CEDAW and its reporting processes as a conduit for this debate. The continuing campaign by gender equality advocates has given those women who are elected a mandate to voice women's concerns and bring about policy changes.

Another critical actor in institution building and supporting gender equality in Timor-Leste is the international community. This support goes beyond dissemination of norms of gender equality (see Hall 2009) and includes significant technical assistance.⁵ For example, the parliamentary women's caucus has received support from bodies such as the IPU, UN Women and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) as well as from bilateral donors such as Australia, Norway and Sweden. This support has included the establishment of a gender resource centre in the parliament to provide research and training in gender analysis (UN Women Southeast Asia 2008). Some have criticized the effectiveness of the UN Transitional Administration in Timor-Leste (see Charlesworth and Wood 2002); however on balance this international presence helped open political and institutional spaces for women and for gendered claims making (see Myrtilinen 2009). Leading activist and current CEDAW Committee member Milena Pires (2004) has pointed to the contradictions within UN agencies over quotas for women to illustrate how international pressure can work against women. Well aware of this, the Timorese women's movement has had to exert pressure at times to ensure that international agencies, in particular UN missions, give adequate attention to gender issues (Trembath and Grenfell 2007).

THE WOMEN'S CAUCUS AND THE ROAD TO GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING

The existence of both parliamentary and government machinery with a mandate to focus on gender equality proved a significant enabling factor in the eventual adoption of GRB in Timor-Leste. GRB has emerged internationally as a strategy for promoting gender equality by paying attention to the raising and spending of government finances. It involves analyses of the gender-differentiated impacts of government budgets and changes in

budgetary decision-making processes and priorities (Elson and Sharp 2010). International bodies such as the UN and the Commonwealth of Nations have been significant institutional conduits for the dissemination of GRB, which has now been taken up in one form or another in some ninety countries (UNIFEM 2008).

An agenda for GRB in Timor-Leste was initiated in 2008 with a short statement in the Government's budget documents. The statement proposed the integration of a gender perspective into performance indicators used in budget decision making. Women in parliament and the women's machinery in government were quick to 'own' its agenda. An agreement to implement GRB was signed by representatives of government, parliament and civil society as part of the International Women's Day celebrations in March 2008 (Costa *et al.* 2009).⁶ This agreement, termed the 'Dili Declaration', also received support from a special International Women's Day sitting of parliament.

Further impetus for the introduction of GRB came from Resolution n. 12/2010, drafted by the women's parliamentary caucus (PN 2010).⁷ This resolution provided a framework for the introduction of GRB, assigning roles to the Ministry of Finance, line ministries and the women's machinery in government, NGOs and donors. Specific recommendations were also made concerning the role of parliament. The women's caucus and Committee E were assigned central roles in assessing the implications of budget decisions, using 'tools and methods' of GRB such as gender-sensitive indicators and statistics (PN 2010: 4089). On 14 July 2009, the parliament made a historic commitment to GRB by passing the women's caucus resolution with thirty-three votes in favour, eight against and two abstentions (PN 2009: 4).

As outlined above, international influence has been very important in Timor-Leste, and the adoption of GRB drew strongly on rationales circulating within the international community. Resolution 12/2010 noted that GRB was central to meeting international commitments such as CEDAW. Further, the preamble outlined how integrating a gender perspective would ensure 'consistency between economic and social objectives ... contributing to economic growth and prosperity ... and improving governability along with promoting accountability, transparency and participation in decision-making over budget policy' (PN 2010: 4088).

Apart from rationales for its introduction, international agencies have made a significant creative, financial and technical contribution to GRB in Timor-Leste. UN Women, for example, has provided support for the training of parliamentarians, government officials and NGOs in the use of tools to integrate a gender perspective into planning and budgeting. The Australian government through its international development agency (AusAID) has funded research on the practices and potential of GRB, including training and briefing for senior government officials (see Costa *et al.* 2009).

THE PASSAGE OF THE RESOLUTION ON GRB IN THE TIMOR-LESTE PARLIAMENT

The GRB resolution of 2009 was first and foremost the product of the cross-party women's caucus of the Timor-Leste parliament, notwithstanding other actors being involved. The women's caucus saw GRB as a way to fulfil its gender equality mandate. The resolution on GRB was perceived as an effective strategy to draw attention to budget allocations and hence improve the status of women and girls (R1).⁸ Importantly, the resolution was seen by a senior caucus member as a means to ensure that complaints and concerns over service delivery, particularly from women and girls, were integrated into the policy process (R3).

Paving the way for the resolution was a range of initiatives supported by international agencies to strengthen the capacity of the women's caucus. A *deputada* highlighted the role of this advice in 'giving us ideas' (R2). Broadly the drafting of the resolution appears to have been confined to the women's caucus, although with significant input from international agencies. One *deputada* suggested the process involved wide consultation, with caucus members having 'to listen to the ideas of many people to develop a resolution that could be approved by the other MPs' (R2). Another *deputada* described the consultation process as encompassing male legislators and selected international organizations. This approach is consistent with what a *deputada* described as a re-calibration of the focus of the women's caucus towards raising the 'awareness of the men' in the parliament (R3). Given that the goal of the consultation was to ensure the passage of the resolution, this stage of the process did not broadly encompass the women's movement or the women's machinery of government.

Women's caucus members tended to play down their ideological differences and political divisions. One *deputada* suggested that within its structure there are no party lines because 'when we talk about raising the status of women . . . there are no parties'; almost all parties are committed to raising the status of women and voicing women's concerns through their women's wings (R2). Outside observers such as Michael Leach (2009) have made a similar point about the broad ideological consensus among political parties in Timor-Leste.

The president of the women's caucus emerged as a critical actor due in large part to her concurrent position as vice-president of the parliament. As vice-president of the parliament she was able to exert pressure that, combined with the caucus's lobby work, resulted in budget allocation for the women's caucus (R1). This amounted to 0.1 per cent of the parliamentary budget in 2011 (Ministry of Finance 2011). Through internal political pressure in the parliament presidency, the women's caucus was able to bring gender equality issues to the forefront of the political agenda. The case of the resolution on GRB illustrates that it is easier for *deputadas* to co-operate on specific issues. The lack of automatic solidarity among women was illustrated by the reluctance of some *deputadas* to participate in the early days of the caucus.

The interest of these women had to be gained over time: 'after lobbying, training and my efforts to reach them, they are now engaged' (R3). More recently (2010) the head of the parliamentary commission covering legislation and constitutional issues, public administration and local power – and member of the women's caucus – sent a letter to the prime minister pressing the Government to provide adequate funding for the implementation of the domestic violence law ahead of the 2011 budget. While the women's caucus has played a role in both GRB and the implementation of domestic violence law, the leadership of the women's caucus did not endorse the letter. Some observers saw in this event an indication of the political pressures the women face in their different parties that may serve to curtail women's caucus effectiveness.

While a horseshoe layout of the parliamentary chamber tends to encourage less aggressive political behaviour, some commentators have observed that in Timor-Leste only a small number of *deputadas* are vocal and that gender issues are only haphazardly addressed in parliament (Ospina 2006). The presentation of the resolution on GRB to the parliament by the president of the women's caucus and vice-president of the parliament, Maria Paixão da Costa, was met by robust opposition from many male MPs. In the discussion that followed, male MPs argued that GRB could be construed as special treatment for women, which in their view was in stark contrast with the parliament's commitment to defend gender equality. Representatives of the women's caucus responded that the resolution did not intend to erode men's rights and position but rather to support women's initiatives and strengthen women's position (PN 2009: 4). Male MPs have been slow to take ownership of the gender equality agenda. This is well summarized by one *deputada*: 'the women members of parliament – the male members of parliament not as much – always mention gender in their speeches' (R3). Resistance is often veiled (R4).

Deputadas drew strength from a safe women-only space and became 'more disciplined and . . . more organized . . . than the blokes' (R4). Some of the *deputadas* talked about the importance of having norms and practices established, a plan of action, for example, to gain the political currency that enabled the passage of the resolution on GRB. Importantly, these *deputadas* have learned to use a range of tactics and strategies to increase their influence in parliament. These include indicating to their male colleagues that it is in their interests, personally and politically, to lend their support and collecting data and personal accounts from women to bring about changes to legislation (R1).

This range of strategies was well displayed in the success of the women's caucus in negotiating a specific section for their comments in the overall parliamentary analysis of the budget, one of the most significant roles of the Timor-Leste parliament. The commentary is normally provided by parliamentary committees and bodies such as the women's caucus would not be part of the process. During the 2010 budget debate, however, *deputadas* provided commentary on what could be done to improve the budget's responsiveness

to gender. This was a critical act, illustrating the relationship between the women's caucus and substantive representation of women. The women's caucus met opposition when its comments were read in the plenary. Some male MPs asked: 'Is the women's caucus a parliamentary committee?' to which the *deputadas* responded that while 'we are not a committee we ask you to consider that we have a double role' as MPs and women. Arguments as to why the commentary of the women's caucus on the budget should be included in the parliamentary analysis were crafted around the need to bring women's voice into the political debate: 'You [male MPs] agreed to our existence so now you need to give space for us to speak!' (R1).

Through its recommendations on the 2010 budget the women's caucus was further feminizing the political agenda. Initially the caucus focused on identifying areas for immediate action and these included health, education, agriculture, commerce and industry and justice (R1). These sectors were viewed as directly connected to the gender mainstreaming priorities of the executive, illustrating the network character of substantive representation. By the 2011 budget the women's caucus recommendations had expanded to areas including national women's machinery in government, security, justice and social solidarity. Consistent with the GRB approach (see Sharp and Broomhill 1990, 1999), recommendations covered three types of outlays: expenditure specifically targeted to women and girls; expenditure directed to equal employment opportunity; and general or mainstream expenditures (Committee on Economy, Finance and Anti-Corruption (CEFAC) 2011).

Another source of institutional support for parliamentary representation of women is the women's movement. However, the women's movement does not appear to have made a specific contribution to the drafting of the GRB resolution. Nonetheless, the women's movement has been significant in assisting elected women to find common ground beyond party affiliation. In a strong sign that *deputadas* are engaging in the responsiveness associated with substantive representation, consultations with the women's movement have been established to improve policy and budget decisions, to collect gender-disaggregated data and to raise awareness among politicians (R3, R4). Through such consultations the women's caucus is seeking to contribute to 'fiscal democracy' (Elson 2004: 639) by making the budget process transparent, accountable and open to a range of participants, men and women, both inside and outside government. Some of the *deputadas* argued for iterative engagement with NGOs on the grounds that NGOs were well positioned to provide analytical input and voice women and men's concerns as part of the legislative process (R4). Another *deputada* suggested that NGOs also need to strengthen their skills (R1).

The women's caucus saw its role as providing policy oversight and the monitoring of progress towards gender equality. In developing its resolution on GRB the women's caucus outlined a broad framework that would require considerable work from the Ministry of Finance, the women's machinery and line ministries in relation to technical detail and implementation.

However, Timor-Leste's broad coalition of feminist advocates has successfully used this one-off resolution to change the way the Government goes about its business. For example, the women's machinery of government drew on the GRB resolution to urge line ministries to show their commitment to implementing the domestic violence law.

CONSTRAINTS ON ACTION

There are practical limits to the power of the women's caucus to initiate action. The women's caucus is politically and legally powerless to oblige the executive to act and its pressure over GRB has the potential to aggravate relations between parliament and government. One *deputada* noted: 'first I thought that it would be negative because the Government is [was] not prepared' but she went on to say that the resolution was a first step to instigate change within the executive (R1).

In practice, parliamentary monitoring remains problematic due to the nature of the budget and planning documents, with MPs having 'no way of knowing what the money actually did go towards' and what 'sorts of results' were achieved (R4). Coupled with an underdeveloped policy debate, any effort to make the Government accountable may fall short of improving services for women. On the other hand, the network of gender focal points could play a significant role. Well aware of the limits of their own sphere of action, the *deputadas* have asked for capacity-building for the gender focal points to help enable inclusion of gender issues 'from planning to approval of the budget and its implementation' (R3). Women in parliament have been vital supporters of the women's machinery in government (SEPI) and the head of SEPI has made political use of the GRB resolution. However the implications of the GRB resolution for the work of the public sector, and SEPI's role, while significant, are yet to be identified and implemented.

In terms of party support, while there may have been broad ideological consensus favouring women's political initiatives, the two largest parties have challenged each other's record on women's rights (CNRT 2007; Fretilin 2007). A 2012 IPU report observed that *deputadas* are using existing arrangements with the party whips to prevent changes contrary to the women's agenda (Palmieri 2012). Nonetheless, one *deputada* believed that women were 'not using their influence within their parties as best as they probably could' because the internal party mechanisms were not fully functioning and operating in a democratic way (R4). This was further canvassed by a president of the women's caucus, who called for more accountability from political parties for their gender equality commitments and better 'internal communication' among women's caucus members (Costa 2009: 6).

Significantly one *deputada* linked accountability to political legitimacy. Drawing attention to the recently approved legislation (2010) on domestic violence, this *deputada* suggested that the success of this law rests on appropriate

funding of services such as police and the justice system: '[If] we just have a law that's not implementable people will lose faith in it' (R4). Thanks to political pressure from activists, both inside and outside government, a special budget allocation for the implementation of the domestic violence law (see Rodrigues 2011) was increased during the parliamentary debate over the 2011 budget. This achievement provides a further indication of the success of networking in generating more gender-sensitive legislation.

The women engaged in the 2009 GRB resolution were empowered by its success. The window of opportunity to introduce gender equality issues has remained open and over the two past budget debates women have established the convention of formally commenting on each budget for its gender-responsiveness.

CONCLUSION

It seems obvious to say that Timor-Leste is a very new nation with new political and administrative institutions. Women activists were able to seize the opportunity presented by 'newness' to institutionalize a focus on gender equality. Timing was important: these new institutions were being created at a time when international agencies and donors were conduits for norms of gender equality. Local actors were able effectively to utilize these international norms and GRB strategies to gain more resources and greater representation for women. Characteristics of the women's movement that enabled it to speak with a united voice were also important, as were networks between the women's movement, women's machinery in government and critical actors in parliament and the executive.

Over the past decade high levels of descriptive representation were achieved and a degree of commitment to gender equality was woven into the constitution and electoral laws. The need for *deputadas* to interact to bring about positive changes was recognized very early on. Soon they were initiating debate on the role of a gender-focused parliamentary institution. Since then, the women's caucus has built a significant presence as well as a plan of attack to bring women's concerns and perspectives into mainstream budget debates.

But while the new institution of the women's caucus has enhanced the power of the *deputadas* within the new parliament, it remains 'nested' within the traditional way of doing politics (see Mackay 2009). Broader cultural values continue to hamper women's political legitimacy in Timor-Leste. Tribal leaders forewarned that the 'wrath of ancestors' could be incurred if the 'right' leader were not chosen (Palmieri 2012: 11). Traditional attitudes continue to deflect the inner-workings of the parliament and the political parties. While the women's movement has been successful in improving the numbers, this does not necessarily indicate that party leaders believe in women's abilities (Fokupers 2009). *Deputadas* recognize that, while there

has been progress in gaining support in both political parties and the parliament, there is still resistance to a gender equality agenda. Such resistance came to a head when the caucus pushed for a formal institutional role within the budget process. The broader institutional environment is also critical to understanding the contradictions displayed by these new institutions. In particular, Timor-Leste's fragile state status, marked by weak institutional capacity, poor service delivery and crisis and instability, significantly hampers their potential, as has the varied degrees of commitment to gender equality. In a context marked by both a complex historical past and a large international footprint, more research is required to flesh out the ways in which new institutional designs and old institutional paradigms coexist and interact.

The contribution of our case study to the literature on substantive representation, and to international feminist politics more broadly, is in identifying the potential significance of parliamentary institutions in supporting critical actors and enabling critical acts, as well as providing a channel for women in the community to participate in the legislative process. The passage of the GRB resolution was a victory for the Timorese *deputadas* and the women's caucus. But it was also a win for women activists both inside and outside the political sphere. The resolution put the focus on gender as an integral part of policy and budget-making, and paved the way for fiscal democracy along gender equality lines. This did not occur seamlessly, and the women's caucus leadership had to invest significant political capital to build this new gender-focused institution. Political tensions and policy debate are integral to the women's caucus. The GRB resolution, however, shows that *deputadas* have been able to move beyond these tensions and act collectively for women. They themselves are proud of this collective strength (Palmieri 2012).

The collective work by the caucus on the GRB resolution had helped build their skills, confidence and political currency. As a group, these women influenced the course of the parliament beyond what would have been possible for them as individuals. It was this enabling characteristic of the parliamentary caucus, including the networks surrounding it, which made it a significant player in the substantive representation of women. This potential of gender-focused parliamentary institutions means that our case study has implications well beyond Timor-Leste for those seeking to ensure that the parliamentary representation of women moves 'beyond numbers' towards substantive achievements in advancing gender equality.

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Notes

- 1 The IPU reported that of seventy-seven parliaments almost half had a women's caucus. In eighty countries there were ninety-three parliamentary committees covering gender equality issues (Ballington 2008).
- 2 These interviews were conducted by Monica Costa and Rhonda Sharp as part of the project, 'Gender-Responsive Budgeting in the Asia-Pacific Region' (2008–10). For more details of this project see <http://w3.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/research/gender-budgets/default.asp>
- 3 The resolution, published in Portuguese, was translated into English by the authors.
- 4 The representativeness of the women's movement, namely Rede Feto, has been questioned by some observers. Nina Hall (2009) suggests that the women's movement has been driven by Dili-based and middle-class activists. Leading Timorese activist Laura Abrantes (2011: 259) agrees that the birth of the women's movement was the result of 'external ideas' but argues it has subsequently matured to gain a 'personality' reflecting the broader community. The 2008 National Women's Congress, for example, involved consultations at the district level in order to engage women outside the capital. This was achieved in a context of significant challenges to consultation processes including geographical, transport, language, literacy and education constraints and differences. With over one-third of the population located in Dili, often consultations do not reach rural communities.
- 5 The likelihood of synergies between international and local actors was enhanced with a prominent Timor-Leste activist being the head of a UN organization in Dili, which had a strong track record in GRB work.
- 6 Also on International Women's Day the prime minister reaffirmed the Government's commitment to increasing allocations to gender-specific initiatives and implementing a GRB (Costa *et al.* 2009). The statement was included in the 2009 and 2010 budget documents but not the 2011 budget documents. It is unclear why this statement disappeared from the 2011 budget documents.

- 7 While the parliamentary resolution on GRB was approved in July 2009, it was officially published in 2010. For the purposes of clarity in this article we will refer to the resolution on GRB as a 2009 event (Parlamento Nacional 2010).
- 8 In the text the interviewees are referred to as respondent and numbered – R1, R2, R3 and so on.

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