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PROMOTION OF WOMEN THROUGH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT & RIGHTS (POWER) PROJECT



BASELINE SUMMARY

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Disclaimer:

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BACKGROUND AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

The *Promotion of Women through Economic Empowerment and Rights (POWER) Project*, funded by the European Union, is implemented through a consortium including World Vision Australia (WVA), World Vision Timor-Leste (WVTL), Fundasaun Esperansa Enclave Oecusse (FEEO) and Forum Komunikasi Untuk Perempuan Timor Lorosa'e (FOKUPERS). The project's ultimate goal is to *support the most vulnerable Timorese women, particularly those aged 18-40, in Covalima and Oecusse, to pursue entrepreneurship opportunities, alternative livelihoods, and actively participate in household and community decision-making.* This initiative aims to advance gender equality and socio-economic rights for women and vulnerable populations over a 36-month period from 2023 to 2026.

The project is intended to reach 8,148 people directly, and aims to impact 38,381 individuals indirectly. It contributes to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality and supports several other SDGs by enhancing access to assets, services, and economic activities, ultimately improving livelihoods.

The POWER project seeks to achieve three key outcomes:

- **Outcome 1** aims to increase household, community, and local leadership support towards the equal and balanced participation of women and men in economic activities.
- **Outcome 2** focuses on increasing women's skills, access to financial services, market information, and business relationships needed to grow their businesses and livelihoods.
- **Outcome 3** seeks to galvanize multi-stakeholder partnerships that celebrate women's economic empowerment and address constraints facing women-led enterprises, employment, and livelihoods at community and national levels.

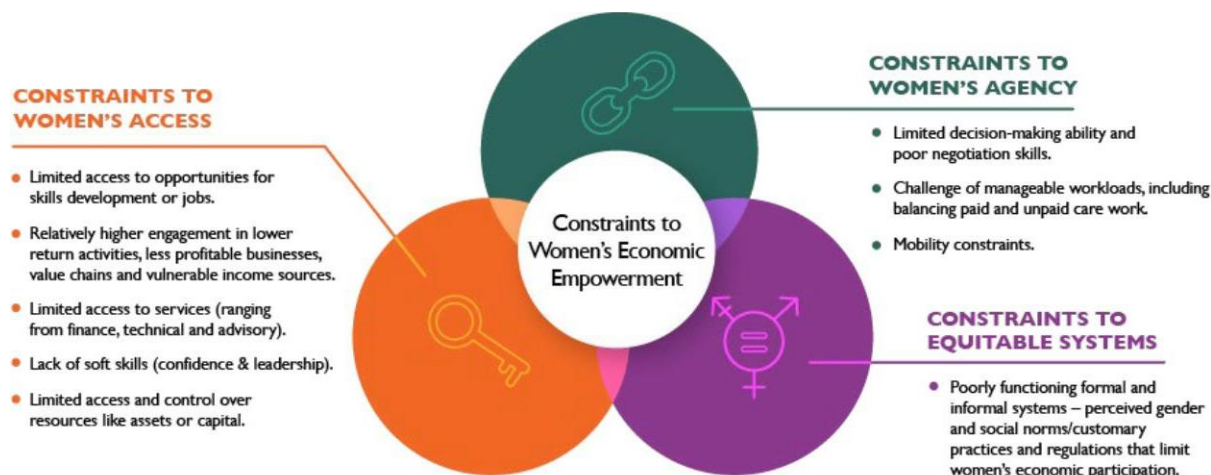
By fostering an environment where women, youth, people with disability can thrive economically and socially, the POWER project sets the stage for transformative change in gender equality and economic empowerment in Timor-Leste.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT (WEE) FRAMEWORK

The Promotion of Women through Economic Empowerment and Rights (POWER) project, guided by World Vision's Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) Framework¹, is a comprehensive initiative designed to address the significant challenges faced by women in Timor-Leste. The framework emphasizes four key domains of empowerment: Economic Advancement, Access, Agency, and Equitable Systems, each targeting specific barriers to women's livelihoods.

- **Economic advancement** focuses on enhancing women's potential for income generation and employment, ensuring they have the tools and opportunities to succeed.
- **Access** ensures women have equitable opportunities, resources, and services, creating a level playing field.
- **Agency** empowers women to make and act on economic decisions, enabling them to translate choices into desired outcomes.
- **Equitable systems** strive for fair policies, laws, institutional practices, and social norms that support women's economic participation.

¹ <https://www.wvi.org/our-work/economic-development/womens-economic-empowerment>



BASELINE OVERVIEW

The baseline study for the POWER project, conducted from February 7th to 15th, 2024, used a comprehensive methodology for reliable results. Data was collected through household questionnaires, key informant interviews (KIIs), and a thorough review of project documents, providing a solid foundation for the study. World Vision's WEE Framework guided the study, focusing on economic advancement, access, agency, and equitable systems. This framework shaped the survey design, measuring baseline conditions and expected outcomes like household income, equitable decision-making, access to opportunities, attitudes towards women's economic participation, and the use of improved financial services. The baseline measures the indicators related to each of the key WEE domains, as outlined in the table below.

Economic Advancement	Access	Agency	Equitable Systems
Equitable Decision-Making Financial Services Usage Financial Literacy Networking Opportunities Business Training	Income Generation Livelihood Support Discrimination Protection	Supportive Attitudes Intimate Partner Violence Justification Decision-Making Participation Advocacy Support	Discrimination Protection Multi-Stakeholder Engagement

Household Questionnaire Survey: Covering five sucos in Covalima and two sucos in Oé-cusse, the household survey sampled 385 households, representing marginalized groups including women aged 18-60, youth aged 16-25, and people with disabilities. Trained enumerators used mobile devices and the KOBO toolbox for real-time data entry, ensuring high data quality.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): KIIs provided qualitative insights from community leaders, partners, and stakeholders, highlighting gaps in women's economic empowerment and validating survey findings. Thirteen key informants, including suco heads and agricultural coordinators, were interviewed with informed consent and transcriptions were analysed.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data underwent descriptive statistical analysis in Microsoft Excel, with results presented in tables and charts by gender, disability, and social differences. Qualitative data from KIIs was analyzed through content analysis, identifying patterns and core principles. This dual approach offered a holistic understanding of baseline conditions, supporting future project assessments.

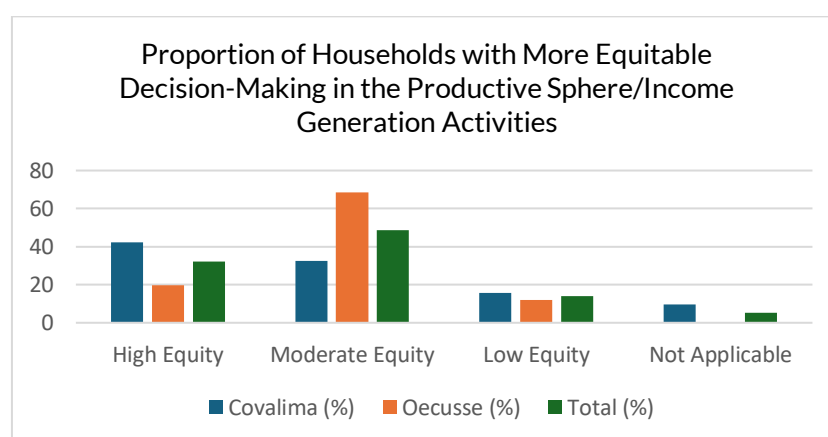
LIMITATIONS

Several limitations were encountered during the baseline study for the POWER project, categorized into data collection challenges, scope issues, and questionnaire design flaws. These limitations affected the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the findings. The first limitation was the inability to interview women-led farmer groups at the project sites. Since men usually lead these groups, the study couldn't capture women's perspectives on income-generation activities in agriculture. Another challenge was that the scope of the project areas at the village level had not been settled during data collection. As a result, the baseline study missed some villages that later became project sites, making it difficult to capture changes in these areas due to limited secondary data sources. Data collection did not fully capture the perspectives of marginalized groups, especially people with disabilities. Only 14% of households surveyed included people with disabilities, which was insufficient to reflect their perspectives comprehensively.

The study team noted that the WEE indicator questions could have been better tailored to fit the rural context of Timor-Leste, where communities practice traditional small-scale subsistence farming were the questions is more for medium-large scale which could have been better adapted to suit this specific environment as this mismatch sometimes led to misunderstandings and unclear responses from participants. Translation issues also posed significant challenges. Questions were translated multiple times between English, Tetun, and Dawan, the local language in Oecusse. Finding equivalent words was difficult, leading to potential misunderstandings. Additionally, the questionnaire format asked respondents to self-identify as having a disability before administering the Washington Group Questions, which may have led to biasing of the results. The survey also left out questions about marital status and household head verification, complicating the identification of household types and respondents' roles. These limitations highlight areas for improvement in future studies to ensure more effective data collection.

FINDINGS

The baseline survey uncovers significant regional and gender disparities in equitable decision-making within households in Covalima and Oecusse. Covalima stands out, with 42.32% of respondents reporting high equity in income-generating decisions, compared to only 19.59% in Oecusse. This stark contrast highlights the urgent need for targeted support in Oecusse.

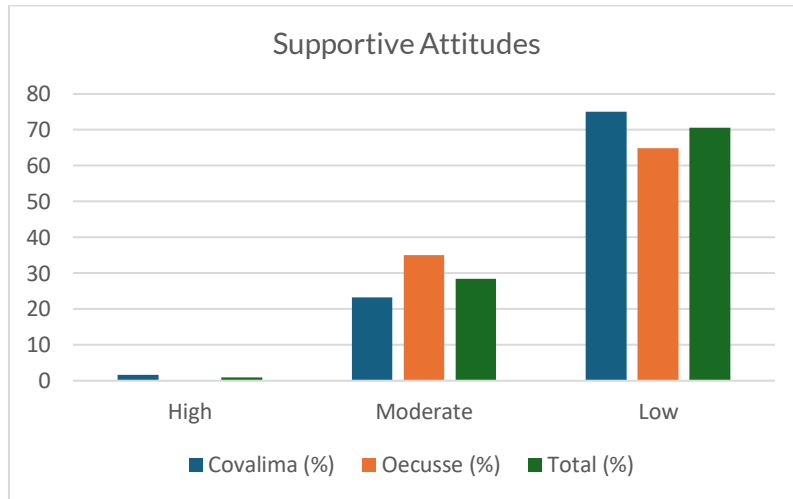


Despite these differences, Oecusse exhibits notable potential for improvement, with 68.56% of respondents reporting moderate equity levels compared to 32.37% in Covalima. This suggests that many households in Oecusse are close to achieving higher equity but require additional resources to get there. Low equity levels are similar in both regions, indicating persistent barriers to equitable decision-making.

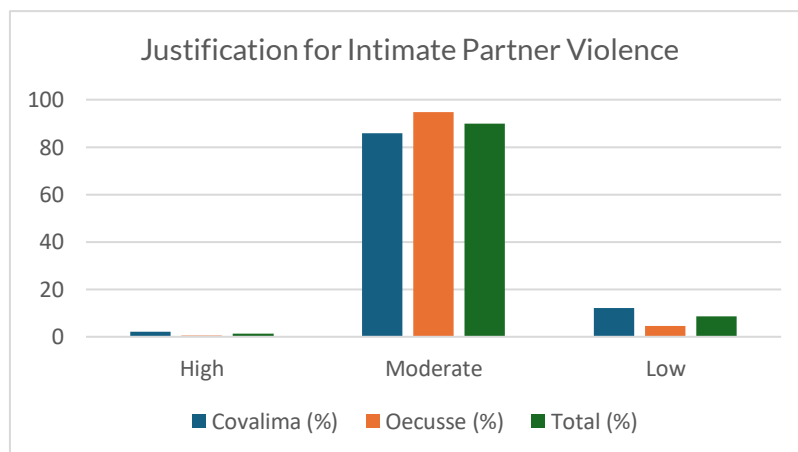
"Here, there are no women-led farmer groups. Usually, they are led by men."
 - Village Head, Covalima

Gender disparities are pronounced, particularly in Oecusse, where both male and female respondents report lower levels of high equity. Conversely, Covalima shows balanced high equity levels among both genders, around 42.32%. Addressing these disparities, especially in Oecusse, is crucial for achieving gender equity.

Outcome 1: Supportive Attitudes towards Women's Economic Participation



Support for women's economic participation is critically low, necessitating substantial efforts to foster change. In Covalima, a mere 1.66% of respondents show high supportive attitudes towards women's economic roles, with 75.10% displaying low support. Oecusse shows slightly better moderate support at 35.05%, but no high supportive attitudes and significant low support at 64.95%.



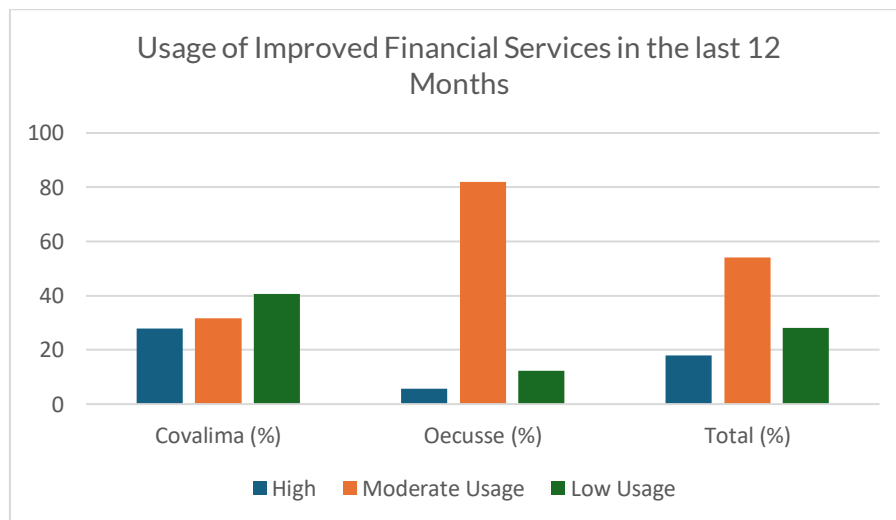
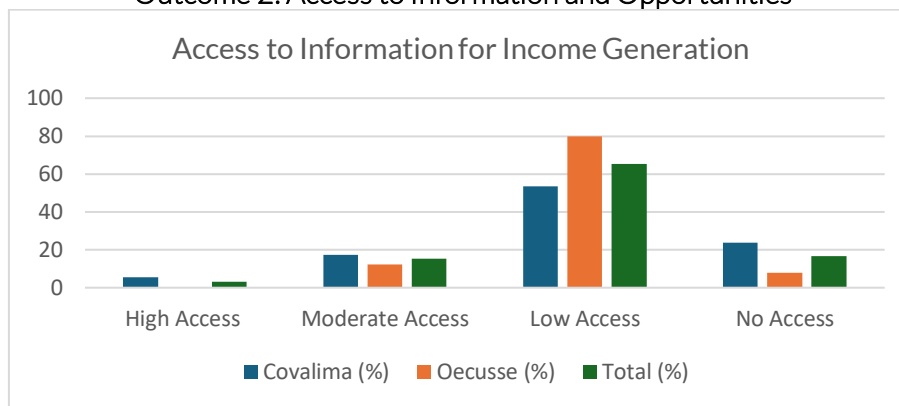
Equitable decision-making within households is uneven, with Covalima reporting 42.32% high equity, while Oecusse shows no households in this category and the majority at moderate equity (68.56%). The burden of unpaid work also disproportionately affects women. In Covalima, women

spend an average of 7.47 hours daily on unpaid work compared to men's 4.92 hours. This gap is wider in Oecusse, with women dedicating 9.55 hours to unpaid tasks versus men's 7.38 hours. Alarming, attitudes towards intimate partner violence remain troubling. In Covalima, 2.07% of respondents justify it at high levels, and 85.89% at moderate levels. Oecusse mirrors this with 0.52% high and 94.85% moderate, reflecting a widespread tolerance for controlling behaviors. These figures underscore the need to challenge and change deep-seated social norms.

"Sometimes the challenges to involve women in agriculture are their willingness and motivation (to get involved)."

- Extension Service Coordinator, Covalima

Outcome 2: Access to Information and Opportunities



Indicator	Covalima (%)	Oecusse (%)	Total (%)
Financial Literacy (No Access / Lowest / Low)	77.15	69.05	73.10
Networking Opportunities (No Access / Lowest / Low)	78.12	73.05	75.59
Business Advisory Training (No Access / Lowest / Low)	73.16	90.05	81.61

"Sometimes the challenges to involve women in access services from financial institutions are they afraid (to get involved) because of complex application processes."

- Female farmer from Oecusse

Access to information and opportunities for income generation is severely limited, especially in Oecusse. In Covalima, 23.65% of respondents report no access to such information, and 53.53% have low access. Oecusse shows no respondents with high access and 79.90% with low access,

highlighting an urgent need for improved information and opportunities. Financial services usage varies greatly between the provinces. In Covalima, 27.80% of households report high usage, with 31.54% indicating moderate usage. Oecusse shows only 5.67% reporting high usage and 81.96% moderate usage. These disparities indicate progress in Covalima but significant room for improvement in Oecusse. Critical gaps in financial literacy, networking, and business advisory training exist. In Covalima, 77.15% of respondents have no or low access to financial literacy, 78.12% lack networking opportunities, and 73.16% lack access to business advisory training. In Oecusse, 69.05% lack access to financial literacy, 73.05% to networking, and 90.05% to business advisory training. Addressing these gaps with targeted training programs is essential.

Key Indicators for Outcome 3: Multi-Stakeholder Engagement in Challenging Social Norms and Gender Stereotypes

Multi-Stakeholder Engagement in Challenging Social Norms and Gender Stereotypes	Covalima (%)	Oecusse (%)	Total (%)
Support in participating in decision-making for village/district	34.99	39.18	36.86
Protection from discrimination and violence	17.00	12.00	14.50
Support for livelihood (e.g., agriculture support)	22.00	3.00	12.50
Community/Religious Leaders Support			
Support in participating in decision-making for village/district	38.87	46.74	42.38
Protection from discrimination and violence	28.00	14.00	21.00
Channelling needs to decision-makers	30.00	16.00	23.00

Engaging stakeholders to challenge social norms and gender stereotypes is imperative. Government support in local decision-making is notably low, with only 34.99% of respondents in Covalima and 39.18% in Oecusse feeling supported. Additionally, a mere 14.5% across both provinces feel protected from discrimination and violence by the government, highlighting the need for more effective initiatives. Support for livelihood activities is also insufficient. Only 22.00% in Covalima and a strikingly low 3.00% in Oecusse report adequate government support for agricultural and other economic activities, which is crucial for women's economic empowerment, particularly in agricultural communities.

Community and religious leaders are slightly more supportive than government entities. In Covalima, 38.87% of respondents feel supported by these leaders in decision-making, compared to 46.74% in Oecusse. However, only 21.0% across both provinces believe they receive adequate protection from discrimination and violence from these leaders. Increased active engagement from community and religious leaders is essential to addressing gender issues and advocating for women's needs. Key informant interviews reflect these findings. For instance, a Village Head in Covalima highlighted the traditional patriarchal structure, stating, "Here, there are no women-led farmer groups. Usually, they are led by men." In Oecusse, a government official noted the lack of sustainability in women's agricultural groups formed between 2011-2013 due to structural changes and limited support.

CONCLUSION

The baseline study for the POWER project highlights important findings regarding women's economic empowerment in Covalima and Oecusse. The study reveals varied levels of equitable decision-making within households. In Covalima, 42.32% of households report high equity in decision-making for income generation, while in Oecusse, 68% of households report moderate equity. Overall, only 32.18% of households across both regions report high equity in decision-making.

- Outcome 1: Attitudes towards women's economic participation are predominantly unsupportive, with 70.57% of respondents holding low supportive views. Women in both Covalima and Oecusse face challenges balancing unpaid and paid work, typically handling an hour more of unpaid work than men. This struggle is compounded by moderate levels of spousal support for income-generating activities and a concerning tolerance for controlling behaviors among men.
- Outcome 2: Access to information and opportunities for income-generating activities is significantly limited. Only 2.99% of respondents report high access, while 65.29% have low access, and 16.55% report no access at all. In Covalima, over half of the respondents perceive low access to essential information and opportunities, with about a quarter reporting no access. The situation is slightly better in Oecusse, but significant barriers remain.
- Outcome 3: Engagement of local and national leaders in challenging social norms and gender stereotypes shows mixed results. While 36.86% of households report receiving government support and 42.38% report support from community/religious leaders, most households feel they lack adequate support to tackle these issues. Support for political engagement, technical assistance in income generation, and protection from discrimination and gender-based violence is perceived as limited.

In conclusion, the baseline study underscores significant challenges, including unequal decision-making within households, limited access to information and opportunities for income generation, and persistent social norms hindering women's progress. Addressing these issues is crucial for the success of the POWER project in empowering women in Covalima and Oecusse.

Recommendations

The baseline study has led to several key recommendations for enhancing the POWER project. These focus on empowering women, improving financial literacy, and boosting marketing skills.

1. Boost Women's Confidence through Education and Financial Support: Organize workshops on public speaking, business idea development, and engaging with public authorities. Establish microfinance programs such as Savings for Transformations (S4T) Groups in Covalima to enhance women's financial literacy and networking opportunities. Offer training in budgeting, savings, and investment strategies.
2. Ensure support networks are in place for women: Encourage women to build networks and support systems. Regularly organize activities to maintain motivation and knowledge exchange. Provide role models and mentors from successful women entrepreneurs to inspire and guide others.
3. Equip women with competencies in marketing and collaboration with market actors: Facilitate training to improve the marketing skills of women producing commodities such as pigs, vegetables, and mung beans. Focus on pricing, negotiation, and market information. Disseminate market information through accessible channels, considering literacy levels.
4. Collaborate with Financial Institutions to explore the expansion of product offerings for women: To address the gap in access to financial services, seek partnerships and expanded service offerings with financial institutions and collaborates which can specifically target women, including with financial literacy. Ensure programs are accessible, relevant, and meet the needs of rural women.

5. Promote value addition to expand income generating streams: Support women in processing value-added products, food preservation, packaging, and processing techniques as a means to diversify income streams.