



PRESS RELEASE

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: NON-OFFICIAL

DNTPSC: MEDIATION IS THE BEST WAY TO SOLVE LAND DISPUTES AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL

Representatives from the National Directorate of Land, Property and Cadastral Services (DNTPSC) from Dili and the 13 districts of Timor-Leste gathered together with a team from the local NGO Belun and the USAID-funded 'Ita Nia Rai' project to discuss mediation of disputes related to land. 31 people in total participated in a 2-day workshop on 26 and 27 November in order to share their experiences and form a unified process for mediating land disputes. "The objective of this workshop was to provide the district Land and Property Directorate (DTP) officers with information about the 'Ita Nia Rai' project and to bring together their experience in order to create a mediation manual that can be used as a reference at the grassroots level" commented Ursula Almeida, 'Ita Nia Rai's manager for conflict resolution and mediation.

The USAID-funded 'Ita Nia Rai' project promotes mediation as the most important method for resolving land disputes in communities. Mediation is a term that refers to a process in which a third party (called a 'mediator') helps two or more disagreeing parties to find a solution to their dispute. Mediation is a skill that many people practice every day although they may not know it by that name: for example when two people disagree and a third person, perhaps a friend of family member, steps in to help them resolve their differences, this is a form of mediation. The key to this process is that the mediator can not impose a solution to the dispute – the disagreeing parties themselves must come to an agreement. Because of this, mediation is a good way to solve land disputes at the community level, and in addition it does not require the time or financial resources that are needed to solve disputes in the Court.

Julio Mota, the head of the Land and Property Directorate in Oecussi, commented: "This 2-day workshop focused on land disputes, where two parties disagree about land [or land boundaries]." He also commented that after attending the workshop he would be able to share information with his community, about the USAID-funded 'Ita Nia Rai' program and about solving disputes locally through dialogue or mediation. According to Mota, the benefit of these methods are that the solution comes from the parties involved in the dispute. "It depends on what they [the disputants] decide, it's not the Government that makes a decision. Also, there should be some kind of agreement between the two parties to the dispute, that can be used as evidence to prevent future disputes," he observed.

Miguel Mau Soares, the manager of NGO Belun's cooperation with the 'Ita Nia Rai' project, commented: "I think the mediation teams can be readied early, since these teams [or panels] are composed of Suco chiefs, Aldeia chiefs and traditional elders." He explained that "the Church, the local land and property offices (DTP) and the National Directorate for Land and Property (DNTPSC) should coordinate together to promote solving disputes which may arise."

On the way to solve disputes, Soares explained: "First, the disputed area is identified, or localized, clearly. Second, a mediation team consults each of the parties to the dispute to find out what solution they wish for, and to find a mediator they can agree on. Third, a place is identified in which to conduct the mediation, that all parties agree on. If a solution is found through mediation, an agreement is prepared and the disputing parties can sign it. This agreement is not the decision of the mediator, but of the disputing parties themselves."

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