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Adult Literacy and Women's Empowerment:
Exploring the contribution of a non-formal adult literacy programme to
women's empowerment in Aileu, Timor Leste

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Abstract

While the majority of studies concerning education in Timor Leste have focused on formal schooling, this thesis seeks to explore the contribution of non-formal adult literacy programmes (NFALP) to rural women's empowerment in Aileu, Timor Leste by examining the challenges that rural women face in their daily lives, whether their participation in the NFALP and literacy acquisition has assisted them with overcoming these challenges and brought benefits to their lives, and if this has led to their empowerment. The study adopts a gender perspective and focuses on the individual voices of rural adult women in considering how NFALPs are impacting on rural women's lives, and provides a space for their voice, one which has been marginalised in the literature so far, to be heard. The study examines three important empowerment frameworks presented by Rowlands (1995), Kabeer (1999) and Stromquist (1993) which are relevant to research concerning women and education. The study employs a qualitative feminist methodology in seeking an in-depth understanding of the reality and lived experience of rural women participating in the programme through semi-structured interviews with literacy programme participants and key informants during a period of fieldwork in Timor Leste

The research findings reveal that the motivation behind women's participation in a NFALP is directly related to addressing their practical gender needs, rather than their strategic gender needs, which revolve around reproductive tasks and unpaid productive work. The study found that NFALP offers rural women who missed out on formal schooling another opportunity to achieve an education, however, yet the heavy burden of women's traditional reproductive roles severely restricts their ability to regularly attend NFALP. Finally, the research found that rural women did experience empowerment through their participation in the NFALP, the most common empowerment dimension experienced being the personal (Rowlands, 1995) or psychological dimension (Stromquist, 1993) of empowerment.

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Viva Timor Leste!

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List of Acronyms

- APODETI – Associação Popular Democrática Timorense¹
- ASDT – Associação Social-Democrata Timorense²
- CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
- DAWN – Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
- EFA – Education For All
- GAD – Gender and Development
- GAU – Gender Affairs Unit
- GNP – Gross National Product
- GDP – Gross Domestic Profit
- GFFTL – Grupo Feto Foinsa’e Timor Lorosa’e³
- GNP – Gross National Profit
- FALINTIL – Forças Armadas da Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste⁴
- FOKUPERS – Forum Komunikasi Untuk Perempuan Loro Sae⁵
- FRETILIN – Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente⁶
- INTERFET – International Force for East Timor
- KI – Key Informant
- LPP – Literacy Programme Participant
- MDG – Millennium Development Goal
- MFAT – New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- NGO – Non-governmental Organisation
- NLS – New Literacy Studies
- NZAID – New Zealand Agency for International Development
- NZAP – New Zealand Aid Programme
- OPMT – Organização Popular da Mulher Timorense⁷
- RLA – Real Literacies Approach
- SAP – Structural Adjustment Programme

¹ English Translation: Timorese Popular Democratic Association

² English Translation: Timorese Social Democratic Association

³ English Translation: East Timor Young Women’s Group

⁴ English Translation: The Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor

⁵ English Translation: Communication Forum for Women from the East

⁶ English Translation: Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor

⁷ English Translation: Popular Organization of East Timorese Women

TLCLS – Timor Leste Survey of Living Standards

UDT – União Democrática Timorense⁸

UN – United Nations

UNESCO –United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund

UNIFEM –United Nations Development Fund for Women

UNMISET –United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor

UNMIT – United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste

UNOTIL – United Nations Office in East Timor

UNTAET – United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

WID – Women in Development

⁸ English Translation: Timorese Democratic Union

Map of Timor Leste



<http://navigatedili.com/East%20Timor%20Images/Timor-Leste.jpg>

Chapter One: Introduction to the Research

On 20 May 2002 after more than 400 years of colonial rule by Portugal and 25 years of illegal occupation by Indonesia Timor Leste achieved independence. Timor Leste achieved independence at a time when it ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world and thus faced considerable development challenges in its efforts to rebuild itself as a nation. One of the greatest challenges Timor Leste faced was the rebuilding of the education infrastructure and administration, which had been all but destroyed when the Indonesian forces retreated in 1999 taking with them the vast majority of Indonesian public servants who formed the backbone of government administration in Timor Leste throughout the occupation⁹. Given this lack of infrastructure in all spheres not just education and a markedly reduced administrative system, in working with the newly elected Government the United Nations who had assumed sovereign control over Timor Leste in the period immediately following the violence that erupted in 1999, combating the widespread illiteracy prevalent throughout the newly independent country was an enormous task. Widespread illiteracy, while not only being a human rights issue, has meant that the availability of literate and skilled human capital needed to administer the public sector, and educational institutions, was severely limited. At the time of independence Timor Leste had an adult literacy rate of around 47%, which subsequently increased to 58% in 2007¹⁰ (Government of Timor Leste, 2007), with adult illiteracy found to be disproportionately higher amongst the rural population and for women in Timor Leste¹¹.

Background and Rationale to this Research

Timor Leste has continued to make progress in some areas of development, such as improvements in under-five mortality, increasing access to improved sanitation, and an

⁹ The World Bank (1999) estimated that 95% of schools had been destroyed in the violence that erupted following the outcome of the referendum in which the population of Timor Leste voted overwhelmingly in favour of independence from Indonesia

¹⁰ The average adult illiteracy rate for the world 2000-2007 was 16% (UNESCO, 2010:95).

¹¹ The UNDP reports that the literacy rate for 15-24 year olds in rural areas is reported to be 81.9%, lower than the 91.8% reported for urban areas, and similarly, for the same age group the female literacy rate of 82.1% is lower than the male literacy rate of 87.8% (2009:28)

increase in the number of children enrolled in primary education (UNDP, 2009:8-9). Yet women and girls continue to show lower human development indicators compared to males. Societal structures in Timor Leste are heavily influenced by strongly traditional patriarchal beliefs and customs, which present a formidable challenge to women's social, economic and political participation. Reducing the high adult illiteracy rate prevalent amongst women, particularly in the rural areas, will be an important mechanism for increasing their social, economic and political participation. Historically, approaches to addressing illiteracy in developing countries have tended to focus on the formal education system, as seen more recently in efforts to achieve Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Two (universal primary education). In the case of Timor Leste this is somewhat problematic due to the limited availability and poor access to formal education, and high drop out rates meaning what is on offer is maybe inappropriate or not of good quality, and not withstanding the fact as identified by McCaffery, Merrifield, & Millican (2007) that formal education is only part of the solution to changing literacy levels. This point made by McCaffery et al. (2007) will be discussed in more detail shortly.

Throughout the world literacy has remained one of the most neglected education goals, and progress towards the Education for All (EFA) goal of halving illiteracy by 2015 has been far too slow, particularly in the area of adult literacy. Current trends suggest that by 2015 there will be 710 million illiterate adults in the world (UNESCO, 2010:94). McCaffery, Merrifield, and Millican have argued that a twin-track approach to tackling adult illiteracy, whereby education policies and strategies target both primary and adult illiteracy simultaneously, is essential to achieving an illiteracy-free world (2007:14). Although adult literacy opens up greater opportunities for adults and enables them to assist their children with education, due to the limited financial resources that governments have available to them, formal schooling tends to receive the greater share of financial resources while informal education (through which the majority of adult literacy programmes are delivered) receives a minimal share (McCaffery, et al., 2007:14). In recent years, while simultaneously looking to develop the formal education system, the Government of Timor Leste has been forward thinking by also encouraging the use of non-formal adult literacy programmes to deliver its vision for an illiteracy-free Timor

Leste. Hence the Government has worked in partnership with international agencies and NGOs to develop a basic non-formal adult literacy curriculum and has taken action towards making literacy a compulsory skill set for gaining access to government pensions, vocational training opportunities, and formal employment in government-run institutions to encourage adults to learn literacy.

In considering the above mentioned discussion about women's, especially rural women's disadvantage, in Timor Leste the focus on improving indicators of development for rural women and the increased attention on reducing female adult illiteracy in the rural areas of Timor Leste, largely driven by the EFA goal to halve illiteracy by 2015, the following questions were raised:

- With an already heavy work burden, how do the target beneficiaries of these adult literacy programmes, namely rural women, feel about literacy?
- Are the adult literacy programmes, and the acquisition of literacy skills, helping rural women in their daily lives?
- How do these adult literacy programmes respond to women's needs and interests?
- What motivates rural women to participate in an adult literacy programme?

These questions in turn led me to ask what impact non-formal adult literacy programmes might have on women in addition to gaining literacy skills, whether their participation in the programme was motivated by or led to feelings of empowerment, and what this empowerment might look like. In other words, did these non-formal adult literacy programmes provide an enabling environment for empowering women to seek out further opportunities to benefit their lives and those of their families and communities? I thought this particularly important given as mentioned above the belief that reducing the high adult illiteracy rate prevalent amongst women, particularly in the rural areas, is an important mechanism for increasing their social, economic and political participation.

My interest in the research topic was motivated by both a personal and pragmatic interest in Timor Leste and the field of education. While my interest in Timor Leste stemmed from its unique history and my admiration for the East Timorese peoples' struggle for independence, my interest in education and literacy in particular is due to my belief in the opportunities it provides people to improve their lives and those of their families and communities. While recognising that education is in no way a panacea for the world's problems, it does offer power through knowledge and can develop critical consciousness (this idea is also supported in the literature see Freire (1970)) which I believe will lead to the liberation of oppressed, marginalised and disempowered people over time.

A review of the available academic and grey literature concerning Timor Leste clearly identified illiteracy as one of the most pressing issues confronting the country (as also stated above), and as will be shown in Chapter Four those most disproportionately represented in the illiteracy statistics are women, more specifically rural women. In the past the focus of the Government in the education sector has been on the delivery of formal education in an effort to achieve MDG Two, with NGOs providing the majority of non-formal adult literacy programmes. Yet while there is a large donor presence in Timor Leste delivering hundreds of development projects, and the Government of Timor Leste has voiced its renewed commitment to eradicating illiteracy and gender disparities throughout Timor Leste¹², the rural areas still appear to be missing out on the resources and the standard of service available in the urban areas. The focus of much of the development activities and available research, which are predominantly donor reports, tends to suggest an urban-bias towards development activities in the capital of Dili and other main urban centres. Hence, the rural areas of Timor Leste have once again been unfairly marginalised in terms of development and educational opportunities.

With limited academic research and literature available relating to adult women's experiences with non-formal adult literacy programmes in Timor Leste it is difficult to

¹² The Government of Timor-Leste established the following key goals in its Education Strategy 2010-2025: universal completion of basic education by 2025; gender parity in education access and management by 2015; and the eradication of illiteracy amongst all age groups by 2015.

ascertain how effective non-formal adult literacy programmes are at meeting the needs of the participants. The availability of literature concerning women, adult literacy and empowerment is often found to be limited due to the difficulties surrounding assessing the impact of adult literacy programmes. This is because of the irregular enrolment, attendance, and completion rates that characterise non-formal adult education (Stromquist, 2009:2). The results of qualitative studies in the field of adult literacy and women's empowerment have been mixed and there is a lack of solid evidence, in part due to the limited baseline data available, demonstrating the positive impacts of non-formal adult literacy programmes. However, such qualitative studies are important because they not only contribute insight into women participant's lives and their use of literacy, but also serve to inform the direction of future non-formal adult literacy programmes. Furthermore, the development of recent critical approaches to adult literacy have made an important contribution in recognising that literacy is in itself a source of power, one which can be used to subordinate or to challenge and transform social and political structures. Hence it is in this tradition that this thesis follows in situating adult literacy within the discourse on women's empowerment.

In the case of Timor Leste, the limited literature available concerning rural women's experiences with non-formal adult literacy programmes emerged in the years immediately following independence in 2002. In addition to the lack of qualitative data, limited statistics are available for Timor Leste on the whole, in particular statistics for rural areas and sex-disaggregated data¹³. Where statistics are available, they show that rural adult women in Timor Leste are a significant section of society that are overrepresented in the illiteracy statistics (UNDP, 2009). The lack of statistics available concerning rural adult women and literacy also suggests that these women are underrepresented in research in education. Previous research focusing on women in Timor Leste has tended to focus on human rights and women's political and economic participation.

¹³ In 2010, Timor Leste conducted its first Census since 2004, however, at the time of writing the 2010 Census data was still unavailable. Thus, this thesis draws predominantly on statistics provided by the 2004 Timor Leste Census (Government of Timor Leste, 2004), the 2007 Timor Leste Survey of Living Standards (Government of Timor Leste, 2007); and World Bank (2008), UNDP (2009) and UNESCO (2010) reports.

Where education is concerned, the research has also tended to focus on formal schooling at the primary and secondary education levels (Nicolai, 2004; World Bank, 2004). Thus it was felt that examining adult women's experiences from a different perspective, such as women's empowerment through a non-formal adult literacy programme, would provide an important opportunity to create a space for a voice that is often missing in the literature, as well as adding to the limited body of research available concerning rural women and non-formal adult literacy programmes in Timor Leste. It is with the abovementioned in mind that the aim of this thesis and the research questions will now be presented.

Aim of Thesis and Research Questions

The aim of this thesis is to explore the contribution of non-formal adult literacy programmes to rural women's empowerment in Aileu, Timor Leste. Literacy not only provides a necessary skill to enable rural adult women in Timor Leste to access greater educational, economic and political opportunities and therefore increase their participation; it is a fundamental human right that should be afforded to all people¹⁴(United Nations, 2011). As much of the research currently available concerning women and non-formal education in Timor Leste has been prepared for or by donor agencies and the government with little focus on the voices of the participants, this research will provide an opportunity to analyse rural women's experiences with literacy from a different perspective, one which seeks to privilege rural women's voice in the research. The intention of this research is to therefore provide an opportunity for the women participating in the non-formal adult literacy programme to reflect on their experiences as actors in the literacy programme, how this may have been transformative in their lives and that of their communities, and to create with these women a space for them to be heard through the outcomes of the research. The research will hence seek to understand the challenges that rural women face in their daily lives, whether their participation in the literacy programme and literacy acquisition has assisted them with

¹⁴ Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Article 26

overcoming these challenges and brought benefits to their lives, and if this has led to their empowerment.

This research is significant for two reasons. Firstly as argued above, the literature currently available on rural women's participation in non-formal adult literacy programmes in Timor Leste is limited and further research is required to build a comprehensive understanding of how non-formal adult literacy programmes can be more effective. Thus, this research will add to the information available and contributes to a greater understanding of rural women's lives, their needs and their interests. Secondly, while a large number of reports on Timor Leste's development in the post-conflict and reconstruction periods exist in the form of 'grey' literature provided by donors, these reports focus predominantly on the formal education system, and tend to represent the views of the donor. This study therefore provides an alternative perspective by focusing on the individual voices of rural adult women in Timor Leste in considering how non-formal adult literacy programmes are impacting on their lives, and provides a space for their voice, one which has been marginalised in the literature so far, to be heard.

Finally, this research adopts a gender perspective to analysing rural women's participation and empowerment in a non-formal adult literacy programme, a perspective that needs greater representation in the available literature. The literature available in the field of adult literacy has shown that failing to adopt a gender perspective to research on adult literacy programmes risks the possibility that the programme's outcomes may be misleading by concluding that the programme was overall beneficial and empowering for participants, when in reality it may have been empowering to men yet disempowering to women (Walter, 2004:426).

The field research for this thesis was carried out in 2010 with 14 rural women from the District of Aileu, Timor Leste, who are currently participating in a non-formal adult literacy programme provided by the Aileu Resource and Training Centre (ARTC)¹⁵,

¹⁵ Two men participating in the non-formal adult literacy programme also expressed a desire to share their views and thus a total of 16 interviews were conducted with participants of the programme.

and a total of six key informant interviews took place. This research applied a qualitative methodology that drew upon feminist insight in seeking to privilege women's voices in making visible the lived experiences and realities of women's lives. In seeking meaning, understanding and depth in the information provided by the research participants it was felt that such data could only be gained through semi-structured interviews with the women participating in the programme and key informants. Secondary data, including government and donor reports, played an important part in identifying gaps in the literature and issues concerning adult illiteracy and gender disparities in education in Timor Leste

To guide this thesis I sought to answer the following research questions:

Question 1: What has been the experience of women in education in Timor Leste?

Question 2: What are the daily experiences of rural women who participate in non-formal adult literacy programmes, and how do these programmes respond to rural women's needs and interests?

Question 3: In what ways have individual women participating in a non-formal adult literacy programme experienced empowerment, and how have these programmes contributed to rural women's empowerment in Timor Leste?

Chapter Outline

Chapter One has introduced the study. The thesis problem and overall aim of the research are presented in an overview of the challenges that women in Timor Leste currently face, including the high adult illiteracy rate prevalent amongst rural women. In situating literacy within the discourse on development and empowerment, the chapter argues that literacy, particularly adult literacy, remains one of the most neglected education goals yet is fundamental to reducing worldwide illiteracy levels in time to meet the EFA Goal Four of halving illiteracy by 2015. The lack of available literature concerning women, adult literacy and empowerment in Timor Leste highlights the need for further research exploring the contribution of adult literacy programmes to women's

empowerment in Timor Leste. The chapter then briefly describes the fieldwork approach, and argues that in seeking meaning, understanding and depth in the data collected this could only be gained through employing a qualitative feminist methodology and the use of semi-structured interviews. The aim of this thesis research, and the research questions which guided this thesis inquiry, are also made explicit. An outline of the chapters concludes Chapter One.

Chapter Two examines the theoretical approaches to gender, education and development, tracing the progression of policy approaches from colonialism through to the Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) approaches, and the impact of these two policy approaches on education in developing countries. The chapter highlights how colonial administrations viewed education as a form of control to subordinate rather than to educate populations to participate in social, political or economic development. The idea of offering education to women as seen in the various WID approaches did little to challenge the very reasons, for example, patriarchal systems, why women did not participate in education systems even when available. Moreover rather than seeing education as a human right and indeed a gender right the WID approach to women's education tended to focus narrowly on the idea that literacy would enable women to be more efficient participants in development through increased income-generating activities as a result of their literacy skills. Thus the different approaches within the WID paradigm are critically analysed followed by an examination of the theoretical shift from WID to GAD, and the rise of Third World Feminists which influenced the debate and discourse around women's empowerment in the developing world. The chapter concludes with an analysis of how this theoretical shift influenced changing attitudes towards women's literacy from an instrumental approach focusing on what women could do for development, to one which asked what development could do for women and education for women's empowerment.

Chapter Three reviews the literature concerning adult literacy programmes and women's empowerment in the context of adult literacy. The chapter highlights the difficulties that researcher's face in attempting to measure the impact of adult literacy

programmes on women's empowerment, and the importance that further qualitative inquiries will have for future programme design. The literature will show that the most common form of empowerment associated with adult literacy programmes are feelings of increased self-confidence and self-esteem in the participants, yet due to restrictive cultural practices literacy acquisition does not necessarily result in an increase in women's social and political status. The chapter then discusses critical approaches to the study of adult literacy which promote literacy as a source of power that can transform social and political structures, and then examines two important concepts central to the discourse on empowerment: power and process. Three empowerment frameworks relevant to the study of women's empowerment and adult literacy are then analysed and the commonalties and differences between the different dimensions of empowerment promoted by the three frameworks in relation to literacy are then highlighted. These frameworks are to be applied to the research findings in *Chapter Seven* to analyse whether literacy and non-formal adult literacy programmes have been empowering for rural women in Aileu, Timor Leste. The chapter argues that empowerment is not a linear process, but one that is cyclical in nature. The chapter concludes that empowerment cannot be done to women but rather women must undertake their own empowerment, and therefore development activities need to be flexible enough to allow women to develop their capacity to analyse their situation and needs.

In presenting Timor Leste's socio-economic, cultural and historical context, and the development of women and education in Timor Leste from the pre-colonial period through to independence, *Chapter Four* answers the first research question by analysing the challenging and harsh conditions that women in Timor Leste have encountered and the severe disadvantage they have suffered through their exclusion from education and development. The chapter will show that while women in Timor Leste, particularly rural women, missed out on formal schooling during Portuguese rule and Indonesian occupation, non-formal adult literacy programmes are providing women with an alternative means of accessing educational opportunities and potentially overcoming their disadvantage and disempowerment. The chapter then introduces the Aileu Resource and Training Centre (ARTC) which is providing non-formal adult literacy programmes to

rural women in the District of Aileu, highlighting the challenges of delivering such programmes to rural women and the importance of contextually relevant and locally driven adult literacy programmes.

In *Chapter Five*, the methodological aspects that guided this research and the fieldwork experiences are presented. The chapter shows how this study was guided by a qualitative feminist research methodology, and employed qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews to collect the data. The chapter highlights the reasons for choosing a qualitative methodology, considered to be the most effective and appropriate means for answering the research questions by gaining insight into the reality and lived experience of rural women in Timor Leste. The chapter provides an in-depth view of the preparation for and experiences during the fieldwork period in Timor Leste.

In presenting the research findings, *Chapter Six* answers the second research question of this thesis by uncovering the daily experiences of rural women participating in the adult literacy programme and how these programmes are responding to rural women's needs and interests. As the chapter will show, the findings suggest that women's illiteracy does not prevent women from participating in household or community decision-making, but could impact on a woman's confidence to meaningfully participate by speaking up at community meetings and on her ability to understand the information presented by government officials. As will be shown, non-formal adult literacy programmes are providing assistance to women to feel more confident to speak up, and in accessing written information they may otherwise be unable to. The chapter will further present findings which show that women's motivation to participate in literacy programmes is based around meeting their practical gender needs rather than their strategic gender needs. Therefore in trying to ensure that the literacy classes are meaningful to women non-formal adult literacy programmes tend to follow in the WID tradition of reinforcing women's reproductive roles rather than transforming for example the unequal gender division of labour to achieve women's strategic needs.

Chapter Seven presents the second part of the research findings and sought to

answer the third research question of this thesis which explores the way in which individual women have experienced empowerment, and how adult literacy programmes contribute to rural women's empowerment in Timor Leste. The chapter will present findings that suggest the women interviewed have experienced forms of empowerment, particularly in the personal and psychological dimensions of empowerment, and which support the findings of previous studies into adult literacy and women's empowerment highlighted in *Chapter Three*. Women's ability to exercise meaningful choice, or 'agency', is shown to be fairly restricted, largely as a result of their reliance on subsistence farming and the limited opportunities available to them outside of the informal unpaid sector. Aspects of economic and political empowerment are also highlighted in the women's experiences, and the chapter suggests that these will perhaps become more evident in future as women's literacy levels increase to the point they can apply their skills to income-generating activities and employment opportunities and gain access to greater resources. The findings presented in the chapter will also show that collective empowerment was less evident in the women's experiences, and actions in this regard are limited to a few examples of women encouraging each other to continue on studying during hard times.

Chapter Eight concludes this thesis with a summary of the chapters, reflections on the contribution of adult literacy to women's empowerment, conclusions drawn from the research findings, and discusses future policy considerations for non-formal adult literacy programmes targeting rural women in Timor Leste.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Approaches to Women, Gender and Development

Introduction

Within the debate concerning women, education and development, different policy approaches developed which defined how women's contribution to development and their participation in education has been perceived by international policy makers. Through a discussion of the literature in the fields of gender, education and empowerment, and an analysis of the key concepts and debates concerning theory and practice, this chapter will provide an overview of the way in which knowledge concerning women, education, development, and subsequently empowerment has been constructed and integrated into development policy and practice. Thus said, this chapter will examine the relationship between women, development and education by tracing the policy approaches to women in the development agenda from the colonial era through to the more recent GAD approach.

The chapter will begin with an overview of the Women in Development (WID) discourse and what this meant for women and education. The chapter will show that education policies were heavily influenced by the popular 'efficiency' approach to women's participation in development, which viewed education as a crucial mechanism for enhancing women's efficiency in their reproductive and productive roles. The chapter goes on to discuss the rise of feminists in the Third World and the introduction of the 'empowerment' approach to women and development. The chapter will show that the roots of the concept of women's empowerment are to be found in the recognition that while meeting women's practical daily needs is important, to really enable empowerment and the transformation of structures which perpetuate gender inequality women's strategic needs and interests must be addressed. Finally the shift from the WID approach to the GAD approach and what this has meant for women and education will be discussed

Traditional Approaches to Women, Development and Education

Traditional approaches to women in development, and the early development of education policy, have been shaped by two important influences: the colonial era and the modernisation era. The influence of colonialism and modernisation on the development of women and education will be discussed next.

Influence of the Colonial Era on Women, Development and Education

Following World War II, and the deemed success of the Marshall Plan, American President Harry Truman announced in his inaugural address in 1949 that the policy of exploitation of the Third World for foreign profit by colonial government administrations was no longer acceptable and would be replaced with a policy focused on development and democratic values, with the ultimate aim of alleviating poverty and underdevelopment in the Third World (Saunders, 2002:1). Up until this time colonial policy had focused on the sourcing and development of raw materials from the Third World for First World profit (Sen & Grown, 1986:29), and the development of administrative structures which enforced colonial control over those resources and viewed indigenous people as inferior to Europeans (Saunders, 2002:2). Under the dominant patriarchal ideology of the colonial era women's economic status had declined as they had been increasingly relegated to the unpaid domestic sphere, with men taking increasing control of the paid productive sphere. Thus, while both men and women in the Third World suffered as a consequence of colonial policy, women tended to suffer the effects more due to their limited rights and access to resources as a consequence of their gendered roles (Sen & Grown, 1986:30).

The colonial legacy of uneven development, inequality and the view that Third World people were inferior had an especially profound effect on the educational development of Third World people and women in particular. Colonial education policy viewed language, and the imposition of the language of the colonisers, as an important method of influencing cultural identities in favour of the dominant Western identity by

destroying notions of indigenous communities' "otherness" (Rasool, 1999:64), and unifying culturally diverse indigenous populations to serve the interests of the colonising nations. Colonial education programmes, where they were available, were specifically aimed at indoctrinating the colonies with Western values and building human capital through a model of social development that aimed to supply a large source of cheap unskilled and semi-skilled labour while keeping the population under-educated and subordinate to colonial rulers (Rasool, 1999:63; Saunders, 2002:2).

Throughout the colonial era, colonial administrations and the Church were important actors in the delivery of education in the Third World. Both the colonial administrations and the Church viewed education as an important instrument for achieving their specific goals (Kelly & Altbach, 1978:2). Influenced by evolutionary arguments colonial administrations shared the belief that women and indigenous/non-Western people were of lesser intelligence (Fox, 1997:51; Lyons, 1978:192), and that indigenous education practices were inferior to those of the West. Men were targeted by the colonial administrations for skills-based education focused on basic literacy and numeracy that would enable them to enter low-level administrative positions in the colonial government. On the other hand, women were targeted for church-based 'moral' education by missionaries who viewed women's responsibility for family welfare as an ideal mode through which to transmit Christian values and implement cultural change (Kelly & Altbach, 1978:12). Thus, education for women during the colonial era was driven by a focus on women's reproductive roles as wives and mothers within the family, in other words, 'Education for Reproduction' (Wild, 2007). Education for Reproduction will be elaborated on further in the following section, which will consider the influence of the modernisation paradigm on women, development and education.

Influence of the Modernisation Paradigm on Women, Development and Education

The modernisation paradigm assumed a vision of development which was largely viewed as being about 'progress' from an underdeveloped/traditional society to a developed/modern capitalist society, and deemed to follow a linear trajectory as proposed

by Walter Rostow's (1960) five stages of economic growth. Modernisation theory viewed progress as synonymous with development and argued that the Third World experienced poverty as a result of backwardness and low productivity, even though they possessed what was seen to be abundant natural and labour resources (Youngman, 2000:53). Hence, underdevelopment and poverty in the Third World was largely viewed as a technical problem which could be fixed with modern Western technology (Parpart, 2002:43), participation in the market economy, and literacy (Youngman, 2000:53). Technology was thus heralded as the panacea for bringing the Third World into the modern era. Development practice during this period was driven by a top-down Eurocentric approach, which viewed Third World people as objects of the world (in need of assistance and development being done to them) rather than as subjects (capable of pursuing their own development) (Chowdry, 1995:33). As will be shown next, education policies during this period similarly followed this line of thought.

Education policies pursued by the newly independent nations emerging from colonial rule during the 1950s and 1960's drew heavily on modernisation ideals of progress and economic development. Education discourse was driven by a top-down approach and tended to focus on 'Education for Production' and 'Education for Reproduction' (Wild, 2007). Education policy-makers were concerned with how to incorporate a greater number of individuals into the modernising economy through skills-based training, in other words 'Education for Production' (Wild, 2007). Whereas the colonial era sought to restrict the education of Third World peoples for fear of social disruption (Gould, 1993:21), modernisation theory promoted a 'one size fits all' approach to schooling in the Third World based on the Western schooling system as a driver for rapid industrialisation. This idea was based on Theodore Schultz's 'human capital theory' which argued that rapid economic growth relied on education as a productive investment (Youngman, 2000:56). The mass expansion of schooling was viewed by policy-makers as a way of creating a large skilled workforce in the Third World that would be capable of participating more fully in the modern economy.

Large investments of foreign aid and public resources supported a rapid expansion of schooling which promoted universal primary education as the most efficient means of building human capital and increasing the skill-level of young adults entering the labour-based economy. In theory, building an educated skilled workforce through primary education appeared to be the perfect solution for supplying the modern economy with a large youthful educated workforce. This policy, however, resulted in significant problems for many countries due to the demand for education outstripping the resources available and the lack of employment opportunities for the rapidly increasing educated unemployed (Youngman, 2000:56). Coombs (1968) publicised the crisis in his book *The World Educational Crisis* and outlined possible solutions which prioritised the modernisation of rural agriculture and focused on “the potential of adult education programmes to contribute to development within the modernisation paradigm” through upgrading the skills of adults to be more effective in the agricultural sector (Youngman, 2000:57).

Education policy-makers at this time were also searching for ways that education could modernise women’s domestic and reproductive roles (Moser, 1989:1809), and assist women with making more informed choices concerning the wellbeing of their family, in other words ‘Education for Reproduction’ (Wild, 2007). The view that educating women would benefit the reproductive aspects of women’s lives by reducing fertility levels as women learned more about family planning and result in decreasing the mortality rates of infants and children was emphasised by mainstream development organisations at the time (Pong, 1999:155).

In addition to creating a skilled and healthy workforce the education system was viewed as an important nation building mechanism in the newly independent Third World nations. As Youngman notes “a strong, centralised education system was also seen as politically important in the process of nation-building, creating national unity and the authority of the state” (2000:56). Similarly, Rasool points to the increased relevance of language, identity and traditional literacy in postcolonial nations during the 1970s and 1980s as a means for building their indigenous identity and distancing themselves from

the dominant colonial policies of the past (Rasool, 1999:4). Adult education in particular was viewed as fundamental to a nation's national development. Yet the normative value assigned to development within the modernisation paradigm and the purpose of adult education were rarely questioned (Youngman, 2000:58). While this period saw a heightened attention to the socio-economic value of education for production and reproduction, and the benefits education could bring to the newly independent developing nations, educational opportunities were still largely targeted at men. Women, modernisation theory assumed, would benefit from the income that their husbands received through participation in economic development in the public sphere, in other words, through a "trickle down" effect (Chowdry, 1995:31).

The assumption that progress through modernisation would benefit men and women equally was increasingly called into question in the 1970s as evidence showed that women did not benefit from development to the same extent that men did. Development had failed to "trickle down" to the poor and marginalised in society which tended to be disproportionately women (Sen & Grown, 1986:17), and in some situations there had actually been a decline in the position of women in society (Boserup, 1970; Rathgeber, 1990; Tinker & Bramson, 1976). It became clear that women were severely disadvantaged in the productive sector in which they faced widespread discrimination and barriers to their participation and were usually assigned lower-paid, lower-skilled, and lower-status jobs than men. Women also experienced strong prejudice against their involvement in educational activities. This was due to the commonly held belief that women's rightful place was in the domestic or private sphere and as they would not acquire well-paying jobs in the productive sector the best return on a family's investment would be to educate the boys, a belief which still holds true in many parts of the world today. Consequently, women's experiences and benefits from development, including educational opportunities, would inevitably be different to those of men who have historically enjoyed more freedom and opportunities in both the productive and education sectors.

The modernisation paradigm also drew wide-spread criticism for having failed to take into account the differences between men and women, neglecting to understand women as a heterogeneous category, and failing to recognise that women experience development in different ways depending on class, race, gender, sexuality, geographic location and environment. The modernisation paradigm was further criticised for having imposed upon the Third World a Euro-centric Western model of development that failed to take into consideration the effects of the prevailing colonial legacy of inequality and uneven development (Rasool, 1999:85). The industrial revolution in the West had succeeded in large part due to the expansion of markets in the colonies, along with the availability of cheap resources and labour sourced from the Third World. Thus, while Western Europe had been characterised by what Rostow's (1960) five stages of economic development suggested was a rational and linear progress towards becoming 'modern' following the industrial revolution, this failed to take into account the historical, social and cultural differences that existed between developed and underdeveloped countries. The development trajectory for the Third World would therefore be very different to that of the First World, and would require "a set of development priorities that reached beyond the economy" (Rasool, 1999:84). The increasing emphasis on women in development led to the United Nations (UN) observing 1975 as the International Women's Year and the establishment of the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Following on from the International Women's Year the UN declared the UN Decade for the Advancement of Women (1976-85). The influence of this decade on women's advancement, and what this meant for women and education will be discussed next.

United Nations Decade for Women (1976-85) and it's Impact on Women's Participation in Education

The UN Decade for the Advancement of Women (1976-85) was a significant milestone in legitimising feminist activism and mobilising women in development on a global stage. The decade called for action to improve the education, employment opportunities, and social and political participation of women throughout the world. The world conferences in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), and Nairobi (1985)

generated unprecedented momentum for advancing the status of women and resulted in a World Plan of Action (1975), the announcement of an international development strategy (1980), and the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. Participation in the conferences provided a valuable opportunity for women from Western, Socialist and Third World ideologies to debate the legitimacy of a singular 'women's point of view' and to challenge the domination of Western feminism (Saunders, 2002:7). While the Decade for Women did not immediately result in a drastic change in patriarchal attitudes and an immediate reversal in the oppression and subordination of women, it did present an opportunity to bring greater awareness to the needs of women in development planning, gender mainstreaming, and the need for women's experiences throughout the world to be researched and documented (Momsen, 1991:3).

Following the UN Decade for the Advancement of Women, the fourth world conference on women was held in Beijing in 1995, during which the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted. The Platform for Action set out a plan for achieving equality for women across 12 critical areas: poverty, education and training, health, the economy, power and decision-making, human rights, armed conflict, institutional mechanisms, the environment, violence against women and the girl child. The Platform for Action also provided the mandate for gender mainstreaming within the UN, a concept that arose from the GAD approach which will be discussed later in this chapter, and had been strongly lobbied for by Third World Feminists as a means of addressing unequal power relations between men and women (Prugl & Lustgarten, 2006:55). Significant milestones concerning declarations on gender equality in education followed the UN Decade for the Advancement of Women. These included the World Declaration on Education For All (Jomtien, 1990) and the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) which reaffirmed the commitment to EFA. Goal Four of EFA is especially important to this thesis as it stipulates a commitment to "achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults" (UNESCO, 2000:16).

More recently, in September 2000 the UN Summit resulted in a set of eight international development targets to be achieved by 2015, otherwise known as the MDGs, two of which focus on gender and education. Due to the disproportionate gender gaps in education the second MDG is aimed at achieving universal primary education, and the third MDG is aimed at promoting gender equality and empowering women with a target of eliminating gender disparities in all levels of education.

As was apparent right from the beginning of the discourse around women in development no singular reference point for the 'women's point of view' exists. This is due to the fact that women are not a homogenous group, they have varied and diverse differences based on their experiences of race, class and sexuality which in turn influences their viewpoint. However, the world conferences were instrumental in encouraging the development of international norms of gender equality. These conferences underpinned the introduction of gender mainstreaming policies that were adopted by many governments, institutions and organisations and emphasised the importance of increasing women's access to education and the elimination of gender disparities in education.

Women in Development (WID) and Education

Prior to the 1970s, it was thought that development benefited men and women equally. However, research into the lives of women in the Third World showed that women were not benefiting from economic development through a "trickle-down" effect. During the 1970s and early 1980s feminist activism intensified as women in the West increasingly challenged the dominance of patriarchy and recognised the benefit of organising separately from men in the political sphere to raise awareness and advocate for women's equality (Saunders, 2002:2). Of the different feminist opinions and frameworks put forth Liberal Feminism was the most closely aligned with the modernisation paradigm in sharing the view that societies were in a state of transitioning from traditional to modern. Grounded in modernisation theory and liberal feminism, the WID approach sought to bring women into the development process by supporting the integration, opportunities, and visibility of women in the productive sector as a means of

improving their ability to provide for their families, contribute to the economy and increase their individual autonomy (Saunders, 2002:5).

Western liberal feminists sought to articulate their common concerns around the discrimination and disadvantages that women experience accessing employment in the productive sector, the inequality apparent in the sexual division of labour that prioritised the value of men's work over women's, and the lack of women's rights not only in the public sphere but the private sphere. Liberal feminism sought to bring about the liberation of women through reform of the legal system to ensure equal rights for men and women, and equal opportunity for women in the productive sector. The rise of liberal feminism in the 1970s inspired educational research into the ways in which women in the West were disadvantaged in the Western education system which centred on the colonial and early independence era tradition of privileging male education over female resulting in lower earning capacity of women in the productive sector (Wild, 2007:52). Feminist research too began to explore women's status and educational disadvantage in the Third World and found that, similar to the West, men's education was privileged over women's (Wild, 2007:53).

Liberal feminism has drawn criticism for its predominant focus on women's access and contribution to the productive sector, however if we consider the historical basis for the growth of the Western Feminist movement in the 1960s and early 1970s we find that during this time the West (particularly the United States) was to a certain extent shielded from the shocks of the world economy and enjoyed fairly stable employment and income along with provision and access to social services (Sen & Grown, 1986:24). As a result, the Western Feminist movement was concerned more with gaining parity with men in the productive sector than questioning why women were poor or lacked parity with men. Thus, they failed to critically analyse the "feminisation of poverty" (Sen & Grown, 1986:24).

While Western liberal feminists focused on integrating women into current development activities, Marxist feminists argued that women's oppression was not

strictly a result of their exclusion from the productive sector, but rather a result of the inherent inequality of the class system. They disputed the focus on women and claimed that men too were oppressed by the inequality of the global capitalist class system. Patriarchy, manifested through male dominance and violence, was viewed as yet another exploitative instrument of the global capitalist system which kept women confined to the home (Nash and Safa, 1980, as cited in Saunders, 2002:8). In this view it was the global capitalist system that perpetuated inequality, rather than men, and only by dismantling capitalism would women along with men be liberated from class oppression. Marxist feminism, like Liberal Feminism, treated women as a homogenous category with common interests and experiences and thus failed to recognise the differences that existed between women.

In 1970, liberal feminist Esther Boserup introduced the approach that came to be widely recognised as the ‘Women in Development’ approach in her seminal work entitled ‘Women’s Role in Economic Development’ (1970). Boserup’s study of women in agrarian societies was influential in that it presented a feminist vision of development and was the first study to focus “scholarly attention on the sexual division of labour and the differential impact by gender of development and modernisation strategies” (Rathgeber, 1990:490). The study found that as societies moved from traditional subsistence agriculture to modern machine-based agriculture women’s burden often grew and the oppression they experienced intensified. It also uncovered a gender bias towards women in the modern productive sector, noting that men were more likely to be given opportunities in paid employment in the modern sector and given access and training in modern agricultural technologies than women who were limited to the informal subsistence sector (Saunders, 2002:4).

Feminists, drawing on Boserup’s research, were active in advocating the need for development policies to recognise women’s productive roles as well as their reproductive roles (Tinker, 1997:37). From an education point of view, this called for greater emphasis to be placed on providing women with the skills and training that would increase their ability to participate more fully in the modern productive sector (Leach, 1998:13). The

traditional educational approaches and policies that dominated in the early 1970s supported the assumption that literacy would provide the means by which women would develop the skills needed to match their male counterparts and become equal partners in the development process. This view implied that illiteracy was in part the *cause* of women's lack of progress and their marginalised position in society rather than a *symptom* of underdevelopment in the Third World (Robinson-Plant, 2004b:18), a view that was reflected in the vast majority of research studies undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s on women's education in the Third World. Many of these studies were commissioned by the World Bank to justify their policy focus on women's education, and which focused on demonstrating a positive correlation between female literacy rates and development indicators such as health and income (Robinson-Plant, 2004c:17).

Within the WID discourse two arguments formed the basis for a focus on development initiatives that specifically targeted women. The first argument was that women are overrepresented in poverty statistics and the second was that women share resources more fairly than men (Kabeer, 1995:109). Moser examined the policy approaches towards Third World women and development and, following on from Buvinic's identification of the 'Welfare' to 'Equity' to 'Anti-poverty' policy approaches (1983, as cited in Moser, 1989:1807), Moser added two additional policy approaches: the 'Efficiency' and 'Empowerment' approaches. Altogether these five different approaches came to be known collectively as the WID approach and together they reflected the changing context of Third World development policies in general, though they did not follow a strictly linear progression. Rather, different institutions favoured different approaches and at times engaged more than one of these approaches to address the needs of different constituencies (Moser, 1989:1807). The welfare, equity, anti-poverty and efficiency approaches and their impact on women in education will be discussed next.

The welfare approach, which has been the most popular and enduring of Third World social development policy, draws on the liberal humanitarian philosophy and has tended to represent women as passive victims and recipients of aid and development rather than as active agents of change. The approach strongly emphasises the

reproductive roles of women in the private domestic sphere as being the most effective and important roles they can play in development (Moser, 1989:1807), and pays specific attention to improving women's roles as caregivers and women's practical needs such as basic health and nutrition through non-formal education and training initiatives. The welfare approach is considered relatively politically safe as it identifies women as the problem, rather than the lack of access to resources and the inequalities within the traditional gender division of labour. This view gives little attention to the underlying social, political and economic structures that caused women to be in a vulnerable position in the first place, and the approach has faced criticism for its paternalistic nature and reinforcement of women's gender-based roles (Stewart-Withers, 2007:24).

By the 1970s dissatisfaction with the welfare approach increased with the recognition that modernisation policies in the Third World were failing to lift the living standards of women. The focus then shifted to analysing the negative effects that development projects were having on women in the Third World in terms of encouraging dependency on aid and disempowering women rather than encouraging their role as active agents of change. Criticism of the welfare approach led to the development of alternative policies concerning women and development, specifically the equity, anti-poverty, efficiency and empowerment approaches under the umbrella term of WID (Moser, 1989:1810).

Projects under the 'equity' approach (Moser, 1989) recognise women as active agents in development through both their reproductive and productive roles. Initiatives focus on those aspects of women's work which maximise their access and contribution to the productive modern sector, often with a welfare aspect added to the project along the themes of health and education (Rathgeber, 1990:492; Saunders, 2002:7). The 'equity' approach is ultimately concerned with achieving greater inclusion of women in the productive sphere through top-down legislative measures. Programmes aimed at equity and meeting women's strategic needs imply a fundamental redistribution of power and involve challenging the status quo. Such action requires the long-term commitment of governments and development agencies to transforming oppressive structures and

institutions through legislative change, and as such this approach is rarely viewed as politically favourable. The result has been limited success in encouraging governments to implement 'equity' focused programmes (Momsen, 1991:102).

The 'anti-poverty' approach is focused on improving women's access to productive resources through education and employment programmes, including income-generating activities (Moser, 1989:1812), as a way for women to increase income for their families thereby reducing poverty levels and increasing their social status through recognition of their ability to contribute financially to the family. As family care is often viewed as the responsibility of women it is envisaged that the benefits of increased income will be shared by all family members and therefore little attention is paid to understanding the cause of women's lower social status and challenging oppressive patriarchal structures and institutions (Stewart-Withers, 2007:31). The focus on women's increased participation in income-generating activities has met with criticism on two specific fronts. Firstly, such initiatives are closely aligned with women's reproductive or domestic roles and merely served to reinforce stereotypes of what women were capable of achieving and how they should act instead of focusing on women's empowerment and challenging society's narrow view of women's roles (Rowan-Campbell, 1999:6). Secondly, development planners have often failed to consider that these activities constitute an additional burden and responsibility on top of an already heavy workload that most women faced in caring for their household. Furthermore, women do not necessarily benefit from the additional income in situations where men control household income and spending (Rathgeber, 1990:491).

The efficiency approach gained popularity during the 1970s following the deterioration of the world economy and shift towards an economic growth-based neo-liberal development agenda which focused on Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP). Increasing productivity and efficiency were the two main objectives of the SAPs (Moser, 1989:1813), and as such only marketed goods and services were recognised. As a consequence SAP programmes failed to acknowledge the value of women's reproductive work and unpaid productive work. To increase efficiency SAPs sought to shift costs from

the paid to the unpaid economy. This meant that governments heavily reduced their expenditure on social services, such as health and education, assuming that women would provide these 'caring roles' and services with their 'free' time and this effectively increased women's unpaid labour burden further (Moser, 1989:1814). The introduction of the efficiency approach to women's role in development was influenced by an instrumentalist view which emphasises what women could contribute to the efficiency of the development process rather than what development could do for women (Chant, 2006:102).

The research agenda on women and education was heavily influenced by the efficiency approach and thus took an instrumental view in seeking to understand how women's efficiency in their existing roles could be increased through education as opposed to encouraging the sort of education that would lead to the transformation of gender roles and promote gender equity (Robinson-Plant, 2004b:21). Western scholars and education policy-makers began to focus on the application of a 'functional literacy' approach which assumed that there was one set universal literacy skills which would require everyone to learn in the same way and would be applicable throughout the world (UNESCO, 2006b:151). The narrow top-down view of the functional literacy approach differed from the traditional literacy approach in its vision of universal applicability and the view that the requirements of literacy were neutral and value-free, in other words independent of social context. While traditional literacy was seen to function in an isolated context-specific effort, the functional literacy approach was viewed as part of a broader worldwide development effort to increase 'human capital' and efficiency through knowledge and skills that could be applied to the labour market (Rasool, 1999:81). The view that literacy could be achieved through a set of universal skills would come to be challenged after the failure of the mass functional and basic literacy programmes, characteristic of educational policies of the 1970s and 1980s, to significantly improve and sustain women's literacy levels.

In viewing functional literacy interventions from a gender perspective the limitation of focusing predominantly on functional/work-related literacy is apparent in

the failure of this approach to understand the complex social and cultural aspects of literacy (McCaffery, et al., 2007:37), and recognise the many varied roles of women and the type of literacy required to support these roles (Robinson-Plant, 2004a:4). Adult education within the WID approach tended to treat women as “generic adult learners” and thus failed to recognise their “gendered lifeworlds in relation to men” (Walter, 2004:425). The WID approach was also criticised for other shortcomings, which included the lack of attention paid to the effects of colonialism on the status of women, and the impact of race, class and gender on the oppression experienced by women.

By accepting the existing social structures as acceptable and assuming that improved access to training, resources and technology would result in a higher standard of living for all people through a “trickle down” effect, the WID approach ultimately failed to adequately examine why it was that women were marginalised in the productive sphere in the first place. In focusing on improving women’s integration into existing development projects (Rathgeber, 1990:491), projects that often failed to take into account women’s specific practical and strategic gender needs and interests, the WID approach did not take the necessary steps to challenge the structures that perpetuated the marginalisation and inequality that women experienced. Rathgeber argues that due to its strong relationship with modernisation theory and its ahistorical nature the WID approach also neglected to explore the important contribution of dependency theory and Marxist theory in critically analysing the impact of class, race, gender and culture on women, and furthermore overlooked the significant differences that existed amongst women (1990:491).

In 1984, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) was formed in Bangalore, India by a group of politically minded Third World Feminist academics and activists who sought to achieve the empowerment of Third World women. DAWN focused on the ways that the structure of the growth-oriented international development agenda was further marginalising women in the Third World and argued that it is the lack of political will, rather than a lack of resources in the world, which is responsible for the marginalisation of women (Sen & Grown, 1986:81). DAWN

introduced the concept of empowerment to the discourse on women and development¹⁶, seeking as the prime objective of empowerment the “transformation of structures of subordination through radical changes in law, property rights and other institutions that reinforce and perpetuate male domination” (Batliwala, 1994:129). DAWN viewed the mobilisation of the women’s movement as a powerful tool for promoting and advocating for this transformation (Sen & Grown, 1986:81).

Drawing on empirical evidence and their own experiences during the U.N. Decade for the Advancement of Women, proponents of DAWN challenged the assumptions made by the WID approach that the main problem experienced by women in the Third World was the barrier to their participation in economic development programmes (Sen & Grown, 1986:15). DAWN argued that women in the Third World have experienced history and the oppressive structures of colonialism and patriarchy differently from women in the West. Thus, rather than applying a ‘one-size fits all’ approach to analysing the relationship between women and development Third World Feminists have sought to provide answers to their own context specific development issues. The analytical framework and arguments put forth by DAWN led to a significant shift in feminist thinking away from the WID approach towards the GAD approach and this in turn had implications for educational policies concerning women. The GAD approach will be examined next.

Gender and Development (GAD) and Education

Drawing on the critique of WID and the rise of Southern feminism and concepts such as participation and empowerment, the GAD approach emerged in the 1980s as an alternative bottom-up approach to the dominant liberal top-down WID approach of the 1970s. The GAD approach takes a different theoretical position to WID in that it focuses on analysing the historical and social construction of gender relations as opposed to studying women in isolation (Kabeer, 1994; McCaffery, et al., 2007:26; Moser, 1993; Rathgeber, 1990). GAD discourse, with its focus on the term ‘gender’ as opposed to

¹⁶ The concept of empowerment in relation to women’s literacy and empowerment will be unpacked in detail in Chapter Three.

‘women,’ sought to bring greater attention to the effects of patriarchy in shaping the gendered roles assigned to women and women’s subordinate status to men. Gender has been defined as “the way in which society differentiates appropriate behaviour and access to power for women and men” (Pankhurst, 2004:25). The GAD approach views gender as being socially constructed and sought to analyse the many ways women were excluded in development activities by examining all aspects of women’s lives, both public and private, and the structures which dominate their social environment (Rathgeber, 1990:493-494; Walter, 2004:424).

By examining the private sector as related to the public sector, the GAD approach rejects the dichotomy that exists between the private and public spheres, which Rathgeber argues has “been used as a mechanism to undervalue family and household maintenance work performed by women” (1990:494). Advocates of the GAD approach view gender inequality as structurally embedded and are therefore focus their analysis on identifying structures in society that perpetuate inequality (Prugl & Lustgarten, 2006:55), and examining how social relations and gender roles are constructed, reproduced and shaped by political, economic and social aspects of society (Rathgeber, 1990:494; Saunders, 2002:11).

The emergence of the GAD approach is important for many reasons, but four in particular stand out in the literature on GAD’s contribution. Firstly, unlike WID, GAD questions the validity of the roles assigned to men and women and seeks to transform the gendered power relations that cause women to be subservient secondary citizens in both the public and private spheres of society. Secondly, it rejects the notion that women are passive beneficiaries and instead promotes the diversity of women’s experiences and role of women as capable of mobilising as important ‘agents of change,’ within society (Rathgeber, 1990:494). Thirdly, the ideology behind the GAD approach views the state as integral to providing subsidies for services which women in many parts of the world provide as part of their gender assigned roles. Through the state taking responsibility and investing in those services which aid social reproduction such as education, healthcare and childcare it is reasoned that women’s work burdens will in time decrease (Rathgeber,

1990:494; Saunders, 2002:11). Finally, the GAD approach recognises that if there is to be true transformation of gendered power relations then men need to be involved in the debate as they play a significant role in the reproduction of gender identities and inequality. A key aspect of the GAD approach is Moser's (1989) concept of women's practical and strategic gender needs.

Moser (1989) recognised the transformative potential of gender planning in development policy and practice and developed a gender planning framework that distinguished between types of gender needs: the practical, and the strategic. Moser's (1989) definition of women's practical and strategic needs drew on Molyneux's (1985) conceptualisation of women's practical and strategic interests. Molyneux identified women's 'practical' interests as "those based on the satisfaction of needs arising from women's placement within the sexual division of labour" and women's 'strategic' interests as "those involving claims to transform social relations in order to enhance women's position and secure a more lasting re-positioning of women within the gender order and within society at large" (1998:232). Moser (1989), drawing on Molyneux's conceptual framework, distinguishes between practical gender needs and strategic gender needs. Practical needs are those that concern the immediate needs relating to livelihood such as water, food, health, shelter and paid employment. Strategic gender needs, like strategic gender interests, deal with the underlying structures of gender inequality and seek to transform the gender division of labour into a more fair and equal relationship. Whether using 'interests' or 'needs,' Moser argues that ultimately it is the distinction between the 'practical' and 'strategic' that is of critical importance in applying a gender perspective to development policy and practice (1989:1803).

The GAD approach recognises that women's interests are often different to men's and it is therefore necessary to tailor development policy and initiatives to women's specific gender interests and needs if they are to benefit. Walter, drawing on Stromquist (1992) and applying a gender perspective to analyse women's lack of access to education and literacy concluded that two important factors greatly affect the participation of women in education: "the gender division of labour and control of women's sexuality by

men” (2004:425). Patriarchal ideology views women’s reproductive roles (childbearing, childcare, health, nutrition, domestic chores) as their most important, yet these roles within patriarchy are undervalued in comparison to men’s gender defined roles in the productive sector. In addition, control of women’s sexuality reduces women’s power to determine the size of her family and the frequency of pregnancy, and often leads to women marrying at an early age (Walter, 2004:425). Fulfilling their traditional roles leaves women with little time to engage in activities outside of the domestic reproductive sphere, such as involvement in adult literacy programmes.

Much of the research into gender and education has focused on exploring the patterns of gender inequality and explaining why there are gender disparities. Driven by an emphasis on meeting the MDGs by 2015, there has tended to be a donor-driven focus on identifying ways to improve girl’s access to educational opportunities, specifically primary education. The focus on formal primary education for girls in the Third World by international donor agencies and governments over the last three decades has overshadowed the fact that millions of women have already missed out on formal primary education for economic, social, cultural or political reasons and therefore make up a significant proportion of the population who are unable to participate in society to their fullest potential. The continuing problems of inadequate access to formal educational opportunities, and poor retention rates in formal schooling leading to low completion rates, will mean that for the coming decades millions of children will become adult illiterates. The provision of non-formal adult education programmes therefore provides an important opportunity for those who have missed out on formal schooling to gain knowledge and skills that can help them to improve their lives.

Applying a gendered view towards the education of women has uncovered the underlying patriarchal ideology evident in commonly held views about the value of educating women. In patriarchal dominated societies, the education of women is generally undervalued in comparison to men as it is often viewed as a poor investment of family resources due to the departure of women to the husband’s village upon marriage and thereby taking their knowledge and skills with them (Walter, 2004:425). Where adult

education is available for women it often focuses on women's reproductive roles and takes an instrumentalist view, as introduced earlier in the chapter, which considers women can do for development, rather than what development can do for women. International policy concerning adult education has traditionally reflected this instrumental approach to women's contribution to development. As Rao and Robinson-Plant explain, "shaped by the assumption that educated women make better wives and mothers, with lower fertility rates and lower incidence of child mortality, such programmes invariably adopt an instrumental approach to women's empowerment" (2006:209).

The instrumental approach, while recognising women's contribution to development, ultimately fails to incorporate a gender perspective into programming and curriculum development (Rao & Robinson-Pant, 2006:209). Furthermore, the curriculum of literacy programmes has often served to reinforce women's traditional reproductive and productive gender roles under patriarchy, rather than promote greater participation of women in community roles and entrepreneurial activities that are generally encouraged of men (Walter, 2004:425). However, recent studies have shown that literacy programmes can also encourage what Nussbaum (2003) calls human 'capabilities'¹⁷ "by providing a space where individual's can encounter one another and pursue social and educational activities corresponding to their own activities" (Prins, 2008:10), thereby challenging the instrumental view of literacy as a means for increasing economic activity

In recent times, research undertaken in the field of adult literacy and women has followed the paradigm shift away from the WID approach towards a GAD approach which views women's illiteracy and lack of access to education as a result of unequal gender relations and women's subordination to men in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres (Robinson-Plant, 2001; Stromquist, 1997). This reflected the overall shift in development thinking which began to focus on the impact of development interventions on gender relations, and sought to better understand the varied and diverse

¹⁷ Human capabilities include: life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination, thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play, control over one's environment, political, and material (Nussbaum, 2003:353).

roles that women play. A focus on gender, and the acknowledgement of women's strategic gender needs and interests, is viewed as fundamental to improving women's literacy and access to education. Walter notes that in failing to adopt a gender perspective to research on adult literacy programmes there is a significant risk that the literacy programme's outcomes may be misleading by concluding that the programme was overall beneficial and empowering for participants, when in reality it may have only been empowering to men and even disempowering to women (2004:426). The shift in development policy thinking has also been reflected in the way in which research concerning women's education is carried out. The GAD approach, which values greater understanding of women's gendered roles "influenced not just which questions researchers decide to explore, but how they situate themselves within the research study and the methods they choose to adopt" (Robinson-Plant, 2004b:21).

Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter explored the traditional approaches to women and development and identified how the colonial policy of underdevelopment, influenced by attitudes which viewed Third World indigenous people as inferior and promoted patriarchal ideology, had grave consequences for the educational development of the colonies, and the development and education of Third World women in particular. The chapter showed how education has throughout history been used first to colonise and control populations in the Third World by limiting access to educational opportunities to the local elite, and then to rapidly educate and train a large workforce through mass schooling which assumed a 'one-size fits all' approach. Furthermore, education has been used to exert social, economic, and political control over women's gendered reproductive and productive roles, which in turn impacted on educational policies and initiatives targeting women. The chapter examined the influence of modernisation theory and liberal feminism, which assumed that progress through modernisation would trickle down to women and culminated in a set of policy approaches specifically targeting women that came to be known as the WID approach. The influence of the collective set of policy approaches under WID was shown to have influenced educational policies concerning women. This was particularly evident in 'efficiency' approach, which took an

instrumental view in considering what women could do for development, rather than an empowerment view that argues for what development can do for women.

The chapter then highlighted how the influence of Third World feminists such as DAWN and the introduction of concepts such as empowerment led to the paradigm shift away from the WID approach towards the GAD approach, influencing the changing attitudes towards women in development and consequently educational policies concerning women. The GAD approach criticised the instrumental approach to women's participation in development that was characteristic of the WID approach, and emphasised the importance of applying a gender perspective to analysing women's lack of opportunities in development and education. The GAD approach advocates for development policies and initiatives that are specifically targeted to not only women's practical gender needs and interests but more importantly women's strategic gender needs and interests, and thus seeks the transformation of societal structures that perpetuate gender inequality and oppression. The next chapter will examine the implications of these policy approaches and review the literature on adult literacy and women's empowerment to situate this thesis within a development context.

Chapter Three: Adult Literacy and Women's Empowerment

Introduction

Chapter three sets the stage for this research into adult literacy and women's empowerment by firstly examining the definition of adult literacy and the aims of adult literacy programmes. The discussion will then move on to examining research that has been undertaken in the field of women's literacy and highlight recent trends in the way literacy for women's empowerment has been conceptualised. As introduced in Chapter Two we saw a rise in efforts to bring about women's empowerment, a concept introduced by Third World feminists, which influenced the shift from WID to GAD and educational policies affecting women. A brief overview of critical approaches to the study of adult literacy, including the 'Real Literacies Approach', 'New Literacy Studies', and the 'Reflect' method which have influenced the current thinking around women's literacy and empowerment will then be provided. The chapter will highlight the importance of linking adult literacy programmes to those literacy activities which adults are already exposed to in their daily lives to ensure that programmes are meaningful to adult learners. The chapter will then discuss of two key concepts central to the literature on women's empowerment, and examine the ways in which empowerment has been conceptualized by focusing on three important empowerment frameworks presented by Rowlands (1995), Kabeer (1999) and Stromquist (1993) that are relevant to this thesis.

The Role of Adult Literacy in the Empowerment of Women

It is universally believed that formal schooling for children is essential to the development of a contemporary society. The same imperative, however, has not been applied to the need for basic education for adults who have missed out on formal schooling and lack basic literacy skills. Adult literacy has been defined as "a set of cognitive skills necessary to make meaning of print and communication...and used not only for efficient functioning in one's environment but also for individual and social transformation" (Stromquist, 2009:2). Studies in the area of adult literacy are fairly limited in number compared to those exploring children's education and formal

schooling, and even more limited are those studies that specifically explore women, adult literacy and empowerment. One reason for this is that assessing the impact of literacy and literacy programmes is a difficult process due to the irregular enrolment, attendance, and completion rates that tend to characterise informal adult education (Stromquist, 2009:2). Although often small-scale and usually lacking a control group or adequate baseline data qualitative studies in the area of adult literacy are important because they contribute insight into the participants lives and their views on literacy, and highlight lessons learned and contextual factors that can be applied to future program design.

While the literature available concerning women's literacy is underscored by a great hope for the contribution of adult literacy to improving the lives of women and reducing poverty there has been a lack of solid evidence demonstrating such positive impacts. Qualitative studies assessing participant empowerment have tended to focus on indirectly documenting and measuring feelings, perceptions and behaviours, and are often based on self-reports by participants with little baseline data collected (Stromquist, 2009:2). Such studies have found, however, that women's empowerment, most often in the form of an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem, is evident in the experiences shared by literacy program participants. Stromquist (1997), drawing on research carried out in Brazil, found that literacy programme participants felt they now had greater confidence in social activities, increased self-esteem, and enhanced awareness of their environment. Similarly, a study of literate women in Nigeria reported that women now had greater knowledge of their rights and had greater participation in family and community meetings and decision-making (Egbo, 2000). The most common type of empowerment experienced by women participating in adult literacy programmes has been found to be self-esteem and self-confidence, in other words empowerment at the individual or personal level. Whether this individual or personal empowerment experienced by participants is then carried through to an improvement in their social and political status is an area of much debate amongst those concerned with social transformation.

Scholarship undertaken in the field of adult literacy and women's empowerment has found that the attainment of literacy skills by people will not necessarily translate into greater social and political status in certain contexts (Longwe, 1998; Puchner, 2003:440). Analysing data from two studies undertaken in rural villages in the North and West of India to explore the relationship between female education and fertility, Kumar and Vlassof's (1997) findings that cultural beliefs and practices within communities severely limited the control that women have over the availability of contraception in the villages challenged the widely-held assumption that female education would automatically result in decreasing gender disparities, increasing use of contraceptives, and lead to social transformation.

The aim of most adult literacy programmes has been to encourage greater involvement of women in the social, economic and political spheres, but despite the presence of literacy programmes in communities it is often still difficult for women to access these programmes and to use the literacy skills they have obtained due to ideological resistance in communities towards women's acquisition and use of their new found literacy skills. As Puchner's study of women's literacy in rural Mali found, "the ideological forces within the communities studied would not allow women's literacy to benefit women" (2003:440). Other researchers suggest that as literacy is loaded with social and cultural meanings, the impact of literacy is determined by its social use (Street, 1984). Literacy can, therefore, be used as a powerful tool to subordinate as well as liberate women in the community depending on the interests of the dominant group controlling the access to and use of literacy (Puchner, 2003:441).

As research on women's literacy has continued to expand and diversify, the focus has shifted away from examining statistical correlations between health indicators and literacy rates, towards consideration of the relationship between literacy, gender and development and key issues such as culture, barriers, motivation and empowerment (Robinson-Plant, 2004a:1-2). There is a widely held assumption that education will automatically result in women's empowerment, however, this assumption is called into question by Jayaweera (1997) in a study which examined the relationship between

education and economic, social, and political empowerment in Asia. Jayaweera found that while excluding women from educational opportunities reinforced their disadvantage, education in itself was not enough to overcome the economic and social barriers perpetuating gender inequality.

There have also been recent developments in the way in which literacy for women's empowerment has been conceptualised (Stromquist, 2006a:140). Unlike research into other areas of educational practice, such as primary school education for girls, gender still receives scant attention in mainstream scholarship on adult literacy (Walter, 2004:424). Increasingly though, greater attention is being paid to understanding existing literacy practices and the ways in which non-formal adult literacy programmes can be more closely aligned with women's daily literacy practices, such as through their role in income-generating projects, to bring greater benefit to women's lives and that of their families and communities (Robinson-Plant, 2004b:26).

Walter's findings provide an important frame of reference for the present research in revealing that,

“gender roles and relations had overriding importance in explaining the women's participation in the literacy programme” and “an understanding of the gendered division of labour, women's multiple gender roles (reproductive, productive and community) and their practical and strategic gender needs became a powerful analytical tool in explaining their participation in the literacy programme” (Walter, 2004:424)

Such research has led to the development of more critical approaches to the study of adult literacy, and changes to the way research in this field is carried out and the methods that are applied.

Critical approaches to adult literacy have sought to uncover the various ways in which adult education has been used to maintain inequality, and to emphasise the value and importance of the multiple literacies which people use in their daily lives. In viewing literacy from a critical perspective, literacy is fundamentally a source of power to

challenge and transform social and political structures. The critical literacy approach emerged during the 1970s and was inspired by the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire (1970) who developed the philosophical foundation for the education of illiterate adults and heavily influenced the overall literacy debate (Bhattacharya, 2008:106; Rasool, 1999:9). Over the past three decades the scholarship with the critical literacy field has emphasised the value of locating literacy within the context of communities and the literacy needs of people in their everyday lives. The development of critical approaches to the study of adult literacy has been led by the New Literacy Studies (NLS) literature, the Real Literacies Approach (RLA), and the Reflect method (Prins, 2008; Robinson-Plant, 2004b; Rogers, 1999; Street, 1984). Each has provided a useful analysis of the contribution of adult literacy to peoples lives and identified areas in which adult literacy interventions can be enhanced, and these approaches will be briefly outlined next.

The NLS literature is underscored by a concern with how empowerment has been defined and whether there is a causal relationship between empowerment and development. Rather than viewing literacy acquisition as a 'technical fix', NLS seeks to analyse the power relations affecting and reflected in women's literacy interventions by "exploring how women 'take hold of' literacy within the classroom and their daily lives" (Robinson-Plant, 2004b:26). The NLS literature makes the useful distinction between the 'autonomous' model of literacy whereby literacy is viewed as a technical input contributing to cognitive development, and the 'ideological' model which views literacy as a continuum of orality and multiple literacies which we learn and draw upon at different points throughout our lives (Robinson-Plant, 2004b:26). The shift in thinking about literacy from an autonomous model to an ideological model is particularly relevant to research exploring the relationship between women's literacy and changing behaviours over time.

The RLA, on the other hand, is concerned with assisting people to develop their literacy skills to enhance their ability to carry out their daily literacy tasks more effectively. The RLA starts with the premise that every person, whatever their literacy level, is engaged in some sort of literacy activity and that these "relate to the cultural and

economic activity of the whole community, not to the level of skills of the individual adult” (Rogers, 1999:222). In this sense, if we understand that adults learn best from their daily lived experience as opposed to prescribed literacy programmes and the sole use of literacy primers, then daily literacy tasks will provide the most meaningful, empowering, and effective way for adults to gain literacy skills.

Finally, the Reflect method is a radical approach to literacy inspired by Paulo Freire’s teaching methodologies that outlined how adult literacy could contribute to the social transformation of oppressive power structures and institutions in society. The Reflect method’s starting point is social development and the identification and analysis of needs, and then moves on to how literacy can assist with that development. Thus, it differs from traditional literacy approaches which begin with literacy as a means of involving people more fully in development activities (McCaffery, et al., 2007:40).

An Empowerment Approach to Women, Development and Literacy

Empowerment is often held to be a solution to the world’s social problems, the answer to overpopulation, the destruction of the environment and the low social status of women. The concept of empowerment gained popularity and influence in development discourse during the 1980s as a result of important critiques of WID by Third World feminists of Western Feminism and the failure of traditional development approaches to address the underlying structures of oppression, & the gendered nature of inequality, exploitation, and poverty (Batliwala, 1994:9; Kabeer, 1995; Molyneux, 1998; Oxaal & Baden, 1997:4; Sen & Grown, 1986:15). The roots of the concept of empowerment can be found in the recognition that while meeting the practical needs of people was both necessary and important, meeting practical needs alone is insufficient in enabling women’s strategic needs to be achieved. Patel has identified these strategic needs as being “to abolish the sexual division of labour, end male control over women’s bodies and generally establish political and social equity for women” (1996:89).

The theory and practice most closely associated with the notion of empowerment is that of ‘Participatory development’, otherwise known as ‘development from below’

and 'grassroots' development (Overton, 1999:8). Participatory approaches developed around the 1950s as an alternative to the conventional Western, top-down, 'blueprint' model of development, which equated development with Western ideals of progress and modernisation. Imposed upon communities, the top-down approach had failed to achieve sustainable development outcomes. Advocates of the participatory approach argued that development projects based on the top-down economic growth-based model failed to include the main beneficiaries in the development process (Botchway, 2001:136), which advocates of the participatory approach viewed as essential to the empowerment of local communities and the sustainability of project outcomes. In the top-down model local communities along with their traditional knowledge were sidelined as 'non-experts' and relegated to the status of 'objects' of development rather than as subjects of their own development (Mohan, 2002:50). Participatory development on the other hand recognises the importance of a people-centred approach to development and positions women as capable agents of change. The approach prioritises greater decision-making by local communities, encourages greater local ownership of the initiative, and thus creates an enabling environment for empowerment.

In a similar vein, participatory non-formal education is an alternative to the traditional formal education approach that is characterised by a top-down teacher-student relationship. Rather, participatory non-formal education is characterised by a 'student-centred' learning approach that encourages interaction between students, and between students and teachers thereby reducing the power imbalance between the two through dialogue and interactive group activities. As the failure of the top-down conventional approach to development projects became increasingly apparent and criticism grew of its failures, attention turned towards the possibilities that a participatory grassroots approach held for empowering communities and achieving sustainable development.

Feminist contributors to the literature on women's empowerment conceptualise empowerment in different ways, though they share the common goal of social change that is aimed at improving the condition and position of women. The following section will focus on the way in which empowerment has been deconstructed by feminists in the

field of development by firstly exploring two important concepts central to the overall empowerment literature: power and process. The discussion will then move to an examination of three empowerment frameworks commonly cited in the literature on women's empowerment in development to situate this research within a development practice context.

Empowerment as Power and Process

The word 'power' in the term empowerment is central to any discussion concerning empowerment philosophy and approaches (Batliwala, 1994; Rowlands, 1995), and is at the core of development studies literature on empowerment. The many different ways in which power is conceived of and experienced by different people poses a problem to those attempting to conceptualise empowerment and design interventions. Therefore, understanding how power is manifested in society is essential to understanding what approach will be most effective in bringing about the empowerment of women. In the past frameworks used to conceptualise and understand power tended to focus on neutral aspects (Rowlands, 1995:101), and therefore failed to acknowledge that power is distributed unfairly along gender and class lines leading to oppression and inequality. Feminists have challenged the lack of analysis of different power dynamics by providing a gender analysis of the conventional definition of power ('power over') which showed that it is men who primarily exercise power over women (Rowlands, 1995:101).

Rowlands argues that power is generally understood in terms of 'power over', 'power to', 'power with' and 'power from within' (1995:102). As Oxaal and Baden demonstrate, each of these terms recognises a different way in which power operates (1997:1). In the case of 'power over', those in power seek to maintain power through instruments of domination which are often aggressive, discriminatory, and socially sanctioned. On the other hand, 'power to' refers to the power to make decisions and functions in a way that seeks to empower people to think creatively about issues in their lives and work to resolve them. 'Power with' is the collective power that people may

exercise when they join together to reach common goals. It is this understanding of power and collective identity that the feminist movement has sought to emphasise to build a strong women's movement and bring about social change, and has most in common with the concept of collective empowerment. Finally, the 'power within' can be most appropriately understood as a sense of self and the capability and capacity to not only understand how structures and institutions of power operate in their daily lives, but also the confidence to challenge and transform the structures that are responsible for the oppression, marginalisation and inequality that exist in society. The term 'power within' has most in common with the concept of personal empowerment.

For Batliwala, the manifestation of power is especially evident in the degree to which individuals are able to obtain and maintain access to resources, and she explains that those who are in a position of power, which from a gender analysis we understand to be primarily men, are able "to influence the distribution of material resources, knowledge, and the ideology that governs social relations in both public and private life" (1994:129). This influence facilitates greater access to resources and, perhaps most importantly, decision-making power. Similarly, Kabeer has argued that women will continue to be marginalised in the development process and disproportionately represented in poverty statistics if they are not empowered to take part in decision-making and the allocation of resources (1995:108). However, others have cautioned against the predominant belief that greater access to economic resources, which is generally focused on the individual rather than the collective, leads directly to increased power, arguing that power is determined by social relationships and greater access to economic resources may in fact increase the labour burden on women without a corresponding gain in power (Batliwala, 1994; Oxaal & Baden, 1997:10-14; Rowlands, 1995:104). Therefore, adequate attention needs to be paid to the social context within which women live if their situation is to truly be understood.

In situating literacy within the discourse on empowerment we understand literacy to be both a source of power and disempowerment. Literacy is a source of power in that it enables greater access to knowledge and opportunities, which in turn enable people to

access greater resources and make meaningful choices about decisions affecting their lives. Yet literacy can also be disempowering and this is clearly evident for example in situations where the poor and marginalised sections of society are prevented from accessing educational opportunities, including literacy education, that are freely accessed by the wealthy and elite. Similarly, literacy education delivered through formal schooling can be disempowering for certain groups of people for example women because formal schooling often provides “knowledge that reinforces rather than challenges the gendered nature of society” (Stromquist, 2006b:149). Thus rather than being a source of power for women to challenge and transform inequality within the social, economic and political structures which govern society, literacy education provides yet another avenue for women’s traditional gender roles to be reinforced. In contrast to formal education, non-formal education provides a space for adults to not only gain an education they have been denied in the formal schooling system, but also an opportunity to reflect on their experiences of disadvantage and therefore such programmes can provide an important enabling environment for women to challenge oppressive social, economic, and political structures and achieve equality with men.

Like power, process is an important characteristic of empowerment. Conventional definitions view empowerment as essentially “about bringing people who are outside the decision-making process into it” (Rowlands, 1995:102). In this context increased access to the formal institutions of social, political and economic decision-making is seen as an essential prerequisite to empowerment. Feminist theorists propose an alternative understanding of empowerment. In their view empowerment is the process through which one recognises their entitlement to decision-making power and overcomes the oppression they have internalised as a result of “negative social constructions” (Rowlands, 1995:103). Oxaal and Baden maintain that for true empowerment to take place the process cannot be done to women but rather women must undertake their own empowerment (1997:6). Therefore for activities to prove empowering they need to be flexible enough to allow women the freedom to develop the capacity to analyse their needs and situation without pre-defined notions of what empowerment is thought to be imposed upon them. ‘Process’ is essential to the notion of empowerment for feminists

who view empowerment as “both a process and the result of that process” (Batliwala, 1994:130). The contribution of feminism to empowerment is most evident in its analysis of the gendered impact of policies and social context, and in identifying gender as a significant dimension of poverty (Kabeer, 1995:108; Molyneux, 1998:242). Through the process of empowerment women are said to benefit from new avenues of knowledge that have previously been denied to them and which open up new opportunities to improve their lives and further assist them to make informed decisions (Batliwala, 1994:132).

Feminists concerned with the social transformation aspect of empowerment argue that the process of empowerment encompasses the challenging of existing power relations and transformation of those structures that are dominated by a patriarchal ideology (Batliwala, 1994; Kabeer, 1995; Stromquist, 2006b). As the world changes so too do power structures and spheres of influence and there is the possibility that those structures will seek to guarantee their continued power and influence through oppressive practices. Like empowerment, transformation is viewed as an ongoing process rather than an end goal to reach in the future (Oxaal & Baden, 1997:6). Furthermore, feminist theorists have argued that social transformation through empowerment should lead to new conceptions of power (Batliwala, 1994:134), which resist the traditional oppressive nature of patriarchy and instead construct a new philosophy that understands power in terms of participatory and democratic principles. The aim of this process is therefore to gain greater control over the power relations that have previously been denied to them so that they may in turn influence the decisions which affect their lives.

While feminist empowerment approaches seek to challenge the underlying patriarchal ideology that governs social, political and economic relationships, and therefore the traditional control that men exert over women, it is important to recognise that men are also liberated by this process (Batliwala, 1994; Oxaal & Baden, 1997). Where empowerment approaches specifically target women, in particular poor women, this has led to anxiety and confusion among poor men who see their position as no better than that of the women (Batliwala, 1994:130). In response to this concern, advocates of women’s empowerment have sought to demonstrate the benefits that the empowerment

of women has also had on the liberation of men. Two benefits in particular stand out. The first concerns the material liberation of men, whereby women's greater access to material benefits results in benefits to the family. The second benefit is the psychological improvement that men may manifest as a result of their release from the role of the oppressor and gender-stereotyping. This release allows men not only greater freedom to express themselves, but also to discover that sharing the traditional power and privileges that were determined by gender also enables the sharing of some of the traditional burden they have had to carry (Batliwala, 1994:131).

While the concept of empowerment has proven useful for analysing power dynamics concerns have been raised about its prolific use in development discourse. The early success of the empowerment approach subsequently led to its use as the new 'buzzword' and incorporation into mainstream development discourse and policy. Initially the concept of empowerment was envisaged in the collective sense and focused on women mobilising to join together and challenge power structures through their collective power (Oxaal & Baden, 1997:5). However, as the concept was increasingly included within the mainstream development agenda the focus shifted towards building individual capacity to reach development goals, particularly within the economic sphere. That said, the new found popularity of the term 'empowerment' has led to what some view as the dilution of the concept's original radical ideology which sought to bring about a fundamental shift in the oppressive social structures that perpetuate the inequality and exploitation of women (Batliwala, 1994; Cleaver, 1999; Kabeer, 1999).

Certain authors have also argued that the term empowerment has been too generously applied to development initiatives with little attempt to define what empowerment really means in different contexts, and to critically evaluate the successes and failures of 'empowerment' goals and initiatives (Cleaver, 1999; MacKenzie, 2009:199; Mosedale, 2003:3). Kabeer in turn has argued that the success of the instrumentalist approach to advocacy for women's empowerment came at a price whereby feminism lost some of its political edge (1999:436). Instead, empowerment is now widely used without adequate attention being paid to its definition and application.

Mackenzie has also argued that empowerment initiatives have been influenced by a neoliberal agenda that implicitly defines appropriate social behaviour through “ideas such as individualism, responsibility and economic order” (2009:199), instead of providing a transformative agenda that challenges gender-defined roles and behaviour.

Three commonly cited contributors to the field of women’s empowerment in development include Nalia Kabeer, Jo Rowlands and Nelly Stromquist. Their empowerment frameworks, shown in Table 1 below, will be briefly outlined next.

Table 1: Feminist Empowerment Frameworks

Feminist Empowerment Frameworks		
Rowlands (1995)	Kabeer (1999)	Stromquist (1993) and (2002)
<p>Personal – developing personal identity, capacity and belief in self.</p> <p>Relational – capacity and bargaining ability to determine the boundaries of personal relationships.</p> <p>Collective – fostering cooperation between individuals and their collective strength will be greater than their individual strength.</p>	<p>Resources – the material human and social resources that enhance the ability to exercise meaningful choice.</p> <p>Agency – the ability to define and determine one’s goals and make decisions.</p> <p>Achievements – those achievements that embody meaningful choice.</p>	<p>Cognitive – awareness and understanding of one’s self, of the ways in which one is subordinated and oppressed and the causes of this.</p> <p>Psychological – overcoming learned helplessness and increasing self-belief in the ability to solve problems.</p> <p>Political – having the ability to analyse the political environment and mobilise for change.</p> <p>Economic – participation in the productive sector for income.</p>

Personal, Close Relationships and Collective Empowerment

Rowland’s concept of empowerment recognises the social construction of abilities that are thought to be inherent in particular groups of people and understands empowerment as having three dimensions: the personal, close relationships and the collective (Rowlands, 1995:103), with each dimension of empowerment supporting the

other. In each of these dimensions the process of empowerment seeks to overcome the negative social constructions that serve to oppress people. Empowerment in the personal dimension is the process by which people overcome the oppression they have internalised by developing their personal identity, capacity, and belief in self. The process of empowerment in Rowland's second dimension, close relationships, seeks to strengthen the capacity and bargaining ability of individuals to determine the boundaries of the relationships they enter into. Finally, empowerment in the collective dimension aims to foster cooperation between individuals on the principle that through their combined strength their impact will be greater than what they would accomplish individually.

While Rowlands (1995) does not make reference to adult women's literacy specifically, to become literate is without a doubt a personal achievement. In drawing on Rowlands' ideas about the personal, for example, to gain literacy skills is about developing one's self, building one's capacity and increasing the belief one has in one's self. With regards to Rowland's ideas about the collective, for example, attendance at literacy classes may provide an opportunity for women to discuss issues collectively. As a group women may find they have a collective strength to deal with an issue, outside of literacy, such as domestic violence. There are numerous examples of women having come together to learn practical skills such as sewing to find that because of the relationships they have built in these groups, and the collective strength they have gained, they are able to address more complex issues.

Resources, Agency and Achievements

As conceptualised by Kabeer the empowerment of women is the "process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability" (1999:435). Those who have been denied the ability make strategic life choices are therefore considered to be disempowered. Strategic choices here refer to those choices that enable people to live their lives in a way that is meaningful to them (this includes choice about family planning and livelihood). Oxaal and Baden elaborate on this further, arguing that in the context of empowerment it is not only about access to

choice, but also the ability “to shape what choices are on offer” (1997:3). Thus Kabeer presents a multidimensional model of empowerment that understands power in terms of the ability to exercise strategic choice in three inter-related dimensions: resources, agency and achievements (1999:437), and is concerned with the inequalities people experience in making choices as opposed to differences in choice. In this analysis, ‘resources’ consist of the material, human and social resources that enhance the ability of a person to exercise meaningful choice. ‘Agency’ refers to “the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them” (power within) (Kabeer, 1999:438). However, Kabeer is quick to point out that agency, in relation to power, can exhibit both positive (power to) and negative influence (power over). Finally, ‘achievements’ as a measure of empowerment is understood as embodying meaningful choice.

Efforts to measure social change through resources, agency and achievements have encountered conceptual problems due to the indeterminate nature of human agency making measurement difficult (Kabeer, 1999:462), however, certain indicators have proved popular with those seeking to measure agency. The most common form of measurement for agency is that of ‘decision-making agency’ (Kabeer, 1999:446). Frequently used in efforts to conceptualise power, decision-making is measured in terms of the role of women in making a specific decisions about a variety of issues such as household purchases, children’s education, and work outside of the home. It is necessary to exercise caution when using evidence of decision-making as an indicator of empowerment as decisions concerning strategic life choices, or where women have previously been denied a choice, will tell us more about their empowerment than those decisions made within pre-existing gender-defined roles (Kabeer, 1999:447).

Structures are another important feature in Kabeer’s (1999) conceptualisation of empowerment due to their powerful influence in shaping individual interests in three ways. The first is their influence in shaping the resources, agency and achievements of individuals. Secondly, structures set the parameters within which individuals can exercise choice, allowing some individuals a voice and denying others. Thirdly, individual interests are shaped by structures which influence their preferences, social positioning

and beliefs (Kabeer, 1999:461). Interrelated systems of disadvantage in social structures and institutions work to reinforce gender-based prejudice, and this in turn results in poverty with a specific gender dimension or what has been termed the “feminisation of poverty” (Kabeer, 1995:108; Sen & Grown, 1986).

Again, similar to Rowlands (1995) Kabeer (1999) does not make explicit links to literacy, however if we look briefly at Kabeer’s arguments about resources, agency and achievements assumptions can be made. For example in drawing on Kabeer’s ideas about resources we can assume that literacy skills help women to live their lives in a way that is meaningful to them by enabling greater access to resources and opportunities which in turn impacts on women’s ability to exercise meaningful choice. Thus literacy is not only a resource for women but also a means for women to access additional resources, knowledge and information that they might otherwise not be able to, and which may encourage women to challenge the inequality and oppression they face. With regards to Kabeer’s ideas about agency or the ‘power within’ for example, literacy can help women to access knowledge and information which can enable them to feel more confident expressing their views, making informed decisions, and defining their goals. In terms of Kabeer’s ideas about achievements, we can assume that the process of learning literacy is itself a great achievement. For many adult women who have been deprived of an education in the past, and continue to face obstacles to their participation in adult literacy programmes, their decision to participate embodies meaningful choice, a key measure of empowerment in Kabeer’s framework. Thus Kabeer’s ideas remain important to understanding how women may become empowerment through literacy.

For both Rowlands (1995) and Kabeer (1999) empowerment is about the process through which one develops critical consciousness, similar to Freire’s (1970) concept of *conscientization*¹⁸ and they both view this as an important step towards understanding how structures of power operate to marginalise and oppress people, especially women.

¹⁸ Freire’s (1970) concept of *conscientization* refers to the way in which individuals develop critical consciousness and become ‘subjects’ in their own lives. In other words, it is the process by which individuals become aware of and understand their environment and the dominant socioeconomic structures, such as patriarchy, which can serve to oppress and marginalise them.

For an awakening of critical consciousness to take place the internalised assumptions about how everyday life should be conducted needs to be challenged by alternative possibilities for 'being and doing'. Kabeer defines critical consciousness as the "process by which people move from a position of unquestioning acceptance of the social order to a critical perspective on it" and she argues that as these internalised assumptions are challenged, "propositions of culture begin to lose their 'naturalised' character, revealing the underlying arbitrariness of the given social order" (1999:441). Critical consciousness is thus also dependent on alternatives being available at the discursive level, whereby people are able to envision alternatives and assess the choices before them. For women, conscientization involves the realisation that many of their problems result from gender-based discrimination in various patriarchal systems, which denies women the same opportunities as men and perpetuates inequality between men and women (Longwe, 1998:21).

Cognitive, Psychological, Political and Economic Empowerment

While recognising that consciousness-raising is an important aspect of empowerment Stromquist argues that "a full definition of empowerment must include cognitive, psychological, political, and economic components" (Stromquist, 1993:14). Each component is equally important though not sufficient on its own for women to achieve empowerment. In Stromquist's view, cognitive empowerment entails an understanding of one's self, the ways in which one is oppressed and subordinated, and the causes of this oppression and subordination. Psychological empowerment is concerned with overcoming aspects of 'learned helplessness' which has resulted from negative sex-role stereotypes which consider women to be the inferior and weaker sex, and increasing women's self-belief in their ability to meaningfully participate in solving the problems they face. Political empowerment involves an "ability to analyse the surrounding environment in political and social terms" and "the ability to organise and mobilise for social change" (Stromquist, 1993:15). Finally, the economic empowerment of women involves the participation of women in the productive sector whereby an income, no matter how small, may afford them some measure of financial independence. Stromquist

believes that educational settings can facilitate all four dimensions of women's empowerment if the design of the educational programmes explicitly seeks to achieve the objective of meeting each of those four dimensions (2002:23).

Stromquist is also explicit about what the process of empowerment entails in arguing that it requires both an individual awareness of political issues, and collective mobilisation that seeks social transformation (1993:15). In achieving lasting social change Stromquist believes that the process of empowerment should focus on adult women for two important reasons. Firstly, because throughout their lives women have experienced some level of subordination that they are totally aware of even if they don't use the term subordination. Secondly, to break the cycle of subordination and oppression by the dominant patriarchal structures and institutions the transformation of adult women, particularly low-income women, is critical because they play a significant role in educating the next generation (1993:14). Thus Stromquist views literacy skills as an important tool for enabling women to become empowered though cautions that literacy skills "must be accompanied by a process that is participatory and content that questions established gender relations, features that, unfortunately, do not characterise the great majority of literacy programs" (1993:16). Social transformation is also a key focus of Stromquist's empowerment framework and she views education as "an important tool for social transformation even if it is not purposefully utilised for that end" (2006b:158).

For the purpose of this thesis I explore the contribution of literacy programmes to enabling women to become empowered by analysing the experience of a group of rural women involved in an adult literacy programme against the concepts of women's empowerment outlined by Rowlands (1995), Kabeer (1999), and Stromquist (1993) outlined above. Moreover, an analysis of the women's reproductive, productive and community roles along with their practical and strategic gender needs will be used to frame findings on women's participation in the literacy programme in relation to empowerment. In analysing these aspects this research is interested in the way in which an adult literacy programme aimed at providing the skills necessary to enable women to better meet their basic or 'practical' needs may also provide a space for women to gather

and discuss concerns and share their experiences which may then enable them to meet their long term goals or 'strategic' needs. Thus, this thesis is concerned more with the social aspects of the adult literacy programme (empowerment, confidence building, group solidarity, community action) than the technical acquisition of literacy and reading and writing outcomes per se.

Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter began with a review of the literature available concerning adult literacy programmes, and women's empowerment in the context of adult literacy. The review highlighted the difficulties inherent in attempts to measure the impact of adult literacy programmes and women's empowerment, and the importance of qualitative studies in the area of adult literacy for future program design. The literature reviewed showed that the most common form of empowerment experienced by women participating in adult literacy programmes have been feelings of increased-confidence and self-esteem. However, research has also found that the literacy acquisition will not necessarily translate into greater social and political status due to traditional community practices which restrict or limit the control women have over resources and over their own bodies. There is a general consensus throughout the literature that education alone will not be enough to overcome the economic and social barriers perpetuating gender inequality, and this led to a discussion of the more recent critical approaches to literacy which view literacy as a source of power to challenge and transform oppressive social, economic, and political structures.

A discussion of the concepts of empowerment and participatory development were then introduced to highlight the changing nature of development from the traditional 'top-down' approach to a 'bottom-up' participatory approach, which emphasised the participation and empowerment of the intended beneficiaries of development. The chapter then moved to an analysis of the way in which empowerment has been conceptualised, focusing firstly on two important concepts relevant to any examination of empowerment: power and process. Finally, the chapter considered three important empowerment frameworks provided by Rowlands (1995), Kabeer (1999) and Stromquist

(1993) that will be used to analyse the findings from the current study and showed how each framework is relevant to the study of women's empowerment through literacy. Chapter Six and Seven will make reference to the frameworks presented by Rowlands, Kabeer and Stromquist in a discussion of the research findings. The following chapter will provide the contextual background to women's development in Timor Leste to highlight the challenges Timor Leste, and women in particular, have struggled to overcome throughout centuries of oppression and conflict. This chapter will provide the background to the current thesis inquiry.

Chapter Four: The Timor Leste Context and the Aileu Resource and Training Centre

Introduction

In Chapter One three research questions were stated and in unpacking the socio-economic and historical context of Timor Leste, and in considering critically this context in relation to the contemporary situation of rural women, the first research question **‘what has been the experience of women in education in Timor Leste’** will be answered. Understanding the context, particularly the historical context that deprived women of an education during the Portuguese colonial administration, and the nature of the conflict experienced by Timorese women during the Indonesian occupation, is fundamental to understanding women’s roles and how these have been transformed during and after conflict. It is in this context that we can see women’s needs and interests have been marginalised and women have been disempowered in many aspects of their life, especially in fundamental areas such as education, health and the economy. The first part of this chapter will provide an overview of the socio-economic context of Timor Leste, important to understanding the nature of women’s gendered roles and the current development challenges they face.

The chapter then moves on to discuss the historical context of Timor Leste from the pre-Portuguese period through to Independence. The chapter will show that the low level of development and disadvantage experienced by rural women in social, economic, and political life can be traced back to the historical conditions that shaped the development of Timor Leste as a whole. The historical overview will cover the legacy of colonialism, underdevelopment, and conflict that impacted on the development of women in Timor Leste and had profound consequences for the level of development Timor Leste achieved independence with. The chapter will then discuss the role of education during the Portuguese colonial rule, Indonesian occupation and post-conflict reconstruction and development, and the importance of non-formal literacy programmes during these periods to the development process and women’s empowerment. The chapter concludes by examining the role and significance of the Aileu Resource and Training Centre

(ARTC) in delivering non-formal adult literacy training to rural communities in the district of Aileu.

Timor Leste Socio-Economic Context

The nation of Timor Leste is located on the eastern half of the island of Timor in the Malay-Archipelago and is approximately 300 miles north of Darwin, Australia. To the West it borders the Indonesian administered West Timor. Its history centres around 450 years of Portuguese administration, 25 years of illegal occupation by Indonesia, and three years of United Nations administration. A newly independent nation, it has a land area size of nearly 15,000 square kilometres and is divided into 13 administrative districts (Government of Timor Leste, 2011), including the enclave of Oecussi located in the western half of the island, and two islands: Jaco and Atauro. The climate is tropical, warm, and humid and until recently had been characterised by distinct wet and dry seasons.

Timor Leste has a high population growth rate at 3.2% (Government of Timor Leste, 2004), and a young population with over 40% under the age of 15 years (UNDP, 2009:25). It is expected that Timor Leste's population growth rate will reach 2.5 percent per annum over 2010-2030, which will result in a total population increase from 1.1 million in 2010 to approximately 1.8 million in 2030 (Government of Timor Leste, 2010:12). The population is made up of a number of distinct ethnic groups, with the majority being of Malayo-Polynesian and Melanesian-Papuan descent. The largest ethnic group are the Tetum. Contrary to West Timor and nearby islands that make up the Indonesian archipelago, Timor Leste was not heavily influenced by Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam (Hill, 2002:1). Instead much of the population follows the Catholic faith due to almost 500 years under Portuguese rule where Catholicism was the dominant religion, and in some areas traditional animistic beliefs are still practiced. Timor Leste is linguistically diverse with 33 indigenous languages, two official languages: Tetum and Portuguese, and two working languages: English and Bahasa Indonesia.

As a young independent nation Timor Leste has achieved much over the last decade due to the strong determination of its people and the support of the international community. However, challenges remain. Timor Leste's development challenges include a high incidence of poverty with 49.9% of the population living below the poverty line¹⁹, urban-rural disparities, lack of private sector growth, a shortage of skilled human resources, and fragile institutions. With a high population growth rate, and low levels of education in Timor Leste, employment opportunities are limited for the unskilled and low-skilled outside of the rural agricultural sector, which itself has limited absorptive capacity. While many have benefitted from the expansion of health and education services these have tended to be of better access and quality in the urban centres while rural areas lag behind and face severe disadvantage. The expansion of services has not necessarily led to an increase in labour market opportunities either (Soux, Gairdner, & Marstein, 2007:61). Expectations of improved living conditions and employment opportunities associated with achieving independence have not been fulfilled (Lundahl & Sjolholm, 2009:90), leading to discontent amongst the population and outbreaks of conflict at times. There is widespread poverty in both rural and urban areas and diseases such as dengue fever and malaria are prevalent amongst the population.

The traditional economy of Timor Leste is based largely around rural subsistence agriculture with the majority of the rural population living close to the poverty line. Historically Timor Leste has tended to rely on subsistence methods in the rural agricultural sector which employs approximately 80% of the population in Timor Leste (UNDP, 2009:20). There are few income earning opportunities outside of the agricultural sector. Cash-crops, including coffee, and small businesses such as kiosks selling small goods provide some households in rural areas with a source of income, although this tends to be unpredictable and irregular. The agriculture sector contributes approximately 30% of the country's non-oil Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (UNDP, 2009:20), which indicates a low level of productivity considering the majority of the population is participating in the agriculture sector. The findings of the second Timor Leste

¹⁹ Basic needs poverty line set at \$ 0.88 per capita per day (Timor-Leste Directorate of National Statistics, 2007)

Participatory Poverty Assessment indicated that low agricultural productivity was due to limited access to local markets and financial services, poor soil quality, low agricultural technology, frequent crop losses, low price of produce, and the difficulty farmers face in trying to sell their produce (UNDP, 2009).

Timor Leste's low agricultural productivity has also resulted in a dependency on imported food and a high level of food insecurity, particularly during the months of November to February (UNDP, 2006:2). With the arrival of the international community in 1999, Dili, the capital city, became the centre point for activity related to the reconstruction effort with reports that 80% of these economic benefits were focused in Dili (Carnahan, Gilmore, & Rahman, 2005:28). Lundahl and Sjöholm note that Timor Leste has also developed a dual economy due to the presence of a large aid-driven expatriate workforce in the urban areas, who have a much greater purchasing power than the indigenous population residing in the rural areas (2009:100). It is not surprising then that the rural areas, particularly those located in the centre of the country, tend to be disproportionately represented in poverty statistics with over three-quarters of the poor in Timor Leste living in rural areas, and one-quarter living in urban areas (World Bank & Government of Timor Leste, 2008:10).

The World Bank and the Government of Timor Leste (2008) report that two-thirds of the poor in Timor Leste reside in the central region of the country, and as the central region is inhabited by 56% of the population of Timor Leste. Poverty alleviation efforts, therefore, need to pay particular attention to the rural areas, and focus on the central region where the majority of people experiencing poverty in Timor Leste are located. As will be shown later in the chapter, rural women have been doubly disadvantaged by both geographic and gender disparities in key human development indicators and much needs to be done to improve their standard of living and the opportunities that are available to them. The field research for this thesis was carried out in the District of Aileu, located in a central region of Timor Leste, to explore how non-formal adult literacy programmes are responding to rural women's needs and interests,

along with their experiences of empowerment, in this region where rural women experience a high incidence of poverty.

Due to historical preconditions Timor Leste achieved independence lacking a modern industrial sector and aside from the government bureaucracy very few opportunities exist in paid employment for those who have skills (Lundahl & Sjöholm, 2009:95). The UNDP reports that the labour force participation rate is around 64% with unemployment at a rate of 7%, and an estimated 10% of the workforce in paid employment (2009). As the majority of skilled workers in Timor Leste have found employment within the public sector this has affected the ability of the private sector to attract skilled people. In turn, this has created a problem where the private sector must compete with the public sector to attract skilled workers. The result has been lower private production levels and limited job creation outside of the agricultural sector (Lundahl & Sjöholm, 2009:101). In addition to the agriculture sector Timor Leste has vast oil and gas resources. Oil and gas income for Timor Leste increased from approximately \$141 million in 2004 to approximately \$2,280 million in 2008. Timor Leste's 2010 non-oil Gross National Product (GNP) is approximately \$700 per capita and oil GNP is approximately \$1,800 (Government of Timor Leste, 2010). However, while the oil sector has brought in revenue it has thus far failed to create jobs for the many unemployed adults, especially the rural population and women in particular.

The Role of Women in Timor Leste Society

Women's Traditional Roles

Historically, women in Timor Leste have fulfilled leadership roles such as *feto ferik*, as female chiefs were known, and fought as warriors alongside the men against other tribes and the Portuguese, Japanese and Indonesian occupiers (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:19). However, the traditional laws²⁰, customary beliefs, and practices which underpin daily life in Timor Leste reflect a strong patriarchal and patrilineal system characterised by gender inequality that negatively affects women in terms of their

²⁰ Traditional law or custom known as *adat* does not generally favour women's rights or power. For example, *adat* does not allow women to inherit land (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:22).

participation in decision-making, access to land, allocation of labour, employment and income, and access to education (Narciso & Henriques, 2010:53).

Women in Timor Leste have traditionally been responsible for domestic activities related to reproductive work and unpaid productive work as a result of gender-defined norms relating to their culture and customs. Traditional gender roles which are enforced from a young age dictate that men are the leaders and decision-makers in their families and communities, and that women should support their husbands and families as obedient wives and mothers (Narciso & Henriques, 2010:54). The most important tasks for which women assume responsibility revolve around child bearing, caring for the family's daily food needs, caring for the house, collecting water, caring for the sick and elderly, and in rural areas working in the field (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:23). Men are responsible for preparing and ploughing the fields, looking after the larger animals, and assisting in the rice fields. The majority of the population, and therefore women, live in rural areas where the sexual division of labour requires that women undertake the heavy 'triple burden' (Moser, 1989) of ensuring the domestic needs of the family are met (reproductive role), as well as working in the fields (productive role), and undertaking a ceremonial role which includes performing ritual dances and welcoming guests (community role) (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:23).

Marriage and Family

Marriage is an important aspect of kinship relationships and is a means to ensure that strategic alliances between families and communities are maintained. Traditionally marriages have been arranged by families and women are married at a young age, though this tradition is starting to change particularly in the urban centres. The tradition surrounding marriage has important consequences for the way in which a girl or woman's education is viewed. The tradition of *barlake* is common amongst both urban and rural populations. *Barlake* is the bride price paid by the groom, which consists of 'masculine' gifts such as money, livestock (horses, buffalo or goats), and jewellery. The bride's family in turn provides to the grooms family 'feminine' gifts such as *tais* (traditionally woven cloth), livestock (pigs and chickens), rice and woven baskets (Cristalis & Scott,

2005:20). Because the husband's family has paid a bride price, women are at times thought of as a piece of property belonging to the husband's family and this can have a negative impact on women's participation in decision-making in the family, and control over her own body in terms of family planning. In addition, as women are expected to leave their ancestral village upon marriage and move to their husbands village, some argue that there is little point in educating girls as the knowledge and skills they learn will not stay within the community (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:20). However, this view appears to be slowly starting to change in the rural areas as men and communities realise the benefits that educating women can have on the health and education of present and future generations. Changes to this view are also being supported through policy development with an emphasis on women's rights and gender equality. This will now be discussed in more detail.

Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Timor Leste has made some progress with new laws and practices seeking greater equality and freedom from discrimination for women. Gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of East Timor, which supports freedom from sex-based discrimination, and since independence Timor Leste has made significant progress towards women's rights and equality. On 16 April 2003, the Government of Timor Leste ratified CEDAW and the Optional Protocol without reservation. Also significant has been the increase in representation of women in Parliament in Timor Leste. Of the 65 seats in the 2007 Parliamentary elections, women gained 19 seats (29.2%), which currently ranks Timor Leste 25 out of a total 187 countries²¹.

More recently, new legislation to combat the high rate of domestic violence in Timor Leste was passed on 3 May 2010 by the National Parliament. Domestic violence is now classified as a public crime punishable by law, and people other than the victim now have the power to report acts of domestic violence to the police. These have been

²¹ See www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm for further statistics contained in the women in parliament index.

important milestones in Timor Leste's progress towards protecting the rights of women and improving gender equality.

Yet the focus of development initiatives in Dili and other large urban areas has resulted in the neglect and underdevelopment of rural areas, and further marginalised rural women in particular from the development process as they continue to live in extreme poverty with limited access to education, health care, and opportunities for employment (Allden, 2007:17). Allden argues that

“the promising outputs for women's participation in political decision-making have not trickled down to the local rural levels, leaving many women disempowered and with few opportunities to use their constitutionally guaranteed rights” (2007:17).

Statistics also show that rural women in Timor Leste appear to be doubly disadvantaged by both geographic and gender disparities in key human development indicators. Progress on the ground is slow and the reality is that rural women and girls continue to be represented by lower human development indicators such as a high levels of illiteracy, a higher level of poverty and fewer opportunities compared to their male counterparts (UNDP, 2006). The 2009 MDG Report for Timor Leste highlights the following challenges currently facing rural women in Timor Leste: the majority of women in rural areas are illiterate; women's contribution to the labour market has been relatively low at less than 40% between 2001-2007 (UNDP, 2009:34); women lack access to quality health facilities, and only 29% of births are attended by skilled health workers in rural areas compared to 66% in urban areas (UNDP, 2009:41). The historical conditions that led to rural women's underdevelopment and low human development indicators outlined above will be discussed next.

Timor Leste Historical Context

Pre-Portuguese context

Pre-colonial Timor Leste was divided into many independent kingdoms called *rai* that were ruled by local kings or chiefs traditionally known as the *liurai*. The *liurai* were a land-owning class sharing commonalities with feudal lords. While the *liurai* had to be of royal heritage and the title was usually hereditary (Hill, 2002:2), the village elders were responsible for choosing the next *liurai*. *Rai* were divided up into smaller administrative settlements called *sucos* that consist of villages called *kuna*. Under the *liurais* were the *datos* (princes) who had authority over the *sucos*. As *kunas* tended to be spread out across the mountains and kinship ties, which were cemented by marriage, were especially important for a community's survival and as a way of securing their territory (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:18). Several *kunas* would often form a hamlet, otherwise known as an *aldeia*, and within these settlements life revolved around the *uma lulik*. The *uma lulik* is the community's sacred house, often one of the oldest dwellings, and in which the community's sacred objects were stored in. The traditional social structure emphasises kinship, hierarchy and unity (Nicolai, 2004:35). Discussion and consensus characterised traditional decision-making processes, though those with lesser power tended to agree with those who wielded more power (Hohe, 2002). More often than not it was the men that wielded more power and authority as opposed to women due to the patriarchal structure that underpinned traditional Timorese society.

Portuguese Rule 1500s - 1974

Before the Portuguese arrived in the region Timor was well known for its sandalwood and its rulers had traded with merchants from China, Gujerati and traders from the Arab region from around the 7th century (Hill, 2002:2). The Portuguese presence on the island dates back to 1511 when they captured the port of Malacca and began to make annual visits to the island of Timor to extract its highly prized sandalwood to trade. The Dutch and Portuguese fought each other for control of the sandalwood trade and after

a number of campaigns the Dutch and Portuguese signed a treaty in 1859 which gave the Dutch the western half of the island and Portugal the eastern half, though their spheres of influence did not reach far outside of Dili (capital of East Timor) and Kaupang (capital of West Timor) (Hill, 2002:5; Nicolai, 2004:36). This division had important consequences for the development of Timor Leste as culturally distinct from West Timor, which shares a culture similar to Indonesia, and Timor Leste's independence movement.

Portuguese colonialism was based on feudalism and in Timor Leste they did not impose direct rule but rather favoured gaining support from traditional leaders of the *rais*, *sucos*, and *kunas* along with divide and conquer methods that played one side off against the other (Nicolai, 2004). The majority of the population was, as it still is today, largely rural and survived through subsistence agriculture. The Portuguese period of colonial rule in Timor Leste was characterised by underdevelopment, both in terms of physical infrastructure and human capital. Women's freedom in particular was suppressed under Portuguese rule as a result of the 'social values' spread by the Portuguese Catholic missionaries which emphasised women's role as mother and as subservient to men, and by the end of colonial rule women rarely worked outside of the home (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:23-24).

Unlike other more industrialised colonial powers Portugal lacked the financial means to fund their colonial expansion by paying the local population wage labour to produce a large surplus, and thus resorted to the forced labour of Timorese to produce coffee, rubber and copra (Hill, 2002:7; Nicolai, 2004:42). Portuguese control over the economy led to the 'great rebellion' of 1910-1912, the first significant resistance against Portuguese rule (Hill, 2002:44). During World War II, Portugal declared neutrality and withdrew from the island of Timor when it was invaded and occupied by the Japanese from 1942-1945. The Japanese occupation resulted in the deaths of an estimated 60,000 people in addition to causing widespread starvation amongst the population (Nicolai, 2004:28). Following the war, the western half of the island of Timor that had formerly been controlled by the Dutch became part of the newly independent Indonesia. However, while the Portuguese returned to claim the eastern half of the island this attempt at

reclaiming authority over the island and East Timorese people was not to go unchallenged, and the second significant rebellion against Portuguese rule took place in Viqueque in 1959 which some view as a landmark occasion in the development of Timor Leste's independence movement (Hill, 2002:50).

The Carnation Revolution and Civil War 1974 -1975

The 'Carnation Revolution' in Portugal during 1974 led to the overthrow of the Cateano Government in Lisbon. As news of the coup reached East Timor, as it was then known, a national liberation movement sprang up and local political associations began to emerge. The role of women in the national liberation movement was of central and vital importance in mobilising the population to participate (Franks, 1996:157). Less than a month after the coup in Lisbon, and inspired by the African liberation movements, the *Associação Social Democrata de Timor* (Social Democratic Association of Timor) or ASDT was formed, and within a few months had evolved into the *Frente Revolucionaria de Timor Leste Independente* (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor), otherwise known as FRETILIN. Two other significant parties also sprung up: UDT and APODETI. The União Democrática Timorese (Timorese Democratic Union, otherwise known as UDT) was a pro-Portuguese party which sought independence while retaining close ties to Portugal, and the Associação Popular Democrática Timorese (Popular Democratic Association, otherwise known as APODETI) which sought integration with Indonesia (Nicolai, 2004:36).

Conflict between FRETILIN and UDT resulted in a coup led by UDT in August 1975, a move immediately countered by FRETILIN. The conflict caused the Portuguese colonial administration to flee to the island of Atauro off the coast of Dili, and resulted in the deaths of an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 people (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:28; Franks, 1996). FRETILIN was able to take control of the government administration and declared independence for East Timor on 18 November 1975. In the brief aftermath of the civil war Rosa Muki Bonaparte, one of the three female members of FRETILIN's central committee, formed the women's front of FRETILIN known as the Organizacao Popular

da Mulher Timorese (Popular Organisation of East Timorese Women, otherwise known as OPMT), the first indigenous women's organisation (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:28). The aim of OPMT was to promote women's emancipation and enable women to participate fully in the revolution and transition to independence. FRETILIN's control of the government was short lived however.

Indonesian Occupation 1975-1999

On 7 December 1975, just 10 days after FRETILIN unilaterally declared independence Indonesia launched an invasion by sea and air which was characterised by indiscriminate killings and "a policy of rape, torture, disappearings, and looting" (Franks, 1996:159). An estimated 200,000 East Timorese died as a result of war and famine, out of which 60,000 are reported to have been killed in the first few months of occupation (Nicolai, 2004:36-37). The East Timorese resistance led by FRETILIN pursued a guerrilla war against the occupying Indonesian army for the duration of the occupation, during which "women made up more than 60% of the clandestine movement" (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:39).

The occupation had a significant effect on the gendered roles of women in East Timor. In the initial period following the invasion the Indonesian military – armed with a list of the names of radical women – killed many of OPMT's leaders and members, which included the wives and family members of FRETILIN leaders (Cristalis & Scott, 2005). Much of the population of the coastal areas, of which a large proportion were women and children, fled inland to the mountains where they found shelter with family members or built temporary settlements. While living in the mountains women's roles became more fluid due to the changing and challenging circumstances of the conflict situation. Many took up arms alongside the men and "carried out a broad range of clandestine political and armed resistance activities" (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:30). Women were also primarily responsible for caring for their family and their community's daily needs. In addition, women provided an important lifeline to the resistance through their

assistance with communicating messages and bringing food, clothing and medicine to the guerrilla fighters.

Violence against women was rampant during the Indonesian occupation. For their support women often suffered physical and sexual harassment and assault from the Indonesian forces. Rural women, particularly those who were young and unmarried, were also extremely vulnerable to abduction, forced sexual slavery and 'marriage' by the Indonesian forces and this forced many East Timorese to marry their daughters off at a young age to avoid such a fate (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:37-38). Many women were also subjected to forced sterilisation by the Indonesians under the banner of a 'national birth control policy', and this discouraged East Timorese women from attending medical clinics when they had health problems (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:38). As a result of the Indonesian occupation women were often required to step outside of their traditional gender roles. Women's roles were thus redefined and transformed as more and more men were either killed or left their homes and families to join the armed resistance movement against the Indonesian occupation and women were left to take care of family and community needs.

Throughout the 1980s the plight of the East Timorese remained low on the international community's radar. The massacre that took place at the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili in 1991 again propelled Timor Leste into the international spotlight in large part due to the international journalists that were present at the time and managed to film the Indonesian army killing the East Timorese gathered at the cemetery, broadcasting it around the world. In 1996, Timor Leste was again in the spotlight as the Bishop of Dili Carlos Belo and leader of the Timor Leste diaspora Jose Ramos Horta received the Nobel Peace Prize for their work. The women's movement too was growing, encouraged and supported by interactions between East Timorese students studying in Indonesia and the women's movement there (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:46).

The Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995 further motivated and mobilised East Timorese women activists around the conference themes of gender

equality and empowerment, though this was not always welcomed by the leadership of the resistance who thought that the right to self-determination should come before gender considerations (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:46). Even so, civil society organisations focused on improving the situation of women in East Timorese society sprung up in the second half of the 1990s, the most well known of which were the Forum Komunikasi Untuk Perempuan Lorose (FOKUPERS – East Timorese Women’s Communications Forum), and the Grupo Feto Foinsae Timor Lorosae (GFFTL – East Timor Students Women’s Group).

Fall of Suharto and the 1999 Referendum

The Asian Financial Crisis in 1997/1998 led to the collapse of the Indonesian economy and the resignation of President Suharto. This provided the impetus for protests by Indonesians expressing political and social discontent with the Government’s policies, and helped to boost the morale of the East Timorese activists. In the midst of the crisis, Vice-President Dr. B.J. Habibie replaced President Suharto, and as a result of Indonesia’s reliance on economic aid and mounting international pressure Indonesia’s policy towards Timor Leste began to shift. Indonesia agreed to a multilaterally administered referendum that proposed two options for the future of Timor Leste. The first option presented to the East Timorese was to remain part of Indonesia but as an autonomous province. The second option proposed full independence. The referendum²² was administered by the UN with the assistance of the Portuguese and Indonesian Governments. The referendum took place on 30 August 1999 with over 78% of East Timorese voting in favour of independence from Indonesia (Nicolai, 2004:38). No one was prepared for the violence that followed the outcome of the referendum.

In the days and weeks following the referendum militias formed by pro-autonomy factions and the Indonesian military terrorised the population killing an estimated 1,400 people and forcibly displacing an estimated 250,000 East Timorese, with many forced across the border into West Timor (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:75; Nicolai, 2004:28-29). In

²² Also commonly referred to as the ‘Popular Consultation’ (Nicolai, 2004:19).

addition to the large-scale destruction of property, widespread looting, killings, and rape were common in weeks that followed.

INTERFET, UNTAET and Post-Conflict Reconstruction 1999-2002

On 20 September 1999, the first INTERFET (the International Force for East Timor) troops landed in Timor Leste to begin stabilising the country after the outbreak of violence against the population by the militias. INTERFET was mandated by the UN Security Council (Resolution 1264 on 15 September 1999) to “take all necessary measures to restore peace and security” (Cristalis, 1999:237). Portugal gave up its sovereignty claim over Timor Leste and on 25 October 1999 the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1272. The Resolution established the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), which gave the UN sovereign control over a country for the first time in its history, and the mandate to undertake the enormous task of rebuilding the country and its institutions and structures, including its all but destroyed education system.

The UN missions in Timor Leste, provided a mechanism for transferring international norms, particularly around human rights and gender, to the East Timorese context. Many programmes provided by UNIFEM, UNICEF and UNDP sought to promote women’s rights, equality and empowerment (Norad, 2007:60). UNTAET were not without criticism however. UNTAET has been criticised for failing to recognise the skills and aspirations of many East Timorese people during the administration period to fully participate in all decisions concerning their country and the road to independence (Hill, 2002:xvii). By not fully utilising the participation of the East Timorese people, UNTAET at times lacked legitimacy and a comprehensive cultural understanding of the context within which it was operating. This was evident in structures it put in place such as the establishment of a Gender Affairs Unit (GAU), which Charlesworth & Wood argue struggled with how to “tackle culturally specific social constructions of gender and identify problems ensuring from these constructions” (2002:347).

Independence 2002

After three years of UNTAET administration Timor Leste finally achieved independence on 20 May 2002. Since then, Timor Leste has experienced several periods of civil unrest and outbreaks of violence. In April 2006 protests by former soldiers in Dili sparked violence between former soldiers and the military resulting in the destruction of buildings, thousands of residents having to flee their homes, and the resignation of Prime Minister Alkatiri. The UN peacekeeping force (UNTAET), along with the majority of its administration staff (the United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor, UNMISSET) had pulled out of Timor Leste in May 2005, with the remaining administrative and police staff (United Nations Office in Timor Leste, UNOTIL) to leave in August 2006. Due to the outbreak of violence their deadline was extended under Resolution 1704 on 25 August 2006, which led to the establishment of the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor Leste (UNMIT). UNMIT continues to support the government of Timor Leste to maintain stability in the country.

As has been shown in Timor Leste's historical context outlined above, women's development under successive waves of occupation by Portugal, Japan, and Indonesia had serious consequences for women's rights and the opportunities available to them to improve their standard of living. Many women suffered terrible atrocities during 25 years of occupation by Indonesia, yet exhibited incredible courage in the face of oppression and hardship to play an important role in the resistance movement and take on leadership roles within their families and communities. The transformation of women's traditional gendered roles in response to the conflict, and later the arrival of the international community, opened up opportunities previously denied to women. To take full advantage of many of the opportunities that opened up following the arrival of the international community women would require at least a basic level of education and skills, yet women in Timor Leste have for centuries suffered severe disadvantage in accessing and participating in educational opportunities. Women's education in Timor Leste during the abovementioned historical periods will now be discussed to show how this has impacted on women's ability to access opportunities in Timor Leste today.

Women and Education in Timor Leste

Women and Education During the Portuguese Colonial Administration

The Portuguese approach to the development and education of the indigenous people of Timor Leste was typical of other colonial administrations at the time in viewing indigenous populations as inferior, and leaving a legacy of underdevelopment and inequality as shown in Chapter Two. With the arrival of the Portuguese came the missionaries who brought with them the Roman Catholic faith. While the Church served as another means of control over the population, Nicolai points out that Christianity and indigenous animist beliefs tended to co-exist together in relative peace (Nicolai, 2004:36). The Portuguese colonial administration and the Roman Catholic Church were quick to recognise the value of religious education as a means of converting local elites to Christianity and creating a submissive traditional ruling class aligned with the Portuguese authority by teaching the children of the *liurai* Portuguese history, language and culture (Millo & Barnett, 2004:725; Nicolai, 2004:42). It also served as a means to spread ‘social values’ promoted by the Church amongst the population. However, the Western-style educational policies favoured by the Portuguese not only created an elite but also caused their dissatisfaction with colonial rule (Hill, 2002:1; Nicolai, 2004:30). Missionary schools prohibited the use of languages other than Portuguese, and Timorese history, culture and geography along with information about its neighbours in Asia were excluded from the curriculum (Millo & Barnett, 2004:725). As Portuguese language instruction was confined to the elite, the Church increasingly began to use Tetum Praca, otherwise known as ‘market Tetum’, to deliver sermons to the wider-population (Millo & Barnett, 2004:725), and in time Tetum became the lingua franca of Timor Leste.

During the colonial period, the Portuguese administration was centred in the capital, Dili, and so too were the educational institutions that were limited to the elite, and thus the majority of the population based in the rural areas remained illiterate. The first school for the Timorese elite was set up during the Governorship of Afonso de Castro (1859-1863) to provide basic primary education with the ultimate aim of ‘civilising’ the Timorese rulers and creating a class loyal to the Portuguese (Hill, 2002:9; Millo &

Barnett, 2004). In 1902, the Canossian Sisters of Charity opened a boarding school for girls with the objective of preparing girls for their domestic duties as wives, mothers and homemaker through the teaching of skills such as sewing and cleaning (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:24). Cristalis & Scott estimate that as few as 50 women received an education during this period, and these women tended to be the daughters of the elite whose parents had money or government and church connections; the only opportunity for girls who did not belong to the elite to receive an education was by becoming a nun (2005:25).

In the 1950s both the church and the colonial administration pursued the expansion of the education system in Timor Leste. The newly expanded education system was characterised by high student drop-out rates, particularly in rural schools, and the quality was such that those students who did graduate primary basic education faced great difficulty in passing the entry exams into secondary education (Hill, 2002:37). It wasn't until 1965 that secondary schools offering four years of secondary education began in Dili and opened the way for East Timorese students to pursue tertiary level qualifications in Portugal. The East Timorese founders of FRETILIN were the first generation to benefit from efforts to expand the education system in Timor Leste during the 1960s and the increase in scholarships offered to the local elite to study in Portugal in the early 1970s (Hill, 2002:68; Millo & Barnett, 2004:726). The three female members of FRETILIN's central committee: Rosa Bonaparte, Maria do Ceu and Guilhermina Araujo were part of this student contingent that had studied overseas and then returned with radical political and feminist ideas which they applied to the situation in Timor Leste (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:28).

Drawing on their exposure to the ideas of Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire while studying in Lisbon, FRETILIN's leaders began an anti-illiteracy campaign directed at decolonising the learning process (Hill, 2002), and increasing adult literacy in 1975 to help prepare and mobilise the rural population for participating in the transition to independence. OPMT was instrumental in running the literacy campaigns in the districts. Of great significance to this effort was the decision to use the common lingua franca Tetum, rather than Portuguese which was the national language, as the language of

instruction. The Sahe Liberation Institute, formed by Vincente Sahe a science teacher from Bucoli on his return from studying in Lisbon in 1974, helped to implement FRETILIN's literacy projects (Hill, 2002:xiii).

Women and Education During the Indonesian Occupation

At the onset of Indonesian occupation, Timor Leste is reported to have had the highest rates of illiteracy and poverty of all Indonesia's provinces. Hill reports that females accounted for only 25% of those students attending primary school in 1971 and that by 1974 only 53% of school age children were enrolled in school (2002:39). Indonesia pursued a policy of integration and assimilation by improving infrastructure and significantly expanding the education system to reach both urban and rural populations outside of Dili (Nicolai, 2004:43). The former Portuguese-styled education system was abolished along with the use of the Portuguese language. Bahasa Indonesia became the language of instruction and primary school teachers from Indonesia were brought in to deliver the new compulsory primary curriculum. Greater numbers of students in Timor Leste were also provided with scholarships to study in Indonesia, and this was to provide an important means of contact with solidarity groups and the women's movement in Indonesia.

To the outside world it looked as though Indonesia was pursuing a policy of 'Education for All', and this served to create a view of Timor Leste's integration into Indonesia as part of a caring paternal relationship, although the quality of education and instruction was low and teachers were in short supply (Hill, 2007:224). The East Timorese, however, viewed formal education as forced cooperation which in reality acted as an instrument of oppression to facilitate submissiveness (Millo & Barnett, 2004:727), and to 'Indonesianise' and inculcate the young East Timorese into Indonesian culture, language and ideology as a way to facilitate assimilation (Millo & Barnett, 2004:726-727; Nicolai, 2004:44). Hill has also argued the Indonesian education system was characterised by a hidden curriculum around gender, whereby education for girls was viewed as unnecessary or unsuitable for girls, and rural areas were viewed as second class to urban areas (Hill, 2007:226). It was therefore not surprising that many parents

preferred to keep their children at home. However, during the occupation OPMT continued to provide support and non-formal literacy training for women (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:30). They faced considerable obstacles to their efforts and were singled-out by the Indonesian forces for imprisonment, brutal assaults, sexual violence, and rape due to their relationship with FRETILIN and its armed-wing Forças Armadas da Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste (FALINTIL), to which many of OPMT's members were related (Cristalis & Scott, 2005:35).

Women and Education During Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development

In the violent aftermath of the referendum in 1999, Timor Leste's education system was almost completely destroyed. An estimated 95% of educational institutions were decimated and an estimated 70-80% of senior administrative staff and secondary teachers fled back to Indonesia (Millo & Barnett, 2004:722; Nicolai, 2004:29). In the post-conflict reconstruction period a plethora of international development agencies and NGOs set up programmes in the area of education to reach out to children who had been displaced from their homes in the violence that followed the referendum, many of which were now living in IDP and refugee camps. UNICEF set up an emergency education programme for East Timorese refugees across the border in West Timor that focused on school-aged children and offered a psychosocial support component, however, large numbers of children did not enrol for range of reasons, including language difficulties, and any youth over primary school-age also missed out (Nicolai, 2004:65-66).

Early on in the reconstruction period, UNICEF served as the defacto Ministry of Education in the absence of a national education ministry. The immediate focus tended to be on re-establishing the formal schooling system at primary level and thus very few secondary schools opened. This meant that apart from a few East Timorese student groups and international NGOs that offered some youth programmes there were limited options for adolescents to continue their schooling. In 2001 Oxfam Great Britain (GB) and UNICEF undertook research into the educational need of rural East Timorese to understand the situation of the population living outside of the urban centres where the

focus of development initiatives had so far been. Their findings highlighted the strong desire of rural adults to access adult literacy classes in Tetum (Nicolai, 2004:92).

In 2002 the Government of Timor Leste began working with international agencies and Non-governmental Organisations (NGO) to increase women's role and participation in the public sphere through adult education programmes. UNICEF and Oxfam GB were significant actors in the provision of adult literacy programmes for women along with other NGOs such as Timor Aid, Concern, and GFFTL. In September 2003, Dr Roshan Chitrakar undertook *a review of UNICEF's Women's Literacy Project in East Timor*, a joint programme with the Timor Leste Ministry of Education Division of Non-formal Education that started in August 2002. The review found that the programme had not changed people's literacy practices nor their livelihoods and that the participants and graduates of the programme had not found the literacy skills useful in a practical sense in their daily lives (Oxfam GB, 2004:12). Chitrakar highlighted the need for a more culturally sensitive literacy programme that considered the participant's socio-economic context, language, and literacy across themes to better understand women's participation in literacy programmes.

Oxfam GB undertook further research in 2004 to explore the *Obstacles to the Effective Participation of Women in Adult Education Program: Focus on Social-Cultural Factors* (Oxfam GB, 2004). Oxfam GB's research considered literacy in terms of participants' everyday experiences, and provided insight into how literacy was viewed by literacy participants, facilitators, community leaders and community members at the community level. The research also examined the traditional roles and relationships of women and the ways traditional beliefs and customs impact upon the way gender equality has been reproduced and accepted. The research ultimately argued for the need to "challenge of socio-cultural obstacles to Timorese women's participation in literacy" (Oxfam GB, 2004:6).

Timor Leste has committed to achieving the Millenium Development Goals, which include 'universal primary education', and 'gender equality and women's

empowerment' by the year 2015²³. In addition to promoting basic education, defined as up to Year Nine, the Government of Timor Leste has implemented adult literacy education programmes to improve the high illiteracy rates prevalent amongst adults who missed out on education during the Portuguese administration and Indonesian occupation, and which are particularly high in rural areas. While there have been improvements in the literacy rates reported for adults since the 2004 Census, one of the key challenges to eradicating illiteracy in Timor Leste concerns the rural-urban and male-female literacy disparities. The UNDP reports that the literacy rate for 15-24 year olds in rural areas is reported to be 81.9%, lower than the 91.8% reported for urban areas, and similarly, for the same age group the female literacy rate of 82.1% is lower than the male literacy rate of 87.8% (UNDP, 2009:28). The adult literacy rate for those 15 years and above has been improving from 36% in 2000 to 47% in 2004 and has further increased to 58% in 2007. The Timor Leste Survey of Living Standards (TLSLS) published in 2007 reported that 74% of adults living in urban areas were literate compared to 52% in rural areas (UNDP, 2009:28). These statistics show that while progress is being made much more needs to be done to improve the adult literacy rate for rural women in Timor Leste.

Timor Leste's first National Literacy Conference was held in September 2004, and argued strongly for the Government to address adult illiteracy through a national literacy campaign (Boughton, 2008:10). In 2006 the FRETILIN-led Government of Timor Leste launched a national literacy campaign based on a 13-week literacy programme known as *Sim! Eu Posso* (Yes! I can) in the Portuguese language²⁴ which was aimed at reducing the high level of illiteracy throughout the country. The campaign was officially launched in March 2007, at a time when the country was experiencing civil upheaval following the political violence in 2006, and a National Commission to lead the campaign was created. The commission was chaired by the Minister of Education and received \$800,000 from the Government's own budget for staff, materials and the purchase of resources and equipment (Boughton, 2008:2).

²³ Goal Two and Three of the MDGs.

²⁴ The Portuguese language materials were subsequently translated into Tetum, the national language more common in the rural areas.

More recently, the Non-formal Education Division of the Ministry of Education in partnership with UNICEF, UNDP and the Brazilian Mission, jointly developed a basic adult literacy curriculum known in Tetum as Hakat ba Oin and Iha Dalan. These two basic adult literacy courses are aimed at helping adults to develop basic literacy skills that will then enable them to progress on to the primary equivalency course. The Hakat ba Oin basic adult literacy curriculum is organised into four levels, each with its own book. The first level deals with letters, the second level with phrases, the third level with sentences, and the fourth level with paragraphs. Once students complete Hakat ba Oin they can progress to Iha Dalan, a set of relevant topical and special interest booklets covering vocabulary relating to topics including health, history, geography and agriculture. The Hakat ba Oin and Iha Dalan curriculum materials are provided by UNICEF and the Non-formal Education Department of the Ministry of Education at no charge, thus enabling all students to have their own copy of the materials required for classes and homework and removing an important barrier to students participation.

Given the situation in Timor Leste where many rural adult women have missed out on formal schooling and are illiterate, non-formal adult literacy programmes based on Hakat ba Oin and Iha Dalan provide these women with an alternative way of gaining literacy skills, access to knowledge and information, and enable women to broaden their opportunities for paid employment. NGOs such as the ARTC are using the Hakat ba Oin and Iha Dalan curriculum to deliver adult literacy training to women living in very isolated communities in the District of Aileu. ARTC's experience working in partnership with rural communities highlights both the challenges and benefits of delivering a non-formal adult literacy programmes to women in a rural area of Timor Leste. The context within which ARTC works in and their non-formal adult literacy programme will be considered next.

The Aileu Resource and Training Centre's Non-formal Adult Literacy Programme

Overview of Aileu and ARTC

The mountainous region of Aileu is located south of the capital Dili and is situated on an area of land approximately 729 sq. kilometres in size. The 2004 Census puts the population of Aileu at 36,889 people, of which 18,311 are female and 19,658 are male. The District of Aileu is composed of four sub-districts: Aileu Kota, Remexio, Laulara and Liquidoe, and includes a combined total of 31 official sucos (villages)²⁵. Mambae is the predominant language and mother tongue of the population in the district of Aileu with 94.3% of the population speaking it, with the second most common language spoken in the district being Tetum (Government of Timor Leste, 2007:21) . In terms of literacy, Aileu continues to struggle with high illiteracy rates. The Timor Leste Survey of Living Standards reported that 57.3% of women over the age of 18 years are unable to read or write a letter, compared to 39.8% of men in Aileu (Government of Timor Leste, 2007) .

The economy of Aileu is based largely around subsistence agriculture, with approximately 90% of the population informally employed by the agricultural sector (Government of Timor Leste, 2002:10). Several types of cash crop also provide a means of income for the population, these include coffee, fruit (mangoes and oranges), maize, and rice which is the main cash and food crop for the river valley areas. Increasingly unpredictable and heavy rainfall has become an issue in recent times for the population reliant on subsistence agriculture to meet their basic needs. Unlike other parts of South-East Asia, 'Terracing' ²⁶ does not appear to be a common feature of rural agriculture in the steep mountains of Aileu where the loss of nutrient topsoil to erosion and lack of water during the dry season contribute to lower crop yields. Heavy and unpredictable rainfall is adversely affecting farmers' crop yields and having a flow on affect to their

²⁵ These official sucos were joined by an additional 13 sucos following the popular consultation, reflecting in part the old clandestine structures.

²⁶ Terracing is an agricultural method to control the erosion of soil and retention of water on steep mountainous slopes and is common practice throughout many parts of the world, in particular South-East Asia.

livelihoods and food security. The small private sector in Aileu offers limited employment opportunities in basic commercial service provision such as restaurants, kiosks, and markets, the majority of which are unregistered and small-scale. More recently service providers, such as a mobile phone network company, have begun to set up offices in town centre of Aileu. Such companies may provide further employment opportunities for the rural population in the future.

Within Timor Leste Aileu is often referred to as the symbolic heartland of the struggle for independence and the political party FRETILIN (Government of Timor Leste, 2002:7). Following the coup by UDT on 11 August 1975 and the civil unrest that subsequently followed, the political leaders of FRETILIN gathered together in Aileu and this became an important base for FRETILIN in their struggle for independence and the resistance movement during the Indonesian occupation of Timor Leste. As a result, life was extremely difficult of much of the population particularly in the town of Aileu and many fled to the surrounding mountains where they remained displaced from their historical homes for many years, or were forcibly resettled by the Indonesian administration away from their traditional homes and fields (Government of Timor Leste, 2002:7). Aileu experienced wide-scale destruction of public and private infrastructure and high levels of violence following the popular consultation in 1999, the sub-districts of Liquidoe and Laulara sustaining perhaps the greatest impact with some villages being completely destroyed (Government of Timor Leste, 2002:8). Few structures remained standing in the town of Aileu and vital infrastructure relating to water, electricity and supply lines throughout all four of the sub-districts were vandalised and often left unusable.

It is within this challenging environment that ARTC²⁷ has worked in strong partnership with communities to assist them in overcoming the obstacles that disadvantage their development. ARTC is a non-governmental and non-sectarian

²⁷ The information presented throughout this section about ARTC and the programmes it delivers is an accumulation of email dialogue with ARTC prior to and following the fieldwork in Aileu and formal interviews and informal discussions conducted with ARTC staff and adult literacy programme participants during fieldwork in Aileu.

organisation. It was established on 1 August 2005 with the support of a UNDP grant that enabled it to establish its premises in the Aileu Biblioteca building in the town of Aileu²⁸. The mission of ARTC is the provision of opportunities for Timorese youth and adults to develop employable skills in: computers, database systems, administrative management, and programs for education. The target group are jobless youth and adults in the communities of Aileu. ARTC provides rural communities in Aileu with access to library resources and language programs in partnership with NGOs, the Government, the Church, and other entities that support the District of Aileu.

ARTC has over five years experience providing non-formal educational programming tailored to the needs of communities within the District of Aileu. Over those five years ARTC has established formal relationships with the Non-formal Education Department of the Ministry of Education, and the Vocational Training Section of the Ministry of Labor and Solidarity. In addition to a Board of Directors, the Centre's staff is composed of an Executive Director, a Finance Manager, a Librarian, programme staff, and a consultant. All ARTC staff live in Aileu, and all are Timorese except for the consultant who is Bolivian and has lived in Aileu for the best part of 7 years providing valuable support to ARTC and its staff. The composition of locally based Timorese staff from facilitators right through to the Executive Director is unique in comparison to the many internationally run programmes throughout Timor Leste. It also helps to ensure that programmes are culturally sensitive and locally driven.

ARTC runs the non-formal adult literacy classes predominantly with villages in the sub-districts of Liquidoe and Aileu Kota. Liquidoe sub-district is made up of seven Sucos (villages): Manucasa, Fahisoi, Namoleso, Asubulitoho, Bereleu, Faturilao, and Betulao. Of these seven Sucos, ARTC works with adult literacy groups that have formed in Manucasa (Libululi, Kantor Desa, and aldeia Zero Um), and in Namoleso (Berloko Sae, Urbada, Serema and Klaeta²⁹). ARTC also works with two literacy groups from the Aileu Vila sub-district: Sarlala and Suku Liurai.

²⁸ The town of Aileu is the centre of the District of Aileu.

²⁹ The Klaeta literacy group has closed for the time being.

Community Needs

ARTC's goal is to work in partnership with the communities to provide services that respond to the needs and interests expressed by the communities in Aileu. ARTC understands that the communities, and individuals within the communities that they work with may have special needs, and believes that to bring literacy to a broad spectrum of the population ARTC needs to structure their programming to address these needs. In this way the approach that ARTC uses is most closely related to the 'Real Literacies Approach' discussed in Chapter Three. One such area concerns that of adolescents who lack the ability to read and write but feel too embarrassed to attend school as they feel that they are now too old but yet are too young to be considered adults.

ARTC faces many challenges in delivering their programme in the mountains of Aileu, however, ARTC have learnt how to effectively organise literacy groups in small, remote villages to support students to work well in a demanding program which requires significant commitment, and have made modifications to the programme methodology and materials used based on their experiences with the students. Three features that are critical to the effective delivery of the literacy programme are the flexibility in class schedule which takes into account the daily and seasonal constraints of the student participants, the provision of individual sets of materials to enable students to study at home when they are unable to attend class, and the use of local facilitators and coordinators. These will be discussed in further detail next.

In focusing on delivering an adult literacy programme that is flexible and responsive to the needs of the students, ARTC supports an approach promoted by the RLA introduced in Chapter Three in conjunction with literacy primers. The RLA is concerned with assisting people to develop their literacy skills and to enhance their ability to carry out their daily literacy tasks more effectively. This approach recognises that participants are already engaged in literacy activities, and seeks to assist them in becoming more confident in carrying out these activities. Thus, while using literacy

primers is helpful, the women also focus on literacy activities which they are currently exposed to and engage in on a daily basis, such as signing their name on documents, writing letters, and reading building names. These literacy activities will be explored further in Chapter Six.

There are many family units in which no one has the ability to read and write and this poses a significant challenge to development in rural areas. As the rural economy develops, new organisations and businesses will require employees that can read and write and those individuals that lack read and writing skills that are requirements for employment in these organisations and business will consequently be hindered or miss out on these opportunities, and this in turn limits their, and their family's ability to grow, progress and benefit from additional income sources. In working to assist communities to identify and meet their needs ARTC works with both men and women, young and old. Women predominate in literacy groups and are generally responsive and perform well in check-ups after each book and the final test. There are a smaller number of male participants and men have tended to be hesitant about attending. ARTC is seeking to find ways of engaging men more in the literacy programme.

Curriculum Materials

ARTC believes that the Hakat ba Oin and Iha Dalan literacy materials, which use a programmed learning methodology that requires student involvement, are well-conceived and have been well-tested. They also find that the material is relevant and attractive to the Timorese and this helps to engage the student more. However to sustain student interest and motivation additional resources and materials are required that are more focused on taking the student in directions that are relevant to their lives as adults. Along these lines ARTC plans to introduce the Primary Equivalency Program that has been developed by the Non-formal Education Department of the Ministry of Education in Timor Leste. This will provide those students that have completed Hakat ba Oin and Iha Dalan with the opportunity to achieve further qualifications.

Facilitators and Coordinators

The adult literacy programme that ARTC delivers relies on local facilitators and coordinators, and they have found that this is one particularly important aspect of their programme's approach. ARTC provides training and employment opportunities for local high school graduates as facilitators (classroom instructors) and coordinators for the literacy groups. While the facilitator and coordinator roles that are promoted by the Ministry of Education are not professionalised courses in teaching or pedagogy, they are critical to the delivery of non-formal education in rural areas where there is a significant shortage of qualified teachers. The Ministry of Education has provided trainers and initial training for the facilitators and coordinators, however, ARTC has found that it is important to follow up this training with regular workshops that are both inclusive and interactive. These workshops provide an opportunity for the facilitators to meet together to learn from each other's experience and receive training on new methods and approaches.

Facilitators have proved fundamental to the success of the program through their ability to connect with and be responsive to the needs of the communities within which they work. High school graduates in each community are employed and trained to fill the role of facilitator for the literacy group in that community. Facilitators work through the curriculum materials with the literacy groups and their enthusiasm, encouragement and dependability are key motivational factors for literacy group participants. Six out of the seven facilitators currently employed by ARTC are women.

Local coordinators too play an important role due to the logistical issues of providing classroom instruction in the village communities. Coordinators live within the community and know the participants. They support the delivery of the literacy program by providing community sensitive program administration and scheduling. As with the facilitators, the coordinators' relationship with the community and literacy group participants is fundamental to understanding the different circumstances of particular

communities and the specific needs of individuals. This understanding enables the coordinators to adapt the approach to local circumstances, build greater commitment, and increases the likelihood of continued participation by communities in the literacy programme.

Classes tend to run for two hours, three days per week. While there is some flexibility for the facilitators and students within individual literacy groups to nominate class times that are most suitable for them and the days on which the classes will take place, the classes must take place three days per week. ARTC has found that, common to group learning situations, each literacy group has its own character and this has resulted in different completion timeframes for the groups as some groups move through Hakat ba Oin and Iha Dalan faster than others. While some groups have completed the basic course material in as little as eight months, other groups have struggled to complete the required course material.

Adult Literacy Programmes 2007-2010

In April 2007 ARTC piloted a community-based literacy education program based on 'Hakat ba Oin' (One Step Ahead) in the Sucos (villages) of Manucasa and Betualao. ARTC has since built on its success and expanded its adult literacy programme to reach more communities and respond to particular needs that have been identified in the communities. In 2008, 72 people from five literacy groups in the Lequidoe sub-district graduated, and the second literacy programme began in March 2008. At the conclusion of the second literacy programme in August 2009, 172 students from 12 literacy groups graduated. Following the second literacy programme and based on lessons learned from the first two programmes ARTC began to develop new materials and refine their methodology based on Hakat ba Oin. Six groups began the new phase, or third literacy programme, and these were a combination of literacy groups from the previous two programmes that have carried on into the new phase, and new additional groups. This thesis examines the experiences of women participating in this third literacy programme.

Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter sought to answer the first research question ‘**what has been the experience of women in education in Timor Leste?**’ In answering this question, the chapter has shown that for centuries women’s experience in education in Timor Leste has been characterised by the instrumental approach, as outlined in Chapter Two, which emphasised what women could do for development rather than what development could do to benefit women (Chant, 2006:102). The chapter showed that in general women in Timor Leste were excluded from educational opportunities under the Portuguese, and those opportunities that were available served to reinforce women’s gendered roles and reduce women’s status and mobility outside of the home. Yet a few women achieved a high level of education through studies overseas in Portugal in the 1970s and they brought back with them radical political and feminist ideas that would influence independence movement. Realising the value of literacy in educating, mobilising and empowering the rural population to participate in the independence movement, these women formed the women’s front of FRETILIN, OPMT, which played a vital role in administering FRETILIN’s anti-literacy campaign which was for many rural women their first experience of learning literacy.

With the formation of women’s political groups and the transformation of women’s gendered roles during the Indonesian occupation, women took on greater responsibility in leading their families and communities under very harsh circumstances. Yet due to the violent and prolonged nature of the conflict many women and girls missed out on basic education, and once the war ended it was generally assumed that women would return to their traditional roles inside the home. However, the arrival of the international community, along international norms around human rights and gender, meant that further opportunities were available for women to participate in development and educational programmes. As previous research has shown, while women were eager to take up these new opportunities and learn new skills they faced considerable obstacles to their participation, namely the lack of access to educational programmes and socio-cultural obstacles (Oxfam GB, 2004). In recognising that literacy and education are a source of power, as highlighted in Chapter Three, women in Timor Leste have been

disadvantaged and disempowered through their exclusion from educational opportunities and this has negative consequences for their participation in social, political and economic life.

The chapter further showed that where women have missed out on formal schooling, non-formal education provides an alternative means for women to access educational opportunities and learn new skills. As their exclusion from educational opportunities has disadvantaged and disempowered them, non-formal adult literacy programmes provides the means for them to overcome this disadvantage, and can therefore provide an enabling environment for women's empowerment. Additionally, non-formal adult literacy programmes have greater flexibility because they do not follow a strict formal curriculum. Rather programmes are able to be tailored to the context and the specific needs and interests of the participants as shown by the example of ARTC. In other words, this flexibility enables programme delivery to focus on student-centred learning. This approach has many similarities with the Real Literacies Approach highlighted in Chapter Three, whereby the focus is on increasing participant's confidence in undertaking those literacy activities they are already engaged in, as these activities are already meaningful to the participants as opposed to abstract literacy activities that bear no meaning in their lives. Thus, non-formal literacy programmes can provide not only a more flexible and meaningful programme for participants, they can also create an enabling environment for women who have been disadvantaged and disempowered to access greater opportunities to improve their lives and become empowered.

To understand further how non-formal adult literacy programmes are contributing to rural women's lives and their empowerment in Timor Leste this thesis explores the challenges that rural women face in their community, how participating in the literacy programme has impacted on their lives, and whether their participation in the literacy programme has led to their empowerment. The methodology that guided this thesis will be discussed next.

Chapter Five: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will outline the qualitative methodology used to guide the research process for this thesis, and draws on the literature and theoretical insights of multiple distinct fields of study specifically that of gender, adult education and development studies. The chapter will begin by introducing the qualitative and feminist methodologies used in carrying out this research highlighting their value in uncovering the social reality of what people think and feel about their lives by listening to the lived experiences and realities of women's lives. The chapter will show that in seeking meaning, understanding and depth of information provided by the research participants a qualitative methodology and the application of data collection methods such as semi-structured interviews was identified as the most effective way of gaining in-depth insight into women's lives. The chapter will then move on to highlighting the three key questions that have guided this research and provide an overview of the qualitative methods used in the field research before discussing the selection of the research site and insider/outsider issues related to undertaking cross-cultural research. My positionality and reflexivity in the research is then presented which will show that while seeking to position myself as a student in the research process it was important to recognise that I held a certain degree of power and continual reflexivity was thus crucial to managing my own positioning. The chapter will then discuss the process of planning for fieldwork in Timor Leste including negotiating access to the research participants, conflict of interest, ethical issues and the possible risk of harm researching in a post-conflict context.

In the second part of the chapter the fieldwork and primary data collection methods used are discussed in-depth. The chapter will highlight the importance of spending time talking through the research with research assistants and translators prior to conducting interviews and the benefits of using a research assistant that is culturally sensitive to the research context. Next the chapter will discuss the specifics of the village visits and research participant selection and then move on to examine how the primary

data collection methods (focus groups and semi-structured interviews) were carried out; showing the strengths and weaknesses of using each method in the research context. The chapter then discusses the secondary data collection methods employed, how data analysis was carried out, and the research limitations and data validity.

Research Methodology

The methodology for this research is qualitative in nature in that it seeks to “highlight the meanings people make and actions they take, and to offer interpretations for how and why” (Luttrell, 2010:1). It was felt that a qualitative methodology would be the most appropriate for gaining insight into how people live and view their lives due to the flexibility and sensitivity of the methods. Qualitative research draws upon a social-constructivist ontology which is linked to interpretivist epistemology (Greene, 2010:67). The constructivist ontology views the world as having multiple realities which are socially constructed by individuals and groups, and therefore no single universal truth exists. Similarly, the interpretivist epistemology “denies the possibility of universal social laws and empirical generalizations” (Greene, 2010:69). In this view, the interpretivist epistemology rejects the traditional positivist epistemological belief that scientific quantitative methods employed to research the natural sciences can also be effectively applied to the study of social reality. Interpretivist knowledge is also referred to as ‘grounded’ knowledge, knowledge that seeks ‘inside’ understanding of the research setting, and is based on uncovering social reality such as what people think and feel about their lives and about development activities. It has been argued that such knowledge cannot be developed through speculation but must be uncovered and justified through a field-based methodology (Greene, 2010:68). Thus, qualitative research is more open to listening to the lived experiences of the participants rather than merely seeking that data which will prove a hypothesis or theory.

Feminist Insights

This research also draws upon feminist methodology as a useful approach due to its “focus on making visible the experiences and realities of women’s lives, which have

been marginalised both inside and outside the academy” (Jenkins, 2007:86). Feminist methodology is grounded in the lived experience and reality of women, and has an ethical commitment to inclusivity and reflexivity in research practice and particular attention to relational power. Feminist methodology is concerned with “exploring absence, silence, difference, oppression and the power of epistemology” (Ackerly & True, 2008:694). It is also concerned with how the decisions that researchers make in terms of what counts as knowledge, the interpretation and meaning they give to what differences exist and how they will be represented in the research puts researchers in a powerful position (Creswell, 2009:107). Feminist methodology thus favours a critical interpretivist epistemology and employs qualitative techniques such as semi-structured interviews as a means for women to express themselves and share their experiences more fully, as opposed to quantitative techniques which are often seen to misrepresent or silence women’s voices (Jenkins, 2007:86).

Ackerly and True argue that feminism is an ethical practice which can “improve our scholarship at every stage by guiding our reflection about our question, theoretical conceptualization, research design, or methods in specified (though not specific) ways” (2008:694). In this view, paying careful attention to epistemology, boundaries, relationships, and the situatedness of the researcher will influence what questions the researcher asks, the methodologies employed, the methods that are used, and what data is included (Ackerly & True, 2008:694). Attentiveness to epistemology is important because epistemology influences how we decide whether something is factual or based on belief. Feminists have challenged the scientific positivist epistemology’s claims of ‘objectivity’ arguing that it masks the researcher’s subjectivity that is inherent in all human beings.

Attentiveness to boundaries, and their power to marginalize by including and excluding participants and social phenomena is important to the feminist research ethic (Ackerly & True, 2008:696). Jenkins makes the similar point that “crossing boundaries, neutralising power inequalities and establishing rapport are essential elements in contributing to a successful research process” (2007:89). Boundaries may appear in

terms of gender, age, race, culture, and ethnicity and thus requires careful consideration of positionality by the researcher in order to negotiate these boundaries. Attentiveness to relationships is another important practice in exploring the interrelatedness of social, political and economic aspects of people's lives, and requires researchers to pay particular attention to the power dynamics in the situation they are researching (Ackerly & True, 2008:698). Finally, the situatedness of the researcher is concerned with how the researcher is situated within three power dynamics: epistemology, boundaries, and human relations.

Research Questions

The objective of this thesis is to explore the contribution of participatory non-formal adult literacy programmes to rural women's empowerment in Timor Leste. In doing so three key research questions guided this thesis:

Question 1: What has been the experience of women in education in Timor Leste?

Question 2: What are the daily experiences of rural women who participate in non-formal adult literacy programmes, and how do these programmes respond to rural women's needs and interests?

Question 3: In what ways have individual women participating in a non-formal adult literacy programme experienced empowerment, and how have these programmes contributed to rural women's empowerment in Timor Leste?

To answer these three research questions through a qualitative feminist methodology, the data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, informal conversations, and the use of secondary sources such as donor and government reports. Using multiple methods of data collection is important to achieve triangulation of research results and data validity in qualitative research (Babbie, 1989). As discussed above, it was felt that these methods would be the most appropriate for gathering the information required to answer the research questions. Semi-structured interviews allow for more informal and less rigid lines of questioning that provide an

opportunity to further investigate participant's answers that structured questionnaires do not. Focus groups were also felt to provide an opportunity for open discussion on the topic, and to learn about how communities discuss issues (Brockington & Sullivan, 2003:58). Focus groups can also provide an opportunity to understand differences between the collective and individual view of community members when compared with responses from individual interviews.

Selection of Research Site and Insider/Outsider Issues

My initial reading of literature on empowerment, literacy and Timor Leste showed that women, and more specifically rural adult women, were a significant part of society whose voice was missing in the literature. Before taking the decision to undertake fieldwork in Timor-leste I questioned whether it was at all appropriate for me to undertake research in a context that I have limited understanding of as an outsider whose life experience has been very different to those of the women in Timor Leste. While I have a very keen interest in Timor Leste and read widely about Timor Leste, its history, customs, tradition and its people, it was by no account a substitute for having lived the experiences of women whose story I was hoping to tell. The question was whether the women's story was even mine to tell, and how the power relations between the researcher and the researched would impact on those who participated in the research. Acknowledging that women are not a homogenous category also led me to wonder what impact participating in the research will have on the power relations between the women participating in the literacy programme. Nevertheless, it is also important to acknowledge the positive aspects of cross-cultural research. Scheyvens and Leslie note the value that research which crosses cultural boundaries can have, but caution that this depends on "how well informed, how politically aware and how sensitive the researcher is, to the topic in question and to the local context" (2000:126).

Listening to accounts of previous research that had been undertaken in Timor-Leste from colleagues who have knowledge of the research context in Timor Leste made me conscious that even with best intentions, motivation and research plan, undertaking

research in any context, let alone one that has been traumatised by successive waves of oppression and conflict, the research and researcher can have a far-reaching negative impact on the participants. With this in mind I sought to address these issues by discussing the proposed research with my chief supervisor, colleagues familiar with Timor Leste and the research process, and ARTC the organisation in Timor Leste with whom I researched and who had first hand understanding of the local context in the development of this methodology and prior to undertaking fieldwork. I sought feedback from ARTC and the women interviewed (through ARTC) about the context and findings chapters to ensure that contextual information and the women's views had been captured accurately.

Positionality and Reflexivity

In undertaking research, it is not uncommon for the researcher to bring with them their own subjectivities and biases based on their personal experience and background. Drawing on feminist theory, "positionality" in this view concerns the identifying characteristics of the researcher such as age, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. In other words those "attributes that are markers of *relational* positions in society, rather than intrinsic qualities" (Chacko, 2004:52). Understanding positionality and the unequal power relations that are implicit in it is important for understanding how power and relationships are contested in the field, particularly as conflict between the researcher and the researched can arise as a result of unequal power relations, misrepresentation, ethical concerns and exploitation (Chacko, 2004:52). Thus, it is important to understand the researcher's particular position relative to their research participants and therefore how the researcher impacts upon the research findings and analysis (Jenkins, 2007:88). Similarly, reflexivity involves a process of self-reflection, whereby the researcher continually considers their own influence upon the research and the researched in all aspects of the research, from the very beginning until the end

In the following discussion I will outline my own positionality in the research, and how it was that I came to be interested in the subject of this thesis. I am female and in

my late twenties, born and raised in New Zealand. I am a first generation New Zealander, my parents having immigrated to New Zealand more than four decades ago from England and Cyprus. My undergraduate degree was in Psychology and Education and following completion of this degree I was employed by the Ministry of Education. After spending some time travelling overseas I became interested in the field of development and followed up this interest by undertaking a Post-graduate Diploma in Development Studies. After completing this Degree I sought practical experience in the field and volunteered with a local non-profit organisation focused on sustainable rural development and the empowerment of marginalised women in Himachal Pradesh, India. This experience reinforced my interest in development and the ways in which education can assist the powerless to gain knowledge and skills to improve their lives and provide for enabling environment for empowerment. On returning to New Zealand I was employed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade New Zealand Aid Programme (NZAP), formerly known as the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID).

At the beginning this research process I did not feel at all very powerful. As a student and as a non-practitioner of adult education I felt that I did not have the skills nor the extent of the knowledge, understanding, and expertise that practitioners of education have, nor a strong understanding of gender issues having not taken courses in women's studies or gender analysis or been a practitioner in this field. However, it was important to recognise that I did indeed have power. This power was associated with having had a relatively privileged middle class upbringing with access to higher education and being in a position to undertake periods of travel, and this research, in a foreign country, being Caucasian, and my employment with the Government of New Zealand's Aid Programme (NZAP) which operates in Timor Leste and which had formerly provided funding to ARTC to deliver the adult literacy programme. In undertaking this research I needed to be constantly aware of how this power, real or perceived, would affect the participants and its impact on the creditability of my research. As O'Leary is careful to point out, "both the integrity of the knowledge produced and the well-being of the researched are dependent on the ethical negotiation of power and power relationships" (O'Leary, 2010:28). With this in mind, I sought to ensure that the field research I carried out would

be done in a respectful and culturally sensitive manner, and result in no harm to those who participated.

Throughout the research continual reflexivity was crucial to managing my own positioning (O'Leary, 2010:31), and ensuring that the subjectivities inherent in my own biases and worldviews did not lead me into the trap of judging the reality of the participants experiences in relation to my own experiences and views. O'Leary cautions that "researchers must actively manage power, politics, and ethics" throughout the research process (2010:29). At times reflexivity led to a necessary shift in my research methodology and the methods I used in the fieldwork. One such example was the decision to discontinue the focus groups, which I had found difficult to facilitate due to the language barrier and limited time to build rapport with the group, and instead focus on the individual interviews which were more successful in gaining the information required in the short time available. This was inevitable but also desirable as it helped to ensure that the research I was undertaking was grounded in the lived experiences of the people, and my own ability as a novice researcher.

Planning for Fieldwork

Negotiating Access to Research Participants

To identify non-formal adult literacy programme participants willing to participate in the research an internet-based search for organisations currently providing adult literacy programmes for women was undertaken. These organisations were then emailed to introduce myself, the proposed research, and enquire as to whether they and the women they worked with would be interested in participating in the research. At the same time I became aware of an organisation that had previously been funded by NZAP, ARTC, through colleagues working on the Timor Leste desk. Advice was sought from colleagues and my chief supervisor concerning whether it would be appropriate to approach ARTC to invite them to participate in the research. Following discussion around the possible conflict of interest and ways of mitigating issues that might arise due to their participation I approached ARTC and we began dialogue about the research topic

and methodology. Dialogue with ARTC took place over three months. During this time they were provided with information about the methodology and their views were sought on what methods would be appropriate in the local context and what was possible during the time in the field. Pre-approval was also sought from the women participating in the literacy programmes to visit them through ARTC. ARTC visited the women with the information they had been provided with to seek the women's approval for me to meet with them, and once they had gained this approval I confirmed my flights and prepared for the field visit.

Conflict of Interest

As I am currently an employee of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign and Trade (MFAT) the decision to research with ARTC posed a possible conflict of interest in undertaking research with an organisation that delivers a program previously funded by the NZAP. I have outlined aspects of this conflict of interest below and the ways in which I sought to address them. Firstly, it was important to be upfront with the organisation about my role within the NZAP and to make explicit that the research being undertaken was in a purely personal capacity. Secondly, as the research is not funded under the MFAT NZAP Scholarship Fund (offered to New Zealand citizens to undertake development-related research) it therefore is not owned or partially owned by MFAT. And thirdly, the research did not focus on the NGO/Donor relationship between ARTC and MFAT, or the intricacies of how the programme is run in terms of funding or evaluating impact.

Ethical Issues

An important consideration in undertaking any research is the question of whether it is ethically sound. Ethics is concerned with ensuring that no harm comes to participants during the course of the research and that there will be no negative implications for them as a result of their participation. Research for this thesis was conducted in line with Massey University's Ethics Guideline, which judged the research to be low-risk. An in-

house ethics procedure, including a meeting with staff of the Institute of Development Studies, was conducted and approval was given to undertake field research in Timor Leste. Among the requirements of research with human participants is the provision of an informed consent form and information sheet for research participants. Both the consent form and information sheet were translated into Tetum (the commonly used Lingua Franca and one of the two official languages of Timor Leste). The information sheet included information in line with Massey University Ethics standards concerning the participant's right to confidentiality and their right to decline to participate in the research at any time without penalty or negative repercussions.

While the information sheet and informed consent represent the minimum standards required by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee a number of further considerations were taken to ensure research methods were appropriate to the conflict-affected context, such as accountability, reciprocity, and transparency (Smyth & Robinson, 2001). Ultimately I sought to be mindful of the participants' interests, needs and fears, and this was guided by the understanding that I was ultimately accountable to them for the way I managed my relationships with them, and how they are represented in the research. I was also mindful that my position as a researcher should at all times be transparent to the participants. Because this research aimed to be a collaborative and participatory process maintaining contact, continual dialogue, and seeking feedback in an open and transparent manner with ARTC and participants was an essential part of building and keeping their trust, interpreting the data correctly, and developing a sound analysis of the data.

Several ethical issues were specifically related to undertaking research as a woman in a conservative religious society which is underpinned by traditional patriarchal beliefs and strict cultural protocols, notwithstanding the language barrier as I do not speak either the local languages or the two official languages: Tetum and Portuguese. My behaviour was sensitive to the effects of the research experiences on the participants and their families, afforded participants dignity and respect, and I was careful not to harm the participants in any way. In order to address these issues of sensitivity I sought advice

from East Timorese colleagues and others that have worked, lived and researched in Timor Leste prior to and during the field research.

The East Timorese translator/research assistant that accompanied me during the two week interview period in Aileu was also briefed on ethical issues and once they understood what was required they signed a confidentiality agreement. Copies of the handwritten transcripts that had been translated were handed over once they had been completed.

Risk of Harm to Researcher

While I did not anticipate there being any cause for harm to myself during the fieldwork as recently there had been no outbreaks of violence in the areas I was travelling to and researching in, I was also aware that Timor Leste is a country that has experienced much violent conflict and trauma over many years. At present the security situation in Timor Leste is calm and stable although incidents can and do occur. Having previously travelled overseas and participated in research in a development context before I had some awareness of the many complexities and issues that undertaking research in and foreign environment and culture, particularly one in which a strong patriarchal ideology prevails, would entail. I learnt to navigate some of these complexities by ensuring that my clothing attire always respected the traditional environment, and as much as possible travelling with a companion, seeking information about customs and traditions from colleagues and ensuring that I followed these to the best of my ability, and by being patient, calm, and flexible during stressful situations over which I had no control.

Fieldwork and Primary Data Collection Methods

Due to work commitments and financial constraints I was limited to one fieldwork visit to Timor Leste. Fieldwork took place over four weeks during August and September 2010. I spent one week in Dili when I first arrived to get my bearings, carry out interviews with senior Ministry of Education staff, and meet up and spend time getting to know my research assistant/translator with whom I would spend the following

two weeks in Aileu. On reflection, this first week was well spent and it enabled me to adjust to my surroundings and to meet and make contact with individuals I had been thus far limited to speaking with via the Internet, and to talk through the research with my research assistant/translator.

The following two weeks were spent in Aileu. ARTC prepared a schedule of visits out to the communities based on the availability of the car that they shared with other groups. In total there were four full-day visits to literacy groups, where at times three to four literacy groups from different villages would meet at one location for our visit due to the time constraints on our ability to drive out to every village. The village visits were usually followed by one to two days 'free time' during which myself and my research assistant discussed our thoughts about how each visit went and the voice recordings were transcribed and then translated into English. The days in between village visits were an important factor in being able to reflect upon how the visit the previous day had gone, and allowed time for transcribing and reading through the information the interview participants had provided. At the end of the two weeks we travelled back to Dili. I then spent several days typing up transcripts, sourcing additional reports and information from colleagues that I had been unable to access through the internet, and saying farewell to those I had met in Dili during my stay.

Research Assistant/Translator

In undertaking field research in a foreign country, and one in which I spoke neither of the two national languages: Portuguese and Tetum, a translator was essential to being able to carry out interviews with the literacy programme participants. Finding a translator in Timor Leste, particularly in the rural areas, can be difficult due to the limited number of people who have English language skills. As I would be interviewing women literacy programme participants, and due to the sensitive nature of some of the interview questions, I felt that a female translator would be more desirable in these circumstances. Prior to departing New Zealand for Timor Leste I was able to make contact through a colleague of mine with a young East Timorese woman who was studying English at the

University of Timor who had a little experience translating to act as a translator during field visits. As she was based in Dili, and the interviews took place in Aileu, she also agreed to travel with me to Aileu for two weeks. Leslie & Storey recommend the importance of spending time getting to know the translator or research assistant prior to conducting interviews in order to develop a professional relationship from the start (2006:133). Thus, prior to departing Dili, I met up with my research assistant on two occasions to talk through the research. As my assistant herself is an East Timorese woman I also sought her views on whether the interview questions were culturally sensitive, and worked on rephrasing the questions to reduce some of their abstractness.

Throughout the interviews the women participants appeared to warm to the research assistant immediately in large part due to her patient and respectful manner, and though she is part of the relatively privileged urban middle-class in Dili she was also a student and in the research process she positioned herself in this way when introducing herself to the communities and interview participants. Following the interviews she commented several times on how she had learnt more about her own culture from listening to the experiences the women shared as East Timorese culture had not been taught in the primary education she received during Indonesian occupation. One of the challenges of using a research assistant or translator concerns the information that can be lost in translation when paraphrasing participant's responses during an interview. In an effort to reduce the possibility of this all but two the interviews conducted were captured on a voice recorder and subsequently transcribed and translated by her afterwards. Reading over the translation helped me to query information that had not made sense to me during the interview and often led to uncovering hidden meanings in what the interview participants were saying. However, the downside to paraphrasing interview responses during the interview and reading over the translation afterwards is that it is then difficult to further clarify information or follow up on certain aspects of the response with the interview participant, unless you have multiple opportunities to interview them.

Village Visits

ARTC prepared a schedule of village visits to meet with all of the literacy groups currently participating in their programme, and one participant from a literacy group that had concluded. Due to time constraints on village visits it was unfortunately not possible to interview all who participated in the adult literacy programme, however, it was possible to interview one participant from each literacy group due to the willingness of many of the participants to travel further to meet with us in one location. We would often leave the Centre at about 8:00am and travel for between one to two hours over rough roads to the meeting location. When we arrived we would follow the custom of sitting down for coffee and a little food that was generously provided by the local community before beginning formal introductions. Following introductions there was time to ask focus group questions before beginning the individual interviews or breaking for lunch, which was then followed by the interviews.

Research Participants

Prior to entering the field I had intended on employing a ‘purposeful’ sampling method to identify participants for the semi-structured interviews. This sampling method is often used in situations where the researcher has limited time and resources available making it difficult to undertake research with the entire population (O’Leary, 2010:162). ‘Purposeful’ sampling entails the researcher making “a judgement on whom to include in the sample” (Overton & van Diermen, 2003:43). Due to the limited time in the field, and limited access to the participants once in the field, participant selection was based on those who turned up to the group on the day we visited the community. As a way to mitigate the unequal power relationship between the researcher and research participants each group was invited to discuss together and nominate participants for the interview. It was considered that this selection method might result in a possible research bias towards those who felt confident to speak, and a silencing of those voices that may have wished to speak but were sidelined by the group or lacked the confidence to speak up. However, it was felt that in this situation the method was appropriate and a means by which a level of

comfort and trust could be established within the limited time available, as well as a transfer of power to the research participants.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions were envisaged as an opportunity for open discussion on the topic of literacy, challenges the community faced, and whether literacy had led to any changes in the community. It was also an opportunity to get to know the community and learn about how the community discussed issues (Brockington & Sullivan, 2003:58). I had also hoped that the focus groups would provide a comparison between the collective and individual views of community members when compared with responses from the individual interviews. Focus groups took place following introductions and before the individual semi-structured interviews. The communities had set up chairs for the visitors, including myself and my research assistant, while they were seated on mats on the ground. I felt that my presence and the discussion would be better facilitated if we were all sitting at the same level and hoped that it might also reduce the teacher-student/researcher-researched power imbalance that sitting at a higher level than the community may have inferred. I was also aware that the community had made a conscious decision to set up the meeting area in this way and I was anxious not to cause any offence. After checking with the community leaders and literacy programme facilitators to ensure that our moving to the mats would not offend the community we moved to the mats, the community appeared to be comfortable with this arrangement and smiled as we joined them.

Due to several factors the focus group discussions did not go as planned and it was necessary to reevaluate the use of this method. Firstly, as we were introduced to the communities for the first time immediately prior to the focus group discussion there was not time to build rapport with the group through informal introductions and general discussion. My research assistant and I initially attempted to encourage discussion amongst the group by talking about differences between New Zealand and Timor Leste and on occasion this led to some questions from individuals in the group, unfortunately

this did not lead to a discussion amongst the group. The lack of discussion amongst the group could also be due to another factor, that both myself and my research assistant lacked sufficient experience in facilitating focus groups, made all the more difficult due to the language barrier. Following our second attempt at facilitating a focus group discussion I felt that data collection would be more effective by concentrating on the individual semi-structured interviews where issues could be explored more in-depth in the limited time available on the community visits.

Table 2: Interview Participants

No.	LPP/KI ³⁰	Pseudonym	Sex M/ F	Age Range	Married/ Unmarried	Children ³¹	Years partici- pating in ARTC Program me.	Previous education
1	LPP	Cornelia	F	20-40	Married	NA	3+	Until 4 th grade
2	LPP	Odete	F	20-40	Married	6 (4F; 2M)	4	Nil
3	LPP	Fatima	F	20-40	Married	NA	3.5	Nil
4	LPP	Jacinta	F	20-40	Married	5	2	Nil
5	LPP	Elizabeth	F	60+	Unmarried	NA	1	Nil
6	LPP	Maria	F	60+	Widow	NA	2	Nil
7	LPP	George	M	20-40	Married	NA	2	Nil
8	LPP	Mabu	F	20-40	Widow	9	3+	Until 3 rd grade
9	LPP	Emelia	F	20-40	Married	9	3	Nil
10	LPP	Manuela	F	20-40	Married	5 (2F;3M)	3	Until 3 rd grade
11	LPP	Armandina	F	20-40	Married	8	2	Completed primary school
12	LPP	Alianco	F	20-40	Married	11	1	Nil
13	LPP	Jose	M	20-40	Married	4	1.5	Nil
14	LPP	Martina	F	20-40	Married	4	2	Nil
15	LPP	Silvina	F	20-40	Married	3	8 months	Some

³⁰ Literacy Programme Participant (LPP); Key Informant (KI).

³¹ Total number of children given birth to, although some may have passed away.

								intermittent schooling
16	LPP	Bela	F	20-40	Married	10	1.5	Until 5 th grade
17	KI	Ministry of Education (MoE) – Coordinator Non-formal Education	M	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
18	KI	MoE – Chefe de Primary Equivalency Programme	F	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
19	KI	ARTC Consultant	F	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
20	KI	ARTC Consultant	F	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
21	KI	ARTC Consultant	F	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
22	KI	Chefe de Non-formal Education Aileu	M	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
23	KI	ARTC	F	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
24		Director						

Semi-structured Interviews

In total, 16 semi-structured interviews with literacy group participants³², and seven key informant interviews took place. Prior to my visit most of the literacy programme participants had had very little contact with foreigners, and the majority had lived in the rural areas for their entire lives. While a few of the women reported having some prior experience in formal schooling none of the women had completed basic primary education and few had obtained even basic literacy skills. To protect the identity

³² 14 women and 2 men participating in ARTC's literacy programme were interviewed.

of those literacy programme participants who agreed to be interviewed it was decided that pseudonyms would be used and any identifying characteristics be removed. As key informants participated in the interviews in their official capacity as a representative for their organisation, it was decided that pseudonyms were not required and instead key informants would be identified by their role in the organisation.

Interviews took place either at the participant's office for key informants, or agreed community-meeting area for literacy programme participants, and there was generally some privacy to the interview location. Prior to each interview, participants were given a copy of the information sheet translated into Tetum and the translator read through this with them, paying particular attention to their rights. Informed consent was sought from each of the semi-structured interview participants prior to the interview commencing. Verbal consent was deemed appropriate for this context in which literacy levels were very low and being asked by a stranger to sign a document could be viewed with mistrust.

The goal of the semi-structured interviews was to openly explore the topic with participants through open-ended questions that would stimulate discussion, allow a certain degree of flexibility, and capture multiple voices by encouraging the participants to freely express their ideas, viewpoints, opinions and experiences in their own words. Interviews with key informants were necessary to build understanding of the topic and context, and as a way of triangulating the findings generated from focus group discussions and secondary data collected from the literature. In searching for key informants I employed a snowball technique (O'Leary, 2010:172), whereby key informants were identified through referrals from other individuals. Each semi-structured interview lasted between 30 minutes and one hour, and all but one of the interviews were electronically recorded³³.

Throughout the interview process I found it better to begin with sharing with participants personal information about myself and information about the research such as why I had travelled to Timor Leste and to their community to visit them, and why I

³³ One key informant from the Ministry of Education did not want to go on the record formally.

was interested in adult literacy. It was apparent right from the beginning of the fieldwork that sharing personal information, and also positioning myself as a student eager to learn and understand things like those I was interviewing helped to reduce some of the formality that often surrounds visits to the community by foreigners who are often viewed immediately as clever or an 'expert'. By sharing personal information and experiences, and by positioning myself as a student, an atmosphere of trust and reciprocity could be established, one in which the participants could become the teachers. In this relationship research participants shared their knowledge and experiences and were also confident to ask me questions, thus this positioning supported the building of a reciprocal relationship based on trust between researcher and research participants.

An electronic recording device was used for all but two of the semi-structured interviews. Prior to using the recording device consent was explicitly sought from the participants on its use and their confidentiality was assured. On one occasion a literacy programme participant did not feel comfortable with the recording device, and on another occasion a key informant did not feel comfortable going on the record with the information they were providing. Their concerns were respected and the device immediately put away. Voice recordings were transcribed and translated as soon as possible following the interviews, and questions concerning the content were clarified with the translator where this was necessary.

Secondary Data Collection Methods

There is a large amount of unpublished non-academic 'gray' literature available on Timor Leste that includes donor and government reports, internet sites, theses, and key documents. There were a number of reports that formed the basis for the initial literature search for information pertaining to the educational context in Timor Leste. The reports listed below were particularly useful in identifying that there was a focus on formal schooling and children in the research and literature available, and a gap in the literature concerning education and rural adult women in Timor Leste. Statistics available in these secondary sources also identified rural adult women as being most disproportionately represented in the illiteracy statistics. These statistics provided the basis from which to

explore further the situation facing rural women in terms of their livelihoods, their motivation for obtaining literacy skills, and the challenges and barriers they faced to their participation in development programmes. Reports that were particularly useful in this initial search included:

- Obstacles to the Effective Participation of Women in Adult Education Program: Focus on Socio-Cultural Factors (Oxfam, 2004);
- Timor-Leste - Education Since Independence: From Reconstruction to Sustainable Improvement (World Bank, 2004);
- Learning Independence: Education in Emergency and Transition in Timor-Leste Since 1999 (Nicolai, 2004);
- Timor Leste Survey of Living Standards (Government of Timor Leste, 2007); and
- Timor Leste Census (Government of Timor Leste, 2004).

Data Analysis

Data collected in the field was analysed using the method outlined by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995), which includes an initial close reading of field notes, open coding and initial memos. It was then followed by more intensive analysis through more focused reading, coding and writing integrative memos. The authors argue that in this process the research is not confined to undertaking this analysis in any particular order but rather “moves from a general reading to a close coding to writing intensive analyses and then back again” (Emerson, et al., 1995:144). To answer the second research question, transcripts for each interview were read through multiple times and themes that emerged concerning rural women’s daily experiences were coded with different highlighters, placed in a table to give a visual indication of the most common responses and experiences, and then further analysed. A similar method was used to answer the third research question relating to aspects of empowerment that interview participants may have experienced, again using highlighters to identify the different dimensions of empowerment under each of the three empowerment frameworks outlined in Chapter Two. The results were then analysed in relation to the frameworks.

Research Limitations and Data Validity

This research has three main limitations. Firstly, the scope of this research is limited to a few literacy programme participants from several rural communities within Aileu District in Timor Leste. This limitation was due to the short research period in Timor Leste and limited access to literacy programme participants in very remote rural areas requiring long travel distances. Furthermore, this research is limited to the experiences of women who are currently participating in an adult literacy programme, and did not include any women who were no longer participating. However, those interviewed did share similar experiences to rural women interviewed in a previous study examining the participation of women in an adult literacy programme in Timor Leste (Oxfam GB, 2004).

Secondly, this research was conducted by a Westerner with limited experience of East Timorese culture and no experience of having lived through a conflict. This challenge is not uncommon amongst cross-cultural researchers. While this posed a limitation to the extent of cultural understanding I have of the situation and experiences of those interviewed, the approach taken with this research sought to be one based on cultural sensitivity, respect, accountability and reciprocity.

The third limitation concerns the difficulties that arise in attempting to measure empowerment through specific and precise indicators, particularly with research undertaken in a short timeframe. This research took a flexible approach to listening and analysing the voices of the women reflecting on their lives and educational experiences. Taking into consideration concerns around data validity in taking a less structured approach to analysing aspects of empowerment, I felt that attempting to anticipate and document every type of finding or indicator in advance might unconsciously lead to being less open to unusual or unexpected findings. Such an approach would also be a risk in terms of data validity because the researcher could become locked into following a specific script that would lead them to overlook unexpected but important aspects of the findings.

Due to the limited time available for meeting participants, building rapport and conducting the interviews (all interviews took place as part of the first meeting between researcher and literacy programme participant), a flexible approach, being one which privileges the women's own reflections about their lives and any changes that had taken place since their participation in the programme as opposed to attempting to categorise responses under specific indicators, was deemed the most appropriate for the research context. It was felt that such an approach also held greater prospects for creating an enabling environment for empowerment through an atmosphere of respect that recognised what may be empowering for one person would not necessarily be empowering for another person. Once the research findings had been analysed a summary of the findings was provided to ARTC for their feedback on the findings and analysis and to pass on to the interview participants for their feedback on the findings and how they felt they had been represented.

Chapter Summary

In summary, Chapter Five outlined the qualitative methodology used to guide the research process. The chapter began by discussing the qualitative nature of the current inquiry into adult literacy and women's empowerment, and its constructivist ontological roots which views the world as having multiple realities that are socially constructed. The focus then turned to feminist insights, which highlighted the need for a research methodology that is grounded in the lived experiences and daily realities of women's lives. The three key research questions that guided the thesis inquiry were then presented, followed by a discussion concerning the selection of the research site, insider/outsider issues that occur during cross-cultural research, examination of the researcher's positionality and reflectivity in the research process, and planning for fieldwork. The difficulties experienced during the collection of primary data through focus group discussions and individual interviews were then highlighted, and the chapter concluded with an analysis of the limitations of the research and data validity. Chapter Six will present the first part of the research findings to answer the second research question of this thesis, followed by a discussion of the researcher's reflections on the findings.

Chapter Six: Women's Experiences of Rural Life Within an Adult Literacy Programme in Aileu

Introduction

Understanding the lived reality and experiences of women is important for understanding how rural women use literacy in their daily lives, how literacy programmes can more effectively assist rural women with meeting their needs and interests, and understanding what motivates rural women to seek out and participate in literacy programmes. Walter maintains that “the first step in examining the participation of women in literacy education is perhaps to illuminate their lifeworlds: to make women visible as adult learners distinct from men” (Walter, 2004:436). Thus gaining an understanding of women's reproductive, productive and community roles (triple role) provides insight into the ways in which literacy supports or hinders their gender-defined roles. This chapter in presenting and analysing the research findings seeks to answer the second research question:

Question 2: What are the daily experiences of rural women who participate in non-formal adult literacy programmes, and how do these programmes respond to rural women's needs and interests?

The above question will be answered in two parts. The first section will discuss the daily experiences of rural women who participate in the non-formal adult literacy programme to provide the context for understanding their motivation to learn literacy. The discussion will focus on their gendered roles, participation in decision-making, and the challenges they face concerning money, transportation, early marriage, large families, and illness. The second section will discuss the ways women use literacy in their daily lives and how non-formal adult literacy programmes respond to women's needs and interests. These needs and interests include caring for family, accessing opportunities, reducing vulnerability, accessing and understanding important information, and targeted

programme support. Quotes will be used to highlight women's experiences in their own words so as to provide a space for their unique voice to be shown and thus heard.

Rural Women's Daily Experiences

As discussed in Chapter Three, the aim of most adult literacy programmes has been to encourage greater involvement of women in the social, economic and political spheres, and more recently to empower women. However, education in itself is not enough to overcome gender inequality (Jayaweera, 1997). Walter (2004) underscores the importance of examining gender roles and relations as a means to analysing and understanding why and how women participate in literacy programmes. Analysing women's daily experiences will also help to identify their reproductive and productive work, and rural women's practical needs (those immediate needs relating to food, shelter and health) and strategic needs (reducing inequality and the transformation of the unequal division of labour).

Women's Gendered Roles

Identifying and examining the gendered roles of rural women in Timor Leste provides an important insight into understanding and explaining women's participation, or lack thereof, in development programmes. Urban-based women in Timor Leste tend to have more freedom to explore opportunities outside of the home, which may be a consequence of not only more opportunities to attend educational institutions in terms of access and availability, but also due to more employment opportunities in urban areas as a result of the large urban-based international community. As shown in Chapter Four, women in Timor Leste have traditionally been restricted to the domestic sphere and reproductive work, leaving them little time to engage in activities outside of the home or field. The research findings that will be discussed next concur with this assessment in highlighting that the daily lives of rural women in Aileu are still characterised by reproductive work (i.e. caring for the family) and unpaid productive work (i.e. informal sector and subsistence farming activities).

The activities that rural men and women in Aileu are engaged in are defined by their traditional gendered roles. Men in Aileu are ultimately the head of the family and final decision-making rests with them. Typical of men in other areas of Timor Leste they tend to represent the household at *suco* meetings and are responsible for building houses and furniture, chopping down wood, preparing the fields for planting,³⁴ looking after the larger animals, and selling surplus produce from the fields. The research findings suggest that women in Aileu are not a homogenous group, and that their family situation, particularly where widows and female-headed households are concerned, influence the types of activities that women undertake and the opportunities that are available to them.

Jose illustrates the role of men in his family in Aileu:

I go to the field and work as a man, men's job is to go to the field, build a house and as a leader in the family. In my house the women don't go to the field. The women look after the children, keep the house in order, washing and cooking (Interview: Jose – Male interview participant).

Bela similarly acknowledges the role of men in her family:

My husband's special role is to prepare the land for planting, only this can be done by men. And to build a house, we [women] only go to rice field for planting the rice (Interview: Bela).

Women are responsible for activities within the home, including looking after the children, preparing meals, cleaning the house, looking after guests, collecting water, preparing the children for school and caring for the sick. In addition to 'reproductive' work within the home women are also responsible for 'productive' work in the field undertaking activities such as planting, watering and harvesting vegetables for both personal use and selling, feeding the animals, and harvesting coffee beans from the

³⁴ Some women noted that they also assist with preparing the fields, however, men are solely responsible for ploughing the fields.

Coffea plant. Some women are also involved in selling surplus produce from the field at the market and running small kiosks.

Mabu's daily activities are typical of the women interviewed:

My daily activities are that I look after my children, send them to school, and then cook. In the morning I wake my children up, prepare breakfast, clean the room, clean the garden, tell the children to wash the plates, boil the water and make some coffee, eat cassava or sweet potato or corn, and if we can buy rice I will cook this for my children, feed them and send them to school. After that I can do some work at home or go to the field (Interview: Mabu).

While these activities are predominantly the responsibility of women the women interviewed highlighted that men would only assist with 'women's jobs' when the women were unable to perform them for various reasons, and supported them with caring for the children.

Men also help with these jobs if we are not able to do them, but only then he will help (Interview: Armandina).

Men help with the cooking and children sometimes if women are sick...or when we go out some place (Interview: Martina).

The boys in the family help, they always help to plant coffee or some plants, go to the field, plant cassava, plant sweet potato and many things. They always help with cooking and washing (Interview: Mabu³⁵).

In the case of Mabu highlighted above, as a widow she relies on all of her children to assist her with the household chores. In such cases it may be that the male children take on more of those tasks traditionally associated with women's gendered roles to support the mother.

³⁵ Mabu is a widow with children.

While men did at times assist with those activities that women are traditionally responsible for, the research findings suggest that this was only when the activities did not coincide or conflict with the men's activities.

If sometimes my husband does not go to his course then he will look after the children (Interview: Silvina).

If my children are healthy, and nobody sick, then both of us will go to the [community] meeting. If one of my children is sick then only he will go to the meeting and I will look after the children (Interview: Bela).

Sometimes I need to miss [literacy] class because now my husband attends training once a month. When he goes to the training I stay at home and look after the children and cooking, but when he finishes the training he will look after the children and I will go to school (Interview: Bela).

In common with other rural contexts the research findings suggest that women in Aileu tend to bear the greater burden of workload in comparison to men. The research findings also suggest that in some situations women viewed men as taking advantage of women's gendered roles by refusing to work and relying on the women to carry out all the work required to enable the family to survive, and this at times led to conflict between the husband and wife.

Men are weak and have no energy to do things. They just stay at home. We take some cassava from the field, and they only feed the pigs. The women argue that all of us need to work, because this food is not only for me. But the men that are weak they cannot do the heavy work (Interview: Emelia).

Some men go to work and some stay home. This can cause problems. If women go to the field and men just stay at home, then the violence will happen. Men just stay

at home, just sit and do nothing, so when the women get back from the field the husbands and wives will fight each other. All the men here are the same, they go to the field, but when it is sunny they will be back home soon (Interview: Elizabeth).

Due to the intense field-driven workload, women reported pooling their resources and working together to carry out work on their plots of land. This helped them to achieve greater productivity through strength in numbers than they would working alone, and enabled them to spend time with each other.

Men do less because they are weak. Men build a house, men help look after the small field, only that. Women make a group to work one day on somebody's field and so on, so that all the fields are done in time (Interview: Emelia).

In summary, the research findings highlighted above show that the daily activities women are involved in are defined by their traditional gendered roles, and while men are ultimately the head of the family women's gendered roles tend to bear the greater burden of workload. The women interviewed highlighted that men would help them with 'women's' activities, but only if women were unable to complete them due to ill health and/or these activities did not clash with the men's activities. The heavy workload borne by women in comparison to the men at times leads to conflict between husbands and wives. Yet at the same time it encourages women, who might otherwise have very little to do with each other, to work together to reach common goals, such as planting and harvesting their fields together. Thus, it creates an opportunity for women to meet together that might not exist if women were confined to the home.

Decision Making

When asked about the responsibility for decision-making the women interviewed felt that in general decisions were made equally in the family and this equality was viewed in terms of the husband and wife consulting each other when making decisions

that affected the family. However, they reported that the final decision-making authority rested with the men in the family who remained the traditional head of the household.

We decide together. I also go to the community meetings and feel comfortable speaking at the meeting (Interview: Armandina).

Both men and women go to the community meeting. Women also speak at the community meeting (Interview: Alianco).

We have equal decision-making. For example if we have no money and he wants to borrow money from my family he will ask my opinion first, and if I say yes he will borrow but if I say I am not able to pay again he will not borrow, he always listens to me (Interview: Bela).

Sometimes we decide things together. I give him an idea [that] “this is a good way to do things” and he will also do the same to me (Interview: Silvina).

It was, however, noted in an interview with one participant that while many of the men and women believed that equal rights existed in their community this is not necessarily always practiced in reality.

Men and women have equal rights, but some don't practice. For example, men and women in the family, men go to the field and women stay at home. Also, before I can attend the community meeting I need to prepare a breakfast for my husband (Interview: Mabu).

Participants observed that whether equal rights existed in a family depended on each individual family and that at times inequality between men and women resulted in domestic violence, which has been a significant problem in Aileu according to one key informant (Interview: Director, ARTC). However, this was slowly changing as the communities received education and information on the rights of women and the harms

of domestic violence. Women are increasingly gaining confidence to speak out against such abuse rather than keep it a secret. Cornelia, a literacy programme participant, noted that conflict would arise in families where decision-making between the husband and wife was not equal:

I think we have equal rights, if we don't then our family will have a big problem. Equal rights helps prevent conflict in our family (Interview: Cornelia).

As community decision-making authority ultimately rests with the Chefe de Suco³⁶ or Chefe de Aldeia, participant's thoughts were sought on whether men and women participated equally in community meetings and contributed their voices to decision-making processes. The findings suggest that generally women were not afraid to go to the meetings or to speak up, however, their reproductive work often meant that they were unable to attend community meetings when one parent was required to stay home and look after the children.

When I came to Aileu I noticed that some customs here are different. There are equal rights. Both the husband and the wife attend community meetings. I feel confident to speak at the community meetings. Sometimes we prepare a question to ask, but the meeting is not long enough and sometimes there is only time for three or four people to speak (Interview: Silvina).

Men and women make the same decisions, men and women can do the same things, but if there are some meetings then sometimes only one can go and one needs to stay at home, if it is a suco meeting then both men and women need to go (Interview: Emelia).

One participant, Cornelia, noted that forms of inequality between men and women were perpetuated by differences in the beliefs of the Chefe de Suco or Chefe de Aldeia

³⁶ Chefe de Suco is the name given to Chiefs of communities, and chefe de aldeia is the name given to the head of a small hamlet or group of dwellings (see Chapter Four).

and this led to conflict in the family when men and women then disagreed over which leader they would listen to. When discussing whether equal rights existed between men and women in the community, Cornelia observed that

Sometimes equal rights, sometimes not. Not equal because the Chefe de Suco speaks one thing, and Chefe de Aldeia speaks another thing that is a different idea. This affects men and women's rights because one Chefe says to go to school and another says not to, so it causes different ideas in the family (Interview: Cornelia).

However, the Chefe de Suco or Chefe de Aldeia were also important proponents of women's participation in community meetings, and in ensuring that education concerning, for example, the harms of domestic violence reached the communities by making it mandatory for community members to attend the meeting.

If Chefe de Suco announce that both men and women need to go to the meeting we will go there so that we can hear women's voice and men's voice. Men are happy for women to attend because then the women go to the meeting and hear important morals...and they get advice on how to educate their young children who are having no respect for each other (Interview: Mabu).

In summary, the research findings suggest that while there is a general belief amongst the women that equal rights do exist in the community in reality the extent to which they are practiced depends on individual families. The findings also showed that community leaders play an important role in facilitating, and in some cases inhibiting, equal rights between men and women. Furthermore, while women can attend and do indeed attend community meetings, if time is limited or one parent needs to remain at home to care for the children then the men will attend and therefore men's voice will dominate in community decision-making.

Lack of Money

A lack of money was frequently cited as one of the greatest challenges for rural women. A combination of limited wage-employment and income generating activities in rural areas, long days in the field engaged in informal subsistence farming, expensive transportation costs, and low prices for produce resulted in a situation of scarce monetary resources in a rural economy that is becoming increasingly formal and monetised. Women highlighted the challenges they faced in relation to money and how this impacted upon their family:

The problem is money to buy books and shoes for our children. If there is no money then we need to borrow from someone to meet our needs until it is time to sell coffee and orange, then we sell that to get money to give back to the people we borrowed the money from (Interview: Fatima).

When our children want to go to school we are not able to send them to school because our income is very low. So, planting vegetables can help us to send our children to school. Our daily work is divided into two parts, firstly for our daily food and secondly for our children's study. If there is only enough for our daily food then our children will not go to school (Interview: Jacinta).

If we depend on coffee, this year if it gives coffee bean that is good, but no bean means no money. Or, if it is raining during the whole week it means no food. If you have money you can buy food, but if no money then no food (Interview: Jacinta).

The lack of income or stable income also impacts on the ability of rural families to pay for costs associated with their children's schooling, such as school uniforms and resources such as pencils and books. The women interviewed reported that those costs associated with their children's schooling were a serious concern and challenge for them.

I face problems because it's hard to get money. If we sell the vegetables and we get money then I can use that for my children – to buy books for them. If we don't sell the vegetables then the children will ask me for money but I can't give them anything. If we can't sell the vegetables we will eat them (Interview: Mabu).

If there is no money then we will sell our animals: goats, pigs, and chickens to support our children's study. If we don't have any animals then we will borrow from our relatives (Interview: Emelia).

Because I have many children I am thinking about where we will find the money to send them to school (Interview: Armandina).

Sometimes we are planting the field but then sometimes there is no food from it. So, we need to make a vegetable garden and then sell the vegetables to support our children to go to school (Interview: Alianco).

To summarise, the lack of money in rural communities due to the limited availability of paid employment, along with low prices for produce from the fields and limited access to markets, severely constrains women's ability to provide for the needs of their family as part of their gendered role. The research findings highlight how costs associated with children's schooling and medical costs to cover a family member's illness, compounded with low yields from their fields, makes families vulnerable to food insecurity and can force them to sell the few assets they have such as livestock. With limited welfare options available families must borrow off other members of their family, or moneylenders, and risk becoming further entrenched in a cycle of debt with each successive crisis.

Lack of Transportation

The lack of transportation is a significant challenge to women's mobility and their ability to access markets to sell their produce. Travelling by foot is time consuming and

other activities such as attending literacy class are dropped as a consequence when for example family members are ill and need to be taken on foot to the medical clinic, or medicine needs to be collected from the clinic which is many hours walk away.

The problems we face are that if some of us are sick then we need to go to the hospital and the hospital is far away, and sometimes there is no transportation, therefore we will not go to class (Interview: Martina).

It is hard for us to catch the public transportation here, so if we want to make some money it is hard, for instance if I want to sell something in Dili it is hard because there is no transportation here (Interview: Manuela).

The legacy of forced movement into ‘strategic villages’ during the Indonesian occupation, which has led to continuing conflict over land, has also meant that many of the interview participants live far away from their fields. With heavy workloads, and due to the lack of transport, they must spend a significant amount of time travelling back and forth between their home, fields and literacy class.

When I go to the mountain [the fields], I will not go to class. The field is far away from class so sometimes I have to miss class (Interview: Elizabeth).

In my family I have lots of work to do, we need to have time to go to school, time to go to the field, to plant coffee, and plant the vegetables so that we can earn money for food. We use the money to buy uniforms for our children and for our daily needs. If we don’t do all of those things then we cant get money (Interview: Cornelia).

In summary, the research findings highlight the significant impact limited transportation in the rural areas has on women’s mobility and their ability to reach markets to sell their surplus produce from the fields. Furthermore, the lack of transport and distance between homes and fields means that women spend much of their time

commuting between the two, leaving less time available for them to participate in literacy programmes.

Early Marriage and Large Families

Interview participants had on average between six and seven³⁷ children each reflecting a high fertility rate, and as all but two of the participants were under the age of 60 this suggests that interview participants have tended to either marry young or experienced a high frequency of birth. This has important consequences for many areas of women's lives, including health, mobility outside of the home, and the time available to access educational and training opportunities.

Because we are married young we have not learnt to speak so well, and I have not learnt so much, so we want to come here to the class and learn, to know something...because we don't understand things (Interview: Armandina).

Before I didn't go to school because I gave birth every year, one child every year. Because of this I don't have enough energy to work. When some of my children go off to school then I stay at home and look after my little children and wait until the older children get back from school. Then the older children take care of my little children and I can do another job like the vegetable garden (Interview: Alianco).

Early marriage can also impact on the value that families assign to educating girls in their family when financial resources are stretched and, as outlined in Chapters Two and Four, may also influence the decision to educate boys over girls due to the common occurrence of women leaving their village upon marriage to live in their husband's village.

³⁷ The average is based on those participants that supplied information concerning the number of children they had given birth to. Five participants did not identify the number of children in their family and therefore were not included in the calculation.

Before I went to school in Dili, but only until fourth grade primary school, because my parents didn't have enough money to send me to school, then I came to Aileu from Dili because I got married and came to live here (Interview: Odete).

However, the findings also suggest that the husbands and families of many of these women are supportive of their wives attending literacy class and the benefits they view education as having for the family.

My family supports me because I can learn many things and I can get information, and the Director of ARTC came here to tell us good things, and then we pass on the information to our family at home. So our family wants us to study...and our school time is our free time. We could just stay at home with the children, but it is better if we can come here and learn something (Interview: Jacinta).

The incidence of large families often impacts on the time women have available to work in their fields and attend literacy class. The lives of women who have children revolve around caring for them, and older children are often relied on to look after the younger children so that the mothers can be released from their reproductive work to attend literacy class or work in the field.

We need to wait until the big children get back from school and then they can look after the little children so we can attend literacy class. I want to continue in the literacy programme but the problem is that all of my bigger children now go to school and there is not enough time for me to attend (Interview: Fatima).

When I give birth I will not go to literacy class until two or three months have passed. If my children are still babies then I will not go because if we go and our children are crying we cannot study. And if nobody can look after our children we will not come (Interview: Jacinta).

My children go to school every day. On holiday they can help me to look after my little children, but when they go to school I will look after my little children, cook for them so when they get back from school they can eat (Interview: Alianco).

To summarise, the research findings show that early marriage and high fertility rate amongst women have a significant impact on women's mobility outside of the home and the time women have available to attend literacy programmes. As childcare is rarely available outside of the family it is often left to the older children to take care of the younger children to release the mother to go and work in the field. Furthermore, while programme participants are given their own copies of *Hakat ba Oin* and *Iha Dalan*, which enables them to work through literacy activities in the books when they are unable to attend class, there is little personal time available to women at home and they find it difficult to concentrate on learning when their children want attention.

Illness

Interview participants reported that seeking medical treatment for themselves or family members took up significant time particularly when they needed to travel to medical clinics for diagnosis, medical care or medicine. It can also be costly for families in terms of lost productivity in the fields and the financial expense incurred purchasing medicine and transportation.

The problem is sickness The children get sick, so then there is no money and no food (Interview: Elizabeth).

I need to miss days because I need to do work for my family, and I also miss class sometimes when my children are sick or I am sick. I live far from the programme and the rain makes it hard because I have to walk many hours in the rain and my children will get sick (Interview: Mabu).

Sometimes the children are sick, and sometimes my husband also sick and I need to do all the work alone (Interview: Armandina).

In summary, illness or caring for family members with illness impacts heavily on the ability of women to attend to their other responsibilities. Illness also limits women's opportunities to access opportunities such as literacy classes and adds to their financial woes.

Reflections on Findings

This section sought to answer part one of the second research question that guided this thesis research '**what are the daily experiences of rural women who participate in non-formal adult literacy programmes?**' The women interviewed shared that their daily lives in the rural areas of Aileu revolved around their traditional gender defined reproductive work, involving caring for the family and the house, and their unpaid productive work in the field and selling produce from the field. The research findings indicate that meeting their family's practical took precedence over activities aimed at achieving their strategic needs. It was also apparent from the interviews that the majority of the women participating in the literacy programme also lacked access to even the basic material, human and social resources that would enhance their ability to exercise meaningful choice.

Rural women's access to resources and financial means of support are limited for a number of reasons. The lack of transportation infrastructure heavily impacts upon women's mobility and the time they have available to attend to their responsibilities. This in turn impacts upon their ability to attend literacy class literacy class. Furthermore, subsistence farming and the informal sector currently sustain low productivity levels and offer limited opportunities to access agricultural technology, and where resources may be available to improve their farming methods they have limited funds available to invest in these resources. Women's access to agricultural technology such as farming machinery, which could reduce women's workload in the field, appear to be extremely limited and almost non-existent for the majority of rural farmers. This is due to a lack of financial

means to invest in such technology, limited access to information about alternative farming methods and technology in the rural areas, and limited access to storage facilities and markets for farmers surplus produce to enable them to make a profit. However, the past has shown that even if women do gain access to such technology women may still be sidelined by men who take over such modern means of production, leaving women once again limited to working in the unpaid informal sector (Rathgeber, 1990).

As highlighted in Chapter Two, proponents of the GAD approach have argued that the gender division of labour and gender norms which mean women have little control over things like their sexuality or movement outside the house negatively impacts on women's participation in education programmes. The research findings suggest this is also true of the experience of rural women living in Aileu. With limited access to resources and finance women experience a considerable burden in carrying out their daily activities, leaving little time to participate in literacy programmes. Early marriage and the incidence of large families impacts heavily on the time and energy women have available to engage in opportunities and activities outside of the domestic sphere. Their community roles, which involve time and labour intensive activities such as welcoming guests and caring for the sick and the elderly in the community continue to go unpaid and reflect the unequal division of labour between men and women in Timor Leste society. Thus it is vital that development and education planners recognise and understand how women's specific gender needs differ from men's in order to tailor policies and initiatives to women's specific gender needs and interests.

Though difficult, rural women are striving to balance the requirements of their reproductive, productive and community roles with accessing opportunities that are opening up to them. Women are increasingly accessing social resources such as literacy programmes, and these are assisting women with achieving a level of literacy that can enable them to learn new skills, access information, participate in vocational training programmes, and gain employment in the paid formal sector. The next section will answer the second part of question two by considering how adult literacy programmes are responding to rural women's needs and interests.

Responding to Rural Women's Needs and Interests

As discussed in Chapter Four, the non-formal adult literacy programme was not the first programme ARTC partnered with the communities in Aileu on. Working in partnership with the communities to identify community needs ARTC and the communities initially identified that reforestation and increasing vegetable yields were areas of great importance to the communities. However, for community members to access further vocational training programmes in these two areas a basic level of literacy in Tetum or Portuguese was required.

Literacy is used for a variety of activities in the community, as Mabu explains:

With literacy I can learn more, I always use literacy, I use literacy in my job, at my house, to read and write, to teach my children, to read the prayer book, the bible, the newspaper, and also to learn more and then teach my children to do good things for themselves in the future (Interview: Mabu).

Due to the low level of literacy amongst community members, and bearing in mind that the majority of people do not have literacy skills in their vernacular or mother tongue language, literacy was identified as another pressing need for the communities. ARTC set about working with the communities, and the Non-formal Directorate of the Ministry of Education, to design and deliver a literacy programme based on contextually relevant resources and curriculum.

Firstly, ARTC started with a reforestation programme, then we started planting vegetables, then we felt that we wanted to go to school. So we asked the Sister³⁸ if she could talk about it with the Director of ARTC so that we could learn how to read and write (Interview: Cornelia).

In addition to the requirement of literacy for participation in vocational training

³⁸ The 'sister' the women refer to in the interviews is a Maryknoll (Catholic Mission movement) Sister who works with ARTC to deliver programmes to the communities.

programmes the women and key informants interviewed also highlighted measures by the Government of Timor Leste to ‘encourage’ rural communities, particularly older women, to learn literacy. Such measures included making it compulsory for people to sign their name in order to receive money from the Government, including their pension (Interview: Chefe de Non-Formal Education Aileu), as Elizabeth explains:

Because when we go to the administration to receive the money from the government we need to sign our name. So when the Sister and our Director came here to run the literacy programme we needed to learn. It is because of having to learn to write our name that we must attend this course (Interview: Elizabeth).

Literacy is also now a requirement for being considered for employment within some government institutions, for example school kitchens:

I really want to come to the literacy class because everything needs a Certificate or Diploma now. To be a cook you need a Certificate, and also for washing dishes you need a Certificate. To cook for Primary, Junior High School and Secondary School we now need a Certificate, so I really want to study so I can get this job (Interview: Manuela).

To summarise, the research findings show how ARTC has worked with the communities to identify, understand and address their needs and interests. While ARTC did not originally set out to provide the adult literacy programme the need for literacy training in the communities quickly became apparent and ARTC refocused their efforts on providing a non-formal adult literacy programme to the illiterate women and men in the communities.

Educating and Caring for Family Members

The women interviewed frequently cited the ability to assist their children and family members with their newfound literacy skills as being an important motivating

factor for learning literacy, which in turn had motivated them to encourage others, particularly their children, to become literate.

I feel that before when I hadn't gone to school, and my children talked about school, I only had my knowledge of the field to answer them. But when I joined the literacy group and I started to write I also started to educate my children to go to school. I think this program is successful for me and now I am aware to push all of my children to go to school (Interview: Cornelia).

After attending this course I can read. Aside from reading the news and writing my name I can help my children when they get back from school. I can help them check their work and I check their report card, and also their spelling and counting (Interview: Odete).

Another motivating factor for one woman was that literacy enabled her to be a better parent by having more knowledge about the activities her children were involved in:

Our willingness is to know how to read and write so that if one of our daughters wants to tell us a lie about a love letter then we will know. Because of this we as old people want to go to school as well, so that we can look after our children. If we don't learn then we can only speak, and something written like this [love letter] will be in front of us but we don't know what it is. Because of this we want to go to school (Interview: Fatima).

Helping older family members who had missed out on schooling during the Portuguese colonial administration and Indonesian occupation and struggled with print media was another important motivation for the women interviewed to attend the literacy programme.

Apart from teaching my children I can help my family. For example, if my parents

don't know how to read something I can help them and if they don't know how to count the money I can help them. I study and I know something so I can help them. They are old and if they don't know how to read then they will not know how to count the money as well, so some people will be able to tell them a lie. Therefore, I need to help them. Also I help them to read the medicine label, and when they go to the office to receive money from the government they cant read the name of the office so I can let them know the correct office (Interview: Jacinta).

In summary, the research findings highlight how the literacy programme is assisting women with carrying out their daily literacy activities, and in assisting their family members particularly the elderly and children with their literacy activities. Furthermore, parents noted that learning literacy provided an important means for them check on their children and be better parents, not only in respect to their children's educational development but also to prevent their children from taking advantage of certain situations where due to the lack of literacy parents may be unaware of activities their children are involved in.

Accessing Opportunities

Accessing educational activities that were previously denied to them, particularly for the older generation that lived under Portuguese rule and Indonesian occupation, is viewed as an important new opportunity for many of the interview participants. Equally important is the delivery of information about the availability of these activities to rural populations who have limited access to information, or may be unable to read this information and therefore rely on service providers and NGOs to inform them via other means, such as village visits. As Fatima explains:

In our life before only the children could go to school, the old people could not. But now old people can also go to school. So, we heard the information about the literacy class and we have a willingness to attend. If we don't hear or see the

information about the literacy class then we will not come, but because we hear that this is a good thing that has come and found us then we must take it (Interview: Fatima).

I did not finish my study because of the war. I only studied until the third grade, so during the Indonesian time I worked as a motivator in the church. Finally I started to go to school again to learn good things, to teach our children again, and then one day they will become human beings (Interview: Mabu).

In summary, participating in the adult literacy programme not only enables women to learn a new skill and access important information, it also provides a symbolic return to schooling that was previously denied to them. The women participating in the programme understand that there is power in knowledge, and that the information they receive through the literacy programme by way of their newfound reading and writing skills and from the facilitators and coordinators who pass on important information they have received in turn benefits their families. It is apparent in the research findings that educating women also has a positive flow on effect for the importance they associate with educating their children.

Reducing Vulnerability

Interview participants were concerned about the disadvantage illiteracy posed in terms of being taken advantage of by people who viewed illiterate women as an easier target to cheat. Several participants noted that literacy either helped them already with their economic activities such as weighing coffee and counting money, or was a motivating factor for their participation in the literacy programme as this skill would help them avoid being taken advantage of in the future.

We want to know how to write our name, and if someone sells false medicine to us we will know if the name of the medicine is correct or not. If we do not go to school then we will not know if someone tells us a lie, and maybe somebody will

use our name to their advantage and we would not know (Interview: Fatima).

Literacy can help me in the future. For example counting, because before we don't know how to count and when people came here to weigh our coffee they count by themselves, but now when they come to weigh the coffee we can also read and count by ourselves to check (Interview: Martina).

To summarise, the vulnerability that women feel as a result of being illiterate is a significant motivating factor for their participation in the literacy programme. Furthermore, with the formal modern economy and development activity slowly etching its way into the rural areas it will be vitally important for communities to understand the information that is being presented to them. Because formal information is often presented in written form literacy skills will better enable communities to be aware of those opportunities that will be beneficial for them, and help them to avoid signing up to business ventures that may take advantage of them

Accessing and Understanding Important Information

Print media is becoming increasingly available in rural areas as a way to communicate although in general it is still fairly limited. Examples of print media available in rural areas and used by the women interviewed include: basic curriculum materials such as Hakat ba Oin and Iha Dalan; Lafaek magazine; prayer books; letters from the Government and Church; medicine labels; building names; and identity cards.

I accept some help from the government and when they come and give me the identity card I can read it. I can write my name as well (Interview: Cornelia).

Literacy helps me. For instance, if I receive a letter from the Church, Government or Chefe de Suco then we can do as they say (Interview: Mabu).

Literacy also assisted the interview participants with seeking help from their

community leaders and government officials in terms of understanding the information they were given, and also in requesting assistance.

Because my children are fatherless, and I am a widow, that is why I want literacy, it helps me ask for help from the Sisters, and helps me to tell the government to help the fatherless children and widows because the war destroyed all their things (Interview: Mabu).

Literacy helps with knowledge and to study more so that when the Chefe de Suco or Chefe de Aldeia holds a meeting if we are not satisfied with their speech we can ask them a question (Interview: Mabu).

Before I came to school many opportunities were coming for us but we did not know how to read and write. We attended some meeting but we did not understand anything from the meeting, and if there are some questions we were too afraid to answer. But now that we are learning how to read and write we can feel more confidence to read something and I can write my name when they ask me to write (Interview: Jacinta)

In summary, with the ever-increasing use of print media in the rural areas women are finding that gaining literacy skills is helping them to access and understand important information concerning their community, church and government. It is also helping to build their confidence to ask questions about the information they are receiving and to request further assistance from the government where before they were too shy to speak out.

Targeted Programme Support

When asked about what they liked most about the literacy programme, one women interviewed compared the way the ARTC programme was run to the Government programme that followed a similar curriculum and also used facilitators to deliver the

programme:

I like the programme that is run by ARTC because before I attended the programme that was run by the Government, but the Government [facilitators] only used our name to earn money from that. We studied there for two years, but we didn't get any certificate. So, we like most the programme that is run by the Sister and Director because they always come and check on us (Interview: Manuela).

Another participant highlighted the importance that spending time explaining the literacy programme, and also the influence that certain institutions the literacy programme is aligned to, can have on their motivation to attend the programme:

If the government provides the programme then we will not go. But because this programme is with the Church, because it is related to the Sisters, then all of us decided to accept it because it is from God. The government programme just came and opened without giving us any explanation first (Interview: Emelia).

To summarise, targeted programme support helps to ensure that the programme is locally driven and supports the needs and interests identified by community. Taking the time to adequately explain the programme, its aims, objectives and long-term goals in relation to the community's needs and interests helps to build greater trust between the community and those delivering the programme. Thus improving the chances of greater participation levels and the sustainability of the programme. It is also interesting to note that many in the communities had rejected the government-run non-formal adult literacy programme that also used the Hakat ba Oin/Iha Dalan curriculum. The reason for this is two-fold. Firstly, the adult literacy programme delivered by ARTC is strongly associated with the Church which has a long-standing presence in Aileu and is viewed as a trustworthy institution by the community, which predominantly follows the Christian faith. Secondly, ARTC spent significant time working in partnership with the communities to understand their challenges and their needs, and to explain how the

literacy programme could help them. This is in contrast to the perception of the government-run adult literacy programme which some of the women interviewed felt had been opened without proper consultation with the communities, and which they viewed with distrust as a result.

Reflections on Findings

This section sought to answer the later part of the second research question: **‘how do adult literacy programmes respond to rural women’s needs and interests?’** Throughout the discussions with key informants and literacy participants, illiteracy was not identified as a reason to prevent people from participating in political sphere and decision-making per se. Rather, the findings suggest that it is the lack of confidence that illiterate people experienced that impacted on their level of participation at community meetings and in accessing information. In this sense, literacy programmes are responding to rural women’s needs and interests by assisting women with accessing written information (e.g. important letters from the government etc), with feeling more confident to participate in community meetings, and with requesting help from the government for those who experience hardship (widows, mentally ill, orphans etc). For many of the women participating in the literacy programme has provided a symbolic return to schooling that was denied to them as children, and increased their hope that gaining new knowledge and literacy skills would afford them and their families better opportunities in the future.

Overall, women’s motivation to participate in the literacy programme appeared to have more to do with addressing their practical gender needs and interests over their strategic gender needs and interests. For example, most of the women talked about how literacy would help them learn the skills required for employment, and provide opportunities to participate in present and future income-generating activities to assist them with meeting the costs of food, children’s schooling and healthcare. Thus, the women are interested in learning literacy skills that will help them to meet their practical needs as opposed to their strategic needs.

To ensure that the adult literacy programme is meaningful to the women the programme seeks to assist women in learning the literacy skills that will in turn enable them in meeting their daily practical needs. In doing so the programme tends to follow in the WID tradition, whereby the literacy skills are related to women's practical gender needs, and tends to reinforce women's reproductive roles rather than transform the unequal distribution of labour (Robinson-Plant, 2004b:21). Strategic gender needs, which address women's subordinate position in society and challenge gender inequality were not identified by the women as being an important motivational factor for their participation in the literacy programme. Next, Chapter Seven will present the second part of the research findings to answer the third research question of this thesis, followed by a discussion of the researcher's reflections on the findings.

Chapter Seven: Adult Literacy and the Empowerment of Women in Aileu

Introduction

This chapter seeks to answer the third research question through a discussion of the ways in which individual women have experienced empowerment. An analysis of the experiences the women shared in the interviews will be guided by the empowerment frameworks presented by Rowlands (1995), Kabeer (1999) and Stromquist (1993) outlined in Chapter Three. As in Chapter Six, quotes will be used to demonstrate instances in which the women interviewed have experienced feelings of empowerment in relation to the dimensions outlined in the three frameworks.

Question 3: In what ways have individual women in this non-formal adult literacy programme experienced empowerment, and how have these programmes contributed to rural women's empowerment in Timor Leste?

Rural Women's Experiences of Empowerment

The next section seeks to answer the first part of the third research question: **'in what ways have individual women in this adult literacy programme experienced empowerment?'** The second part of question three, **'how have these programmes contributed to rural women's empowerment in Timor Leste?'** will then be discussed in the 'reflections on findings' section.

Personal Relationships, Close Relationships and Collective Empowerment

Rowlands' conceptualisation of empowerment is underscored by the premise that empowerment is essentially "about bringing people who are outside the decision-making process into it" (1995:102). In many ways rural women in Timor Leste have been denied choices, particularly in the strategic areas of their lives, and have been left out of the decision-making process at the family, community and national level as a consequence of

their gender-defined roles. Increasingly though rural women are gaining greater confidence to speak up and have their voices heard by family members, their community, and the government. Research findings suggest that participating in the adult literacy programme is slowly helping to build women's personal confidence, supports their close relationships with family members, and is encouraging collective support mechanisms that in future could lead to a greater voice for rural women in decision-making.

According to Rowlands, empowerment in the personal dimension is the process by which people overcome the oppression they have internalised by developing their personal identity, capacity and belief in self (1995:103), in other words, the 'power within'. The personal empowerment dimension is also similar to Stromquist's (1993) psychological dimension of empowerment. Most notable amongst the interview participants were examples of their personal feelings of empowerment following participation in the literacy programme and the learning of new literacy skills. Many of these examples included: increased confidence to continue studying, increased confidence to speak publically and increased confidence in being able to assist their family members, especially their children, with activities that required literacy. The term 'increased' is used here to describe the women's level of confidence because many of the women mentioned that they felt confident *before* participating in the literacy programme, perhaps as a result of the changing nature of their gendered roles during Indonesian occupation and their empowerment at having achieved a hard fought for Independence, but noted that gaining literacy skills and participating in the literacy programme had *increased* their level of confidence.

Before I was very shy about public speaking, now I have confidence. Before I didn't have the idea to support my friends to study more, to learn more, to keep going with the literacy group (Interview: Odete).

I have confidence before now, and I am still confident, more confident because we have learned how to read and write and hopefully we pass [literacy test] (Interview: Armandina).

Women also considered their participation in the literacy programme as ‘their time’, time that could be spent on improving themselves and taking time out of their daily activities to do something that would benefit them on a personal scale.

Our school time is our free time, we could just stay at home with the children but it is better if we can come here and learn something (Interview: Jacinta).

Rowlands (1995) understands the ‘close relationships’ dimension of empowerment to indicate the strengthening of the capacity and bargaining ability of individuals to determine the boundaries of relationships they enter into. While evidence of this in the interviews was not as commonplace as examples of the ‘personal empowerment’ dimension, a few stood out. Cornelia considered that her participation in the literacy programme had helped in her relationship with her husband by enabling them to understand each other better and encouraged them to talk through family issues:

The literacy programme helps, it helps because now when we speak we can better understand each other, because when you go to school you are more educated, so now if somebody speaks we can listen and understand and control ourselves (Interview: Cornelia).

Jacinta too found that her family has continued to support her to attend the literacy programme because she will then be able to pass on the information and skills to them:

My family supports me because I can learn many new things, and I can get information. The Sister and Director comes here and tells us good information, then we pass on the information to our family at home, so our family wants us to study more. Our school time is our free time, we could just stay at home with the children but it is better if we can come here and learn something (Interview: Jacinta).

Another area in which the findings suggest that women have experienced empowerment in terms of their close relationships is in their relationships with their children. Of concern to many of the interview participants was their ability to assist their children with schoolwork, and to ensure their children acted in a respectful way towards their parents. With children learning literacy skills at school, some parents who lacked literacy skills were finding that their children were becoming increasingly disrespectful towards them in their interactions. As a result, parents were finding it difficult to control their children's whereabouts because they were unable to read the school report cards, which would provide information about children's attendance and grades (Informal discussion: Manucasa literacy groups).

Rowlands' (1995) third dimension of empowerment, 'collective empowerment', or the 'power with', aims to foster cooperation between individuals on the principle that through their combined strength their impact will be greater than individually. The collective or 'power with' dimension of empowerment is emphasised by feminists as being essential to bringing about social change or transformation, in the sense that women's collective voice will be stronger in demanding change than an individual voice. While the interviews with women who participated in the literacy groups did not provide a great deal of examples that collective empowerment had taken place, there were signs that in future this may occur. Several literacy group participants from the Manucasa sub-district, with the assistance of ARTC, had formed a small income-generating group that is currently focused on learning sewing and weaving skills with the aim of being able to sell their goods in future and, importantly, to preserve the culture of their region. Normally the women in this group would not spend time together, or in some cases have even met each other, prior to forming this income-generating group as the literacy groups tended to be village-based. When asked how they felt about being part of this income-generating group the women replied:

Now we like coming together as a group, when we come together to make new things, this is something better than before (Fieldnotes: Namoleso income-

generating group).

Jacinta also noted that being part of the literacy group with other women in her community enabled them to support each other with their learning when they were not at class:

If we are on our way home we will ask each other about the things we have learned (Interview: Jacinta).

In future, building on this support that the women participating in the literacy programme are providing each other with can provide a foundation from which to further explore opportunities collectively, and can enable them to have a greater voice with their combined effort.

Resources, Agency and Achievements

Measuring social change through resources, agency and achievements is difficult due to the indeterminate nature of human agency, therefore, this present research sought to identify broad examples of these dimensions of empowerment leading to social change, and noting that while the level of social change that has been achieved may be considered small in relation to other examples, the importance of these steps towards social change should not be understated.

The lessons learned and critique of the WID approach showed that access to resources does not necessarily guarantee that women's lives will automatically improve, that their participation in decision-making will increase or become more valued, that their labour burden would be reduced, or that social transformation leading to their gender-defined role in society becoming more equal would take place. In Kabeer's (1999) framework the resource dimension of empowerment, or 'precondition' for empowerment, is not merely concerned with 'access' to resources, but rather encourages us to look at the way in which resources translate into agency and achievements. Resources consist of the

material, human and social resources that enhance the ability of a person to exercise meaningful choice.

As women explained in Chapter Six, women's access to resources is limited. The majority of women interviewed have access to the fields in which they grow vegetables for consumption and if there is a surplus to sell this at the market. Some women also have access to plants which produce the coffee bean and this also provides a source of income during good harvests. Women also keep small livestock such as pigs and chickens with men taking responsibility for the larger livestock which can be sold to pay for their children's schooling needs or when family members get sick. Women also noted that during lean periods they may need to borrow money off relatives, and that literacy assisted them with preparing a letter to their relatives to ask for assistance instead of having to meet face to face to ask for help. This alternative means of requesting assistance enabled women to 'save face' in a situation where they felt embarrassed. While important as an enabling factor for the choices that women have available to them, access to resources will not necessarily lead to greater agency and achievement. Bearing in mind the low level of resources available to rural women in Timor Leste, which reduces the ability of a person to exercise meaningful choice, there were examples from the interview participants that would suggest 'agency' had been exercised and that meaningful choices have in some respects been made.

Agency according to Kabeer, refers to "the ability to define one's goals and act upon them" or the "power within" (1999:438), its most common form being 'decision-making agency'. Agency can also be thought of as the 'process' of empowerment. When asked about how decisions were made in their family and in the wider-community the majority of the interview participants responded that decision-making was equal, but that the final decision rested with the head of the family who was a man, or the *Chefe de Suco* or *Chefe de Aldeia* for community decision-making. Women reported that they were often consulted on family decisions and felt that their husbands and other male relatives respected their voices and opinions. The interviews did not show whether their input into family decision-making was increased as a result of their newfound literacy skills and

participation in the literacy programme.

One of the difficulties in analysing whether empowerment is the result of women expressing agency concerns the context within which they do so:

I want to come to class because I am interested in studying and learning how to sew. As a woman it is our job to sew and we must know how to do this, otherwise the men will say not knowing how to sew is annoying (Interview: Odete).

In the example above, Odete is eager to learn sewing in order to fulfil her gendered role as wife and mother. Thus, while she is defining her goal, or expressing agency as Kebeer (1999:435) refers to, it is within her pre-existing gender-defined role, and therefore it is difficult to ascertain whether this is an example of empowerment to the same extent that an example where participation in the literacy programme had opened up opportunities that had previously been denied to her would be.

For many of the interview participants the opportunity to participate in education is one they had previously been denied. Kabeer (1999) understands achievements as those outcomes that embody meaningful choice. In this sense, women's participation in literacy programmes now could be considered an example of the participants expressing agency by making the conscious decision to attend the programme when there are competing activities for their time:

Before our parents did not allow us to go to school, so now we feel lucky for the opportunity to learn to read and write (Informal discussion: Manucasa literacy groups).

Cognitive, Psychological, Political and Economic Empowerment

Stromquist's (1993) cognitive component of empowerment involves the understanding of one self, the ways in which they are oppressed and subordinated and the

causes of this oppression and subordination. Throughout the interviews women highlighted several ways in which illiteracy puts them at a disadvantage in society. These included being in a position where they could be taken advantage of, feeling that because they were illiterate this meant that they were 'unclean' compared to those who were educated, and being unable to fully engage with and support their children who were now receiving an education at school. The findings from the interviews suggest that participants were aware that having been deprived of an education played a part in their subordinate position in society.

While being a motivating factor for women's participation in literacy programmes, seeing that those who were educated had greater access to jobs, skills training, greater income, and could avoid being taken advantage of, was also something that led to feelings of disempowerment amongst the women who had not had the same access to educational opportunities in the rural areas. Obtaining literacy skills and participating in the literacy programme, where an education had previously been denied to them, was viewed by many of the women as a pathway to becoming the person they aspire to be. The following examples suggest that some level of cognitive empowerment has taken place:

If someone sells us false medicine now we will know if the name of the medicine is correct or not. If we are not going to school then we will not know if someone tells us a lie, maybe somebody will use our name to their advantage and we would not know (Interview: Fatima).

We are willing to attend this program, because it will help us to become clean in some way, if we don't go we will just stay at home, just look after the children, and only attend the field, and therefore we are always dirty, no time for being clean (Interview: Fatima).

Women were also aware that their gender-defined roles were not always equal with men in the community and at times were clearly upset by this. However, in the

interviews it did not appear, or was not clear, that their understanding of this inequality was due to their involvement in the literacy programme or gaining literacy skills:

Sometimes men and women are equal, sometimes not. Some want to go to school, some want to get married. Men have the higher decision-making. The decisions that women can make are about whether we want the children to go to school. But this is also decided by the men (Interview: Fatima).

The psychological component of Stromquist's (1993) empowerment framework is concerned with overcoming aspects of 'learned helplessness' which has resulted from negative sex-role stereotypes which consider women to be the inferior and weaker sex, and increasing women's self-belief in their ability to meaningfully participate in solving problems they face. In the interviews with the women literacy programme participants, examples of psychological empowerment, where women's self-belief in their ability to meaningfully participate in solving problems or assisting their families and communities had increased, were apparent:

Before I come to school many things were coming for us but we don't know how to read and write, we attend some meeting but we don't understand anything from the meeting. And if there is some questions we were afraid to answer. But now when we know how to read and write we feel more confidence to read something and I can write my name when they ask me to write (Interview: Jacinta).

Some [women] are able to speak [at community meetings], but some are not because they are scared. Coming to this literacy programme helps them to speak but some are still scared, some can speak though because they get more confidence (Interview: Mabu).

The change is that I get some good words, good words from the Sisters, from Church and Government – they are together something that can make something good for us in the future (Interview: Mabu).

Within Stromquist's (1993) empowerment framework the political component is concerned with one's ability to analyse the surrounding environment in political and social terms, and to mobilise for social change. As is the custom and tradition in Timor Leste the majority of women, particularly in the rural areas, will stay at home and though they may be affiliated to a particular political party they might not necessarily get involved in political decisions. As such, women in Timor Leste tend to be grossly underrepresented in the political sphere, and measures have been taken to support greater participation of women in local government to ensure that women's needs and concerns have greater a voice. One such measure has been the introduction of mandatory seats on *suco* (village) councils for women. At the national level the electoral law in Timor Leste, enacted in December 2006, stipulates that for every four candidates a political party fields, at least one must be a woman.

Due to the traditionally patriarchal society prevalent in Timor Leste women have not always felt the confidence to speak up about issues that concern them and their communities. For several of the women learning literacy has helped to build their confidence to participate and speak up at community meetings to demand greater resources and assistance from their Government through their local elected officials.

Literacy helps with knowledge...It also helps because we can study more so when Chefe de Suco or Chefe de Aldeia hold some meeting and in the meeting if we are not satisfied with their speech we can ask them a question...[Literacy] helps me ask for help from the Sisters, and helps me to tell the government [to help] if there are some fatherless child and widows because the war destroyed all their things (Interview: Mabu).

The final component of Stromquist's (1993) framework is economic empowerment. The economic component considers the level of participation of women in the productive sector as a means of affording women some measure of financial independence. Some of the women reported that their motivation for joining the literacy

programme was because the literacy groups would be learning sewing and income-generating activities:

I hear information that this group has a sewing programme... I want to learn sewing with machine, we just list our name but not start yet (Interview: Martina).

For other women their newfound literacy skills had helped them to obtain employment as health coordinators, or opened up the possibility of future employment opportunities, such as working as cooks in the local school which now required literacy skills.

Reflections on Findings

This chapter sought to answer the third research question: **‘in what ways have individual women in this adult literacy programme experienced empowerment, and how have these programmes contributed to rural women’s empowerment in Timor Leste?’** In analysing women’s experiences against the three empowerment frameworks provided by Rowlands (1995), Kabeer (1999), and Stromquist (1993), empowerment is most apparent in the personal aspects of women’s lives. This is evident when considering women’s experiences in terms of Rowlands’ ‘personal’ and Stromquist’s ‘psychological’ and ‘collective’ dimensions of empowerment. The women interviewed reported increased feelings of self-confidence, self-esteem, feeling more ‘human’ and ‘clean’, and were now more respected in their roles as wife and parent as a result of being part of the literacy programme. In this sense, women were finding the ‘power within’ to continue on in the literacy programme and had become empowered to encourage others around them to continue on with their studies. Some women were also increasingly realising and becoming more vocal about the unequal distribution of labour between men and women. The findings also suggest that some aspects of political empowerment were evident in their increased confidence in understanding information provided by the Government, and the confidence to speak up and ask questions at community meetings and demand greater resources from their Government. It also became evident, however, that personal levels of empowerment had not necessarily translated into greater levels of collective empowerment amongst the women.

While a few women interviewed reported that they sometimes talked to others in their literacy group about what they were learning and more recently an income-generating group had formed, the collective or 'power with' dimension of empowerment did not appear to be as noticeable as expected. The expectation that collective empowerment would be evident in the findings was influenced by having read reports about the strong Timor Leste women's movement, which had fought so hard during the independence movement in the 1970s and during the UN transitional administration period for women's equal rights and gender equality. Women in rural areas tended to live rather private lives, in part due to the traditionally patriarchal beliefs which view women's place as inside the home and their mobility is thus restricted. In addition, women's heavy work burden does not leave much time for 'socialising', and when there are issues or problems in the household, such as domestic violence, or in the community individuals prefer to take these to the Chefe de Suco or Chefe de Aldeia to resolve the problem as they are have the decision-making authority. As a result the women interviewed do not tend to come together to mobilise against issues with their collective voice.

Furthermore, the research findings suggest that thus far women have not experienced a great deal of economic empowerment during the course of their literacy study. This is in large part due to many of the women having not yet completed the curriculum to receive the certificate or diploma required to participate in vocational training programmes and gain employment in the formal paid sector. The income-generating group related to the literacy programme is also relatively recent with women still learning the skills (sewing and weaving) needed to produce the products they intend on selling in the future. However, literacy skills did provide some measure of economic empowerment for those that sold coffee and produce from the field in terms of reducing their vulnerability to being cheated by those they were selling to as they could now read the weight and count the money during the sale.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

In concluding this thesis, this chapter reflects on the experiences of rural women living and participating in a non-formal adult literacy programme in Aileu by exploring how women's practical and strategic needs and interests have influenced and been influenced by the application of literacy skills in their daily lives and the strengths and weaknesses of non-formal adult literacy programmes as an enabling mechanism for women's empowerment. The conclusions drawn from the research will now be critically considered and future policy considerations presented.

Reflections on Adult Literacy for Women's Empowerment

In analysing women's reflections on their daily lives and their experiences participating in a non-formal adult literacy programme it is apparent that adult literacy programmes which focus on women's practical gender needs, and the ways in which they use literacy in their daily lives, can be more appealing to women and may result in greater participation of women in these programmes. However, if women are to overcome the inherent and ingrained prejudices that exist in patriarchal societies which prevent their full participation in society, then their strategic gender needs must also be adequately addressed and the oppressive social, economic and political structures which perpetuate inequality transformed (Moser, 1989).

With greater access to information through non-formal adult literacy programmes women's level of consciousness about their rights, along with greater knowledge about the opportunities available to them, can increase their personal sense of empowerment. Furthermore, with greater access to knowledge and information women can become empowered to mobilise together as capable agents of change to struggle against inequality and transform their lives for the better. The research findings have highlighted how undertaking a gender analysis of women's participation in adult literacy programmes can help to ensure that these programmes do not inadvertently cause women harm by ignoring their gender roles (Walter, 2004: 439). If gender analysis is not undertaken then

there is a risk that these programmes will add to the already heavy workload of women.

The research also highlighted the challenges encountered in delivering effective non-formal adult literacy programmes in rural areas, and the importance of a strong commitment by those organisations delivering such programmes to regular monitoring and evaluation of the programme's methodology and implementation to ensure that the programme continues to meet the needs and interests of women as effectively as possible. The travel distance between women's homes and literacy classes, competing workloads for facilitators, lack of professionally trained teachers, irregular participant attendance, and the lack of resources and transportation are all significant challenges for the delivery of non-formal adult literacy programmes in the rural areas of Aileu, Timor Leste. However the research findings suggest that by ensuring that the curriculum of adult literacy programmes is meaningful to rural women where employment opportunities are limited, and by showing a clear link between literacy and the prospect of greater personal and employment opportunities, rural adult women may be more motivated to participate.

Conclusions of the Research

Three main conclusions were drawn from this research in answer to the three research questions which guided this thesis inquiry: What has been the experience of women in education in Timor Leste?; What are the daily experiences of rural women who participate in non-formal adult literacy programmes, and how do these programmes respond to rural women's needs and interests?; And finally, in what ways have individual women in this adult literacy programme experienced empowerment, and how have these programmes contributed to rural women's empowerment in Timor Leste?

Firstly, the research findings from the literature concerning the development of women and education in Timor Leste showed that the majority of women were denied educational opportunities during both the Portuguese colonial rule and the Indonesian occupation, and this has impacted on their ability to participate meaningful in development activities. For centuries women's limited experience in education in Timor

Leste has been characterised by the instrumental approach which emphasises what women can do for development rather than what development can do to benefit women (Chant, 2006:102). The arrival of the international community in 1999 along with international norms around human rights and gender opened up further opportunities for women to gain an education that they had previously been denied. Rural women in particular missed out on formal schooling during the Portuguese and Indonesian periods of rule and thus non-formal education programmes, particularly non-formal adult literacy programmes, provide an important means for women to access educational opportunities they have previously been denied and to learn new skills which can help them to improve their lives.

Secondly, the research findings examined in Chapter Six revealed that women in Timor Leste play an important and central role in their families and communities which involves taking on the heavy burden of responsibilities in the home, field and community. This requires many sacrifices on their part to ensure the survival of their families, and this sacrifice is often reflected in women's lack of education and limited time to participate in social, economic and political activities. In seeking to understand women's participation in adult literacy programmes it is important to acknowledge that their participation is both influenced and constrained by the underlying patriarchal ideology evident in Timor Leste's traditional culture and beliefs. The unequal gender division of labour inherent in the patriarchal system impacts heavily on the time women have available to pursue activities and opportunities outside of the domestic sphere. Until this unequal distribution of labour is transformed women will continue to miss out on opportunities such as education.

The findings of this research make clear that understanding the motivation behind women's participation in a literacy programme is directly related to addressing their practical gender needs which revolve around women's reproductive tasks and unpaid productive work. The majority of non-formal adult literacy programmes tend to be designed around assisting women to meet their practical gender needs to enable them to be more efficient in their roles and to play a greater role in development. While such

programmes may be more meaningful to women and therefore a significant motivational factor in women's attendance, these programmes tend to reinforce women's reproductive roles. In the GAD tradition, if we understand that women's illiteracy is a result of unequal gender relations and the influence of patriarchal ideology which views women as inferior to men, then identifying women's gendered roles and assisting women to meet their strategic needs in addition to their practical needs will also be fundamentally important to address the unequal gender division of labour and transform women's socio-cultural, economic and political subordination to men (Moser, 1989).

Thirdly, the empowerment frameworks applied to the research findings provide valuable insight into the way in which individual women participating in an adult literacy programme have become empowered. The empowerment dimension most commonly experienced by women participating in the adult literacy programme is the personal or psychological dimension, also referred to as the 'power within' (Rowlands, 1995; Stromquist, 1993). And while women's access to resources limits their ability to exercise meaningful choice, or agency, the skills obtained through education can be considered a resource that once learnt cannot be taken away from them. Access to information can lead to consciousness-raising, or conscientisation, whereby women become aware of their situation, their rights, and the inequalities inherent in the social, economic and political structures that exist in society and thus seek to transform them.

Future Policy Considerations

There are four main policy considerations concerning adult literacy programmes for women that stem from this research.

Firstly, the women interviewed stressed that they wanted additional programmes that would help them with their productive roles such as sewing and vegetable growing groups, in addition to or as part of the literacy group to assist them to earn additional income. Adult literacy programmes could build on this motivation by focusing on literacy tasks associated with these additional programmes, and this would also provide a clear link between the literacy classes and income-generating activities that could then

mutually reinforce the learning that is taking place, and build on women's motivation to participate. Walter cautions, however, that it is important that women's gendered roles and relations be taken into account, and that such programmes should "work to strengthen women's access and control over these productive resources, to reduce their burden of reproductive labour and in general, to foster women's empowerment" (2004: 437). There is also the concern that once women gain access to income-generating activities, these may be taken over by men, and it is therefore important to ensure that women are able to maintain control over their labour and the income generated from it.

Secondly, a strong level of commitment and support from the organisation providing the adult literacy programme, and their continual reflection in partnership with the communities participating in the programme concerning how the programme can best meet women's needs and interests, is fundamental to encouraging and motivating women to begin and to continue on with literacy classes. Without this continued support and reflection adult literacy programmes run the risk of becoming less relevant to the daily lives of women, which in turn will affect women's participation levels in the literacy programme and perhaps their participation in future development programmes.

Thirdly, while many of the women interviewed appeared to be highly motivated to continue on with the literacy programme, without relief from childcare and other labour associated with their reproductive roles in addition to their productive and community roles, women's participation in adult literacy programmes may continue to be characterised by irregular attendance and a slow learning rate. Adult literacy programmes might be more attractive to women with young children by providing early childhood components or crèches during classes so that the women are able to bring their children with them.

Finally, in addition to promoting literacy activities that can assist women with meeting their practical gender needs, adult literacy programmes can encourage women to pursue their strategic gender needs by providing a space in which women can share their voices and opinions, to consider women's situation in society, and to support each other

to overcome the inequality they experience by mobilising their collective voice.

Concluding Comments

In conclusion, this thesis has shown that the daily lives of women in Timor Leste revolve around reproductive, unpaid productive, and community tasks related to their traditional gender defined roles and this impacts on their ability to access educational programmes. Non-formal adult literacy programmes offer another opportunity for women who missed out on formal schooling to learn new skills, and for some women it provides a symbolic return to the schooling they were denied when they were young. The research findings suggest that women participating in the adult literacy programme have experienced empowerment in a number of ways, but most commonly in terms of personal or psychological empowerment through feelings of increased self-esteem and self-confidence stemming from their newfound literacy skills. The research highlights the importance of ensuring that a gender analysis is carried out when designing adult literacy programmes for particular contexts, and that adult literacy programmes remain flexible to participant's needs, contain contextually relevant content, and assists women to meet their practical needs if they are to sustain participation levels.

Appendices

Appendix A - Information Sheet

Adult Literacy and Women's Empowerment: Women's Participation in a Non-formal Adult Literacy Programme in Aileu, Timor Leste.

INFORMATION SHEET

My name is **Alicia Kotsapas** and I am a Masters student at Massey University (Palmerston North, New Zealand). I am writing a thesis exploring the challenges that rural women in Timor Leste face, and the contribution of adult literacy programmes to women's empowerment in Timor Leste. The intention is to provide an opportunity for the women participating in the literacy programme to reflect on their experiences as actors in the literacy programme, the transformation of their lives and that of their communities, and to create together a space for women to be heard through the outcomes of the research. It will hopefully also provide useful information for individuals and organisations working in the area of adult literacy in rural areas in Timor Leste.

A couple of ideas underpin my research. Firstly, that the challenges rural women face are different to those of urban women, and secondly, that adult literacy practices which are situated in the social context and daily lives of women have the potential to assist women to overcome the challenges and difficult conditions they face.

As part of my research, I am setting up meetings with a range of stakeholders (women participating in adult literacy programmes, members of a range non-governmental organizations, aid agencies, government and those working in community development) and I would like you to be part of my research.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation to participate in the research. If you do wish to take part in the research, you will be asked to sign a consent form.

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be involved in one to two interviews, lasting about one hour each, depending on the time that you have available. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the research at any time;
- stop the audio recorder at any time and have what has been recorded erased at any point;
- ask any questions about the research at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used. To ensure confidentiality your name will be removed and a pseudonym will be

- utilised and neither identifying details nor your name will be used in any publications or reports; and
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Ethics Committees. The researcher named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 00 64 6 350 5249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

I hope this information has answered all your questions.

Alicia Kotsapas
Masters of Development Studies student
Massey University

Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers
Institute of Development Studies, School of People, Environment and Planning
Massey University

Appendix B – Consent Form

Adult Literacy and Women's Empowerment: A Case Study of Women's Participation in a Non-formal Adult Literacy Programme in Timor Leste.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me.

My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Date:

.....

Full Name - printed

.....

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