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**‘It’s Not a Him, It’s a Her’:
An Exploration into the Changes and Challenges, Meanings and
Mechanisms in the Lives of
Timorese Women Workers
on the Offshore
Bayu-Undan Gas Recycling Project**

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the ways in which the potentials of a group of Timorese women, with early aspirations of achieving economic self-reliance through formal work, have been realised through their recruitment into non-traditional jobs on the Bayu-Undan Gas Recycling Project in the Timor Sea.

The aspirational horizons and experiences of the sixteen women who comprise the sample of this study run counter to those of most women in Timor-Leste, where poverty and pervasive patriarchal ideologies relegate them to the domestic sphere as wives and mothers subject to the authority of men. Their reality as working women also runs counter to that of other female waged workers in the developing world reported as experiencing poor wages and working conditions and discrimination in the workplace and for some, resentment or violence from husbands.

The findings of this study point to new evidence of young Timorese women at the beginning of their post-secondary school journeys exhibiting a high level of agency. This is reflected in their personal qualities, both inherent and socially fostered, of determination, courage and self-belief, and confidence in their aptitude to learn new competencies, with strategic goals of economic independence and an awareness of their right to shape their own lives towards this end. In addition to this they have had the crucial social resource of support from family members and from husbands and male partners.

It is rare to see the inclusion of gender, explicitly or tacitly, in the local content commitments associated with petroleum extraction projects in developing countries. This thesis has identified the pivotal role, played by a locally-owned Timorese contracting company, confident in the capacity of Timorese women to be effective offshore crewmembers, in shaping the employee component of the Bayu-Undan project's local content to incorporate females. What is also of significance is that these women occupy well-paid, valued positions of responsibility on the western platform, where a culture of non-gender discrimination sees them receiving respect from male

personnel, including their Timorese male co-workers, and being supported in their ambitions to up-skill, in some cases into historically male areas.

At home, the women's new identities as high income-earners employed in non-traditional work have given them greater social and economic status. While there is some concern that their economic autonomy could be eroded by excessive family demands, the new financial resources provided by the women are seen by them, and others, as important obligations towards improving the lives and prospects of extended family members. Additionally, as a 'realising potential' outcome from their incomes, new opportunities and valued ways of being have opened up for the women themselves and their immediate families.

Key words: Timor-Leste, women offshore workers, aspirational horizons, self-belief, social support, local content, realising potential, economic autonomy.

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Glossary

<i>Adat</i>	Customary/traditional laws, values and belief systems
ANP	Autoridade Nacional do Petroleo
ASV	Accommodation Support Vessel
CEDAW	Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CoP	ConocoPhillips
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CPP	Central Processing and Production
CUQ	Compression, Utilities and Quarters
DNE	Direcção Nacional de Estatística (National Statistics Directory of Timor-Leste)
DPP	Drilling, Production and Processing
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
FIFO	Fly-In-Fly-Out
FSO	Floating, Storage and Offloading
GAD	Gender and Development
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HR	Human Resources
HSE	Health, Safety and the Environment
HUET	Helicopter Underwater Evacuation Training
IPIECA	International Petroleum Industry Environment Conservation Association
JPDA	Joint Petroleum Development Area
LADV	Law Against Domestic Violence
LCP	Local Content Policy
LDC	Least Developed Country
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
LPG	Liquefied Petroleum Gas
<i>Malai</i>	Foreigner
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PF	Petroleum Fund
PSC	Production Sharing Contract
PPE	Personal Protection Equipment
RDTL	Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
SEPFPOE	Secretary of state for Professional Training and Employment Policy
T-BOSIET	Tropical- Basic Offshore Safety Induction Emergency Training
SEPI	Secretariat for the Promotion of Equality
TSDA	Timor Sea Designated Authority
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor
WDR	World Development Report