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**THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS
IN THE DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT OF EAST TIMOR:
A CASE STUDY OF A LOCAL NGO, YAYASAN ETADEP
*(Yayasan Ema maTA Dalam ba Progressu)***

*A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirement for the degree of Master of Philosophy
in Development Studies at Massey University,
New Zealand*

ANACLETO DA COSTA RIBEIRO

2000

Dedicated to the people of East Timor and
NGOs or development agents involving in the rebuilding
East Timor who believe that development is:

"Go to the people
Live among the people
Learn from the people
Plan with the people
Work with the people
Start with what the people know
Build on what the people have
Teach by showing, learn by doing
Not a showcase but a pattern
Not odds and ends but a system
Not piecemeal but integrated approach
Not to conform but to transform
NOT RELIEF BUT RELEASE." *

(Dr. Y.C. James Yen)

* The Credo of Rural Reconstruction
The Philosophy, Principles and Practice of Rural Reconstruction,
International Institute of Rural Reconstruction.

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ABSTRACT

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have been actors on the development stage longer than the World Bank, the United Nations or any other official agency. Throughout the 1980s they have played a greater role than previously because of their greater diversity, credibility and creativity. Therefore, they have now moved to the centre stage of development as significant development agents in the civil society sector. Being significant agents in development, it is important to understand their roles. The current spectrum of NGO activities has emerged from the 19th Century, and been shaped in the past 30 years by the search for alternatives and by emerging new needs and concerns.

Realising the importance and relevance of understanding the role NGOs in development, this study seeks to assess the role of a local NGO, ETADEP, operating in the specific development context of East Timor. The situation in East Timor was unfavourable due to its unstable political status which has been the predominant factor affecting and shaping an NGO's work in this local context. Thus, to gain a better understanding of the role NGOs in East Timor, the assessment should be in line with the existing factors and problems faced by an NGO in this specific context. In addition, this study also attempts to define and classify local NGOs in East Timor i.e. ETADEP into an alternative typology.

This study collects firsthand data through interviews, observations and secondary data from archival records or documents such as: reports, evaluations, publications. Documents were selected from ETADEP's files between the years 1987 and 1998. Informal in-depth interviews were also conducted with relevant individuals who have been either actors of grass-root development or partners of ETADEP.

The findings of this study concludes that ETADEP though operated in such a unfavourable atmosphere has contributed to the process of improving socio-economic welfare of the rural community and sustainable development in East Timor through the strategy of strengthening local self-reliance groups and grassroots organisations.

Specifically, ETADEP has functioned as: a) the *facilitator* of development aimed at improving the socio-economic welfare of the rural community; b) the *communicator* between the local government, donors and the local community and

between the local communities; c) the *embryo for NGOs and grassroots organisations*; and d) the *catalyst* of innovations and participatory development approaches.

The study has also identified that ETADEP, though having multiple identities due to its incapability to identify itself properly in such a situation has embedded the four defining characteristics to be considered as an NGO in this context. Thus, a tentative typology is developed based on four main essential descriptors i.e. orientation of activities, scope of operation, main forms of control and its links with donors. This scheme, therefore, has placed ETADEP into a multiple scheme typology. However, comparatively speaking, in terms of focus and scale of ETADEP's programs, it is more appropriate to categorize ETADEP as a *development-oriented NGO*.

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