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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

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy

in

Development Studies
at Massey University, Manawatu, New Zealand.

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2011

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.

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by thanking the Aileu Resource and Training Centre and the East Timorese women and men who gave up their precious time to share their lives and stories with me, without which this research would not have been possible. The courage and strength you have shown overcoming the many challenges that have come your way, and kindness and warmth you express to even those who are complete strangers is an inspiration to me, *Obrigada Barak!*

Special thanks also to my Master's supervisors, Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers (Chief supervisor) and Maria Borovnik. For your expertise, guidance and immeasurable amount of patience throughout, I am incredibly grateful.

I am also indebted to those who provided in-country support during the period of fieldwork in Timor Leste: staff at the New Zealand Embassy in Dili, Sister Rosalva, Sra Diamantina, Rachel Carter, Danielle Boon, Nivia Pereria and Pedro. I am eternally grateful for the support each of you provided to me, without which I would have found it incredibly difficult to navigate the many and varied intricacies that undertaking research in Timor Leste entailed.

Thanks to my colleagues in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade New Zealand Aid Programme for their unfailing support and guidance from the moment I began this research, particularly during those 'crisis of confidence' periods that would ensue following a weekend of hitting the books.

Finally, my profound gratitude to my parents: Annette and Costa, and all my friends, the greatest support system ever invented! Your wise advice, support when the going got tough, comedic relief and love was pivotal in completing this thesis.

Viva Timor Leste!

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List of Acronyms

AODETI	Associação Popular Democrática Timorense ¹
ASDT	Associação Social-Democrata Timorense ²
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
GGFTL	Grupo Feto Foina'e Timor Lorosa'e ³
GNP	Gross National Profit
FALINTIL	Forças Armadas da Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste ⁴
FOKUPERS	Forum Komunikasi Untuk Perempuan Loro Sae ⁵
FRETILIN	Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente ⁶
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 Timorense ⁷
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

UNMISSET –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>