

# The education horizon

**Education is one of the most critical components of human development. Unless people have at least a basic education many of the other choices remain closed to them. East Timor has a lot of ground to make up—not just dealing with illiteracy but also coping with a multiplicity of languages.**

East Timor's standards of education are among the lowest in the world. The literacy rate is only 43% and there is a striking gap between urban areas where the rate is 82%, and the rural areas where it is only 37% (figure 4.1). Illiteracy deprives the people of East Timor of the opportunities to expand their human capacities—to achieve better standards of health, for example, and to participate fully in social and political life. But it also hampers the development of the nation as a whole since basic literacy and numeracy are the keys to more productive employment, in both national and international enterprises.

East Timor certainly compares unfavourably with other countries in the region. For neighbouring Indonesia as a whole, the literacy rate in 1999 was 88% and even for the province of East Nusa Tenggara on the border with East Timor it was 81%. East Timor also lags behind many other countries in Asia and the Pacific—Malaysia (87%), the Philippines (95%) and Papua New Guinea (64%).

Most of the older generation will never learn to read: of today's household heads more than half have had no schooling at all. But the situation should be better for the next generation since a higher proportion of children do at least start in primary school. In 2001, the net primary enrolment ratio was 76%. This represents progress, though it still falls far short of global standards.

East Timor's education system today is the legacy of colonial rule, but by two colonial powers that had very different priorities. For most of their period of rule the Portuguese showed little interest in mass education. They sent only a small proportion of the population to school, mostly to those run by the Catholic Church. By 1975

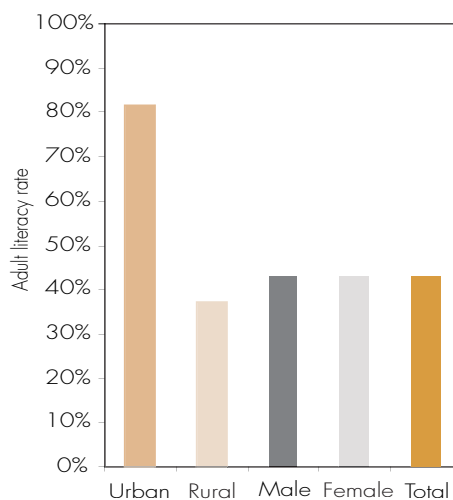
when the Portuguese left, the literacy rate was only around 5%.

Even so the relatively small numbers of people educated during this period are now playing an important part in building the new nation. These include people who continued their education in Portugal and some of whom were instrumental in setting up the National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT) whose Education Division during the transitional period helped to shape the country's system of education.

Another significant group educated during the Portuguese period are those who became primary school teachers. They had completed four years of primary education and also received a few months of teacher training that certified them to teach primary grades 1 and 2. Some of these teachers had their qualifications upgraded during the Indonesian period and many now work as teachers of Portuguese.

Figure 4.1

Adult literacy, 2001



Source: See annex table 4

*In the Indonesian era educational quantity was not matched by quality*

The Indonesian approach to education was rather different. The Indonesian government was determined to achieve universal primary education and in many provinces went a long way towards reaching this. It made slower progress in East Timor than elsewhere. Nevertheless by around 1985 almost every village had a primary school. This expansion certainly enrolled many more children in school but it had two main flaws.

The first flaw was that the quantitative increases were not matched by increases in quality. In most provinces of Indonesia the standard of teaching was poor: schools lacked funds, textbooks, and basic equipment. And in East Timor the situation was worst of all—though the effects of this were not always evident since assessments generally tested the students in reduced areas of the curriculum and inflated the marks in order to improve the statistics.

The second flaw was that the government in Jakarta saw education as an important part of the process of ‘Indonesianizing’ the people of East Timor. As a result, the government forbade the use of Portuguese in schools and required East Timorese who wanted to deal with the administration to do so only in Indonesian. To further this, the government drafted in large numbers of teachers from Indonesia. They did not succeed as rapidly as they had hoped; it took several years to achieve widespread use of Indonesian in the schools—fifteen years according to some observers. But eventually they did ensure that East Timorese children were often being educated in a language different from the one they spoke at home—which further hampered their progress.

Over time, the number of Timorese teachers increased. By 1998/99, of the 6,672 primary school teachers 78% were East

Timorese. But the quality of instruction was low. Most teachers had not progressed far beyond fourth grade. And because they earned very little they had to take extra jobs to survive and were frequently absent from the classrooms.

This in turn discouraged both parents and children. Around 30% of children were not enrolled at all. This was partly for cultural reasons, since many parents did not appreciate the value of education, especially for girls. But many poor parents could not afford the fees or the costs of textbooks or uniforms. And a number of parents were also unwilling to have their children indoctrinated by a foreign curriculum.

The weakness at the primary level carried through to secondary school. In 1998/99, of 1,963 lower secondary school teachers, only 3% were East Timorese. In the final year of Indonesian administration net enrolment had still only reached 36% at the lower secondary level (12 to 15 years) and 20% at the upper secondary level (16 to 18 years). Data for 2001 suggest that the current figures are slightly lower at the primary level, 62%, and much lower at the lower secondary level, 27%.

Finally at the tertiary level, education is even more restricted, with an enrolment ratio of 3.8% in 1999 and 2.8% in 2001. The University of East Timor was established in 1986 with three faculties: social politics, teacher training and agriculture. Here too standards were often very low. The university had few resources and used outdated teaching methods, and both staff and students were frequently absent. The other tertiary institutions included a Health Academy to train nurses and a polytechnic with a two-year course in engineering and accountancy. The Catholic Church Pastoral Institute educated teachers of religion. And in 1997 a private School of Economics was established with courses in accountancy and management.

#### *The impact of the 1999 emergency*

The violence of September 1999 is thought to have destroyed, either partially or completely, 80% to 90% of school buildings and related infrastructure. In most cases the teaching materials, school records and furniture were stolen or burned. As a result, when schools reopened students lacked even pens and pencils and exercise books

Table 4.1

Colonial education legacies		
	1978	1999
Primary	47 schools 10,500 students	788 schools 167,181 students
Lower secondary	2 schools 315 students	114 schools 32,197 students
Upper secondary	none	54 schools 18,973

Source: United Nations (2000)

which were either unavailable or being sold at prices beyond the reach of poor parents. Just as damaging was the loss of personnel. Although the primary schools were mostly staffed by East Timorese, the secondary schools had largely been staffed by Indonesians, most of whom eventually decided to leave. The same was true of school administrators, almost all of whom were Indonesian.

A further problem is that some of the schools built during the Indonesian period are now redundant. This is because the Indonesian government forcibly moved many communities to new locations and built the schools there. Now, however, many of these families have moved back to their ancestral grounds. Other schools are also unavailable because the Indonesians built them on land that they did not own and some of these sites are now subject to title disputes.

### Rebuilding the education system

When the situation had settled down somewhat by the end of 1999 and people started to come back to the urban centres East Timorese administrators set to work on a voluntary basis within the CNRT Education Division. They were hampered, however, by their inexperience and also by the type of top-down management culture imposed by Indonesia and that has left people with little confidence to take decisions.

Meanwhile many of the remaining primary school teachers also started work on a voluntary basis, receiving small incentive payments from UNICEF and also some food from the World Food Programme. Although most had taught during the Indonesian period some people had no experience at all. UNICEF also provided start-up kits of educational materials and re-roofed a number of primary and secondary schools.

In May 2000, UNTAET and CNRT organized a proficiency test for teachers. This was taken by Timorese teachers in Indonesian since this was the language the teachers had used as a medium of instruction. Of those who took the test, 5,000 were capable of teaching in the primary schools, although not all were hired immediately.

The situation in secondary schools was even more difficult. Because almost no secondary teachers were available, the administration encouraged university students to

sign up for these jobs. These recruits, who were hired for the first ‘normal’ school year from October 2000, usually had sufficient basic knowledge but they had no training in teaching or in classroom management.

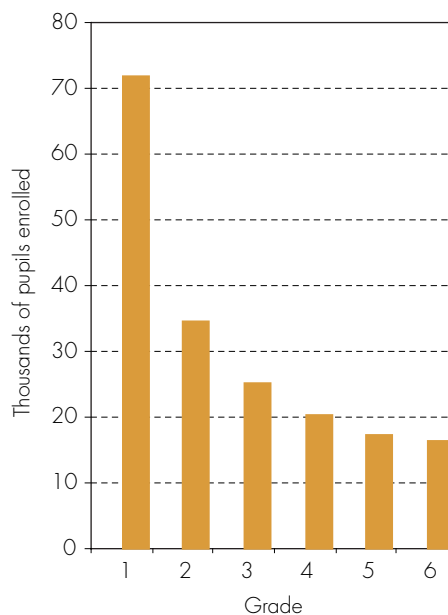
Meanwhile international donors were preparing a School System Revitalization Programme that combined the efforts of UNTAET, CNRT, UNICEF, national and international NGOs, bilateral donors and the World Bank. The first phase of this, which was agreed in June 2000, was the \$13.9 million Emergency School Readiness Programme to repair some buildings and also build new prototype schools. By February 2002, the programme had rehabilitated 535 schools, representing 2,780 classrooms, built three junior secondary school prototypes, and assembled 54,000 sets of student furniture in classrooms. In October 2001 the donors agreed another \$13.9 million ‘Fundamental School Quality Project’ to upgrade 65 primary schools.

For the school year 2000/01, 185,180 children were enrolled in 707 primary schools across East Timor (table 4.2). In most countries enrolment is usually highest in grade 1 and then tails off to grade 6 as children gradually drop out. As figure 4.2 indicates, the gradient is especially steep in East Timor. The lower classes are also swollen by the numbers of students who are either repeating years or have started late and had to enrol at grades lower than the

*Donors have been helping to rebuild the schools*

Figure 4.2

Enrolment by grade, 2000/01



Source: Ministry of Education

Table 4.2

## Student-teacher ratios in primary schools, 2000/01

District	Schools	Students	Students/school	Teachers	Ratio	Ratio range
Aileu	40	13,190	330	149	89	36-147
Ainaro	38	9,398	247	157	60	40-106
Baucau	93	20,365	219	345	59	24-175
Bobonaro	89	18,294	206	289	63	27-104
Covalima	52	8,998	173	227	40	28-147
Dili	61	28,333	464	475	60	17-119
Ermera	62	19,076	308	376	51	27-124
Liquica	38	11,989	316	195	61	30-99
Lospalos	55	10,541	192	172	61	27-142
Manufahi	50	10,443	209	153	68	28-243
Manatuto	35	9,169	262	118	78	36-235
Oecussi	43	9,932	231	146	68	37-100
Viqueque	51	15,452	303	189	82	46-224
TOTAL	707	185,180	262	2,991	62	24-243

Note: The ratio range shows the highest and lowest of the average of the sub-districts of that region.

Source: Ministry of Education (2001)

ones they normally would study at for their age. This means that the 'gross enrolment ratio,' which represents the number of children studying at a particular level compared with the number of children of the appropriate age group, can be quite high—112% at the primary level in 2001.

It is also interesting to note that the primary enrolment ratio was the same for boys and girls. Interviews carried out in May 2001 in a survey for UNICEF and Oxfam also concluded that in primary education there was gender equality (UNICEF, 2001). Indeed in some cases girls may have the advantage since boys are more at risk of being kept out of school once they are old enough to work on the family farm.

Nevertheless, enrolment is only part of the picture. Many children who register to go to school do not actually attend. The same study found that, according to the teachers, many children were 'not active': up to 20% in some schools had shown up for some classes and rarely attended subsequently. In 1997/98 East Timor's repetition rate for primary education—14%—was one of the highest in Indonesia.

Table 4.2 also indicates the pupil/teacher ratio. The average of 62 students per teacher at the primary level is high, which reduces the quality of education for individual pupils. However this average conceals wide

variations across districts, sub-districts, and schools. As this table shows, the number ranged from 17 (for a school in Dili) to a high of 243 (for a school in Turiscai sub-district of Manufahi).

This information applies to government schools. However, in addition to more than 700 government schools, there are also some 173 schools run by the Catholic Church, which charged on average, Rp 5,954 (\$0.60) per month, and 26 private schools which charged Rp. 9,327 (\$1) per month.

### Obstacles to school attendance

Now that East Timor has gained its independence, some of the previous obstacles to school attendance have been removed. But many remain. The most basic issue is poverty. Although there are no enrolment fees for government schools, there are still costs to sending children to school. Closely linked with poverty is the need for children to spend at least part of their time working on the family farm or on household chores. Around 10% of children aged 10 and 11 are employed, mostly in agriculture, though around half of these also go to school.

Another problem is that since many parents did not go to school themselves they may have little interest in education and do not encourage their children to attend school. Parents may also conclude that the quality

*As many girls as boys now go to primary school*

of education is so low that their children achieve little by going to school and might just as well stay at home.

These problems are of course compounded if the school is far from home. For most children this does not seem to be too much of a problem. According to the Suco Survey around half of children do not need to walk more than ten minutes to get to school. Only seven out of 498 sucos reported that the average time needed for children to walk to school was more than half an hour. Nevertheless, during the rainy season it is generally more difficult.

The problems will be greatest in areas where schools are still occupied by squatters or are unavailable because the school was built on land that is now subject to legal disputes.

### Future issues for education

The East Timor education system is currently being rebuilt but it faces a number of major challenges.

#### *Language*

One of the most difficult tasks for schools in the years ahead will be to work in a different language. The Constitution establishes Tetun and Portuguese as the official languages. As far as the education system is concerned, the policy has been to introduce Portuguese progressively as the language of instruction, starting in the 2000/01 school year with students in grades 1 and 2, while teaching Portuguese as a second language

in higher grades, and then gradually extending instruction in Portuguese throughout the school system.

This has created a number of problems since only 5% of the population, and consequently few teachers, speak Portuguese. In order to identify those teachers who could speak the language some 3,000 teachers sat for a test facilitated by the Portuguese Mission in Dili. Of these, only 158 (5%) achieved the pass mark—the majority of whom lived in Dili or Baucau (table 4.3). As this table indicates, Manufahi district had no primary school teachers qualified to teach Portuguese and so instruction in grades 1 and 2 is being given either in Indonesian or in a local language. This is depriving students of the foundation they need in Portuguese to be promoted to higher grades in the school.

Both teachers and school administrators will need a strong grounding in Portuguese. This will need more careful planning both of the content of the courses—and to allow for the time that teachers will spend out of the classroom on language learning. Many courses have been offered on an ad hoc basis and some teachers report that they have not received enough benefit. To assist with Portuguese, the Government of Portugal is financing 141 Portuguese nationals who are teaching Portuguese as a second language in secondary schools and upgrading the Portuguese-language skills of Timorese teachers.

At the same time East Timor needs to look again at the value of mother-tongue teaching—whether in Tetun or any of the other main languages. The experience in other countries that have faced similar problems suggests that children learn more quickly if they first become literate in their mother tongue and then acquire a ‘national’ language, in this case Portuguese or Tetun, as a second language. The confidence of being able to read and write in their mother tongue lays a strong cognitive and emotional foundation, equipping them with the capacities needed to learn a second language. And when children are learning about their legends and culture in their mother tongue they will also get greater support and reinforcement from their parents. This then encourages the children to attend school regularly. International research has shown that one of the main causes of school failure is poor

*When children learn in their mother tongue they get more parental support*

Table 4.3  
Teachers approved for teaching Portuguese

District	Primary	Secondary
Aileu	0	1
Ainaro	7	0
Baucau	24	1
Bobonaro	5	0
Covalima	3	2
Dili	45	5
Ermera	2	1
Lautem	3	4
Liquica	18	2
Manatuto	7	0
Manufahi	0	4
Oecussi	1	9
Viqueque	11	3

Source: Ministry of Education

*There are on average more than 60 pupils per primary school teacher*

adaptation of national education programmes to the cultural and linguistic characteristics of pupils.

Producing materials in all the main vernacular languages would be very costly—both for printing materials and for training teachers in their use—especially when there are only small numbers of children to be taught in certain languages. Nevertheless international experience shows that the benefits more than justify the expense. East Timor might gain from the experience of Papua New Guinea which has recently introduced over 800 vernacular languages into its schools. Instead of printing materials in all the languages, however, here the approach was to develop materials without text that could be used nationally, but also to provide teachers with detailed guidelines as to how they might use them in their own language.

The current programme to ‘stabilize’ the grammar and vocabulary of Tetun is useful. But as yet there are few educational materials available—and little or nothing in the other languages.

#### *Teachers*

The Ministry of Education currently employs about 6,400 teachers, at all levels of whom 70% are men, and all of whom were hired after the referendum in 1999. Most of these are primary school teachers who, during the Indonesian period, completed lower-secondary education and then continued to upper-secondary schools that specialised in education. They studied for two years at the SPG (Sekolah Pendidikan Guru) level following which some studied for three years at the higher, KPG (Kejuwan Pendidikan Guru) level. At the primary level, the student/teacher ratio is over 60, which is clearly too high.

At the secondary level, the majority of teachers are still university students who have had no teacher training. For the 2000/01 school year, of the 2,091 secondary school teachers, only 106 have formal secondary training—69 male and 37 female.

For the future there are two main issues for the teaching profession. The first is to raise the overall numbers, so as to reduce the pupil/teacher ratio. In the past the low salaries and poor working conditions have dissuaded more motivated students from entering the profession. The situation may

even be worse now since teachers are no longer provided with free housing. All this contributes to low morale. Regrettably, in many instances teachers are often seen sending students home after an unacceptably short school day. Since teachers have an important role, particularly in the rural areas, not only in schools but as development facilitators, the government will need to reassess their pay and working conditions.

The second priority is to upgrade the skills of teachers. Those studying to become teachers need to be properly prepared. Not only will they need to become familiar with a new curriculum, and a new language, they will also have to encourage more active learning.

At present students spend much of the day copying information from the blackboard. This is partly the result of a shortage of textbooks and other teaching aids, but it is also because teachers still use traditional methods that rely on rote-learning rather than encouraging children to acquire information for themselves.

For the coming generation of teachers the East Timor National University (UN-TIL) will have an important part to play. For the next ten years or so, its main priority should be to produce more schoolteachers. This would mean reassessing the value of existing faculties so as to make best use of its scarce financial and human resources. For those teachers already working, this will involve more in-service training through intensive workshops and regular meetings at the school level, along with district-level teacher resource centres.

#### *Community involvement*

One of the best ways of raising standards in schools is by wider community involvement. If teachers, parents and other community leaders jointly take responsibility for running schools they are likely to invest more time and energy in the schools and take a greater pride in what they and their children can achieve.

A useful stimulus in this direction could come from the UNICEF ‘100 schools project’. This will choose 100 schools nationwide in order to model good practices in all areas of education—involving parents and communities, upgrading teaching methods, keeping better records, improving attendance and raising morale. The schools

chosen to be models will be those that have already committed to good practices.

This is another area where East Timor can make progress. The Indonesian system was highly centralized, with little scope for local initiative by either teachers or parents. This may have served the interests of the government but it wasted valuable potential resources of commitment and energy.

### *Curriculum*

So far there have been few efforts at curriculum development—a result partly of the uncertainties of the transition period. Teachers still use most of the Indonesian curriculum for all grades. For grades 1 and 2, however, they also have Portuguese books that cover a standard early primary programme. These are of good quality, colourful and appealing, though they are quite expensive. The remaining grades follow a dramatically reduced curriculum which in grades 4 and 5 is limited to maths and science, with Portuguese as a second language. Grades 3 and 6 have maths, science and social science. There is also some instruction in music and sports but with very few support materials.

At the secondary level the curriculum is much broader, consisting of 14 subjects in lower secondary and 17 in upper secondary. Given the shortage of both teachers and materials it would seem wise to cut back on the range and concentrate on quality rather than quantity, with maths and science as priorities.

The basic subjects and contents of the curriculum will need to be arrived at through extensive consultations between teachers, parents and children. But this is also an area where international experience and resources can make an important contribution—helping those charged with developing a new curriculum for East Timor to learn from teaching practices elsewhere and attain internationally accepted standards.

### *Technical and vocational training*

The Indonesian technical and vocational training system in the upper secondary schools was quite elaborate. But the training on offer bore little relation to the real needs of the workplace—in many respects it was just ‘education for education’s sake’. East Timor cannot afford this and, in conjunction with local employers, will have to refashion it so as to train young people in

competences that are in real demand. In any case most of the people who ran the previous vocational training system before have now left so East Timor has little choice but to start again.

A survey by the Australian financed Capacity Building Project for East Timor recommends that schools avoid specializing in certain subjects too early and that they include some subjects such as agriculture in general science courses.

There are already a number of vocational training projects, including those for the construction industry, which are financed by Brazil and Portugal. But clearly East Timor has urgent need of people with basic skills such as electricians and mechanics. Given the possible importance of tourism, those working in this industry will need to be proficient in English. Some of this training should also go to those who are already at work since it is clear that many people are now doing jobs for which their skills are inadequate.

### *Tertiary education*

East Timor National University reopened in 2000. At the time the priority was to offer courses to those who had already been studying either in East Timor or in Indonesia. Though a large number of students failed the qualifying test they still put pressure on the Education Division to find them places. This resulted in a compromise: a new ‘bridging course’ that after another examination would offer students access to the different university courses.

This examination did indeed give most of the students sufficient marks to go to the university for the academic year 2001/02. But this large number of students then put the university under strain. The Faculty of Economics, for example, instead of its usual complement of 150 students found itself with 389.

The University of East Timor could find itself with many poorly qualified students crowded into courses that offer few prospects for employment. It might therefore re-examine its priorities, aiming for a smaller institution that emphasizes quality. And for the next ten years or so it could concentrate most resources on the faculty of education in order to train the next generation of secondary school teachers. Another issue is the quality of university teachers, most of

*East Timor urgently needs more people with basic skills*

whom do not hold advanced university degrees.

The university will want re-examine its priorities and reshape its courses according to the country's needs. The bulk of the resources and the students could be focussed on the Faculty of Education—to train the next generation of secondary school teachers. Other courses may also have to change their focus—particularly those that have strongly reflected the Indonesian heritage. The Faculty of Political Science, for example, could concentrate on preparing people to work for the civil service.

East Timor does need university graduates. But it will want to avoid falling into the same trap as other developing countries that have promoted university education for status or in order to respond to the demands of richer families. Instead it should probably aim for a smaller institution, with the emphasis on quality—educating people to international standards and capable of administering a modern state.

#### *Adult literacy*

Although the immediate priority will be to ensure education for the current generation of children, East Timor cannot ignore adult education. This is not just to meet the rights to education for the half of the adult population that has had little or no schooling, but also to help with the process of nation building, and more broadly to support hu-

man development by allowing people greater control over their own lives.

Given the importance that Portuguese will have in the nation's future it is not surprising that most adult literacy efforts now focus on this language. One is the Brazilian campaign implemented by Alfabetização Solidária, whose literacy programme started in all districts in June 2001 and will teach 3,500 illiterate adults. Another Brazilian project teaches Portuguese using TV. 'Telessalas' aims to upgrade the Portuguese skills and general knowledge of another 3,500 people. The target group in this case is 45-50 year-olds who have some Portuguese language skills. The pilot project runs in 20 classrooms in Dili district, serving 600 people. The next phase will involve 70 classrooms across all districts.

#### *Civic education*

In addition there is the question of what knowledge the population as a whole will need to sustain the new state of East Timor. So far civic education has understandably concentrated on the mechanisms of voting and elections. But human development takes a much broader and more inclusive view of democracy, not just as an objective but as a continuing process—as a way of life. Civic education can also promote:

- *Civic knowledge*—the fundamental ideas and information that people need to be effective and responsible citizens;
- *Civic skills*—the ability to understand and compare principles and practices of governance. These include participatory skills that enable citizens to monitor and influence public policies.
- *Civic virtues*—the character traits needed to sustain and enhance democratic governance and citizenship. These include respect for the worth and dignity of each person, tolerance, and equality.

With these skills citizens are in a stronger position to sustain and deepen the democracy they fought for—taking part in decision making on national and local policies. This may mean combining modern and traditional forms of decision making (box 4.1)

The same abilities are also the building blocks of a peaceful society—gradually achieving a consensus on the kind of be-

Box 4.1

#### East Timor's democratic tradition

It is inaccurate to characterize East Timor as a country without democratic roots and principles. The traditional power structures which remained intact over the period of colonization and occupation reflect highly intricate economic, social, political and cultural systems which are both participatory and inclusive.

The brief period of Fretilin rule in the mid-1970s also integrated devolution of power and authority to regional decision-making mechanisms. More significantly, the clandestine movement itself operated in highly consultative and participatory ways, involving local leadership and power structures to transmit messages from communities and to undertake collective decision-making. Civic education strategies should therefore involve local lead-

ers and incorporate traditional community processes to address differing social hierarchies and reflect the realities of local decision-making.

Traditional East Timorese society is highly hierarchical. This poses challenges for introducing some democratic concepts, such as the notion of equality. Within traditional systems, there is no identity for the state, other than those traditional elements that were co-opted by colonial state structures. Timorese kinship systems do not account for individualism, which is in contrast to the foundations of a multi-party system. Moreover, there is little trust for leaders who are not connected to sacred items and ancestral legitimacy. Any civic education initiatives need to take account of these traditional paradigms.

haviour that most people would like to see in their new country. Of these the most important is to achieve peaceful co-existence. This means not just the absence of violence within and between communities but also within the household, where much of it is directed against women. But there are also many other issues that can also benefit from civic education. One would be the risks of HIV/AIDS of which most people know very little.

To some extent civic education will have to start with teachers, relying on them to communicate ideas not just in the schools but also to the community at large, especially in the rural areas. Other state institutions, such as the police, might also help.

### *The education horizon*

Education is one of the main focuses of this human development report because

establishing the education system on the right track is so critical to the country's future. Better standards of education will resonate through the whole society. Better educated people are in a position to innovate and to improve not just their own lives but those of others. Better educated women are in a stronger position to look after their own health and that of their children. And better educated people are in the best position to make choices about human development, for themselves as well as for their country.

Planning for education in East Timor will be difficult—complicated by a severe shortage of resources and of trained people, and the complexities of a multilingual society. But the choices have to be made as soon as possible if the next generation is to take full advantage of East Timor's new horizon as a democratic country.