

## East Timor: The Way Ahead National Human Development Report 2002 Building a capable public administration

**In the early years of independence, the people of East Timor will rely heavily on the competence and capacity of government services. Any weaknesses or failure of these services will be a serious obstacle to progress in human development.**

The events of September 1999 were devastating, not just for the population, but also for the system of administration. Alongside the losses in terms of buildings, records and archives, there was also a debilitating loss of personnel. East Timor was left with virtually no senior managers or people capable of operating basic facilities, and found itself with no judges or police force.

In building its public administration almost from scratch, the risk for an independent East Timor is that it may yet inherit some of the institutional failures of the previous administration; such as overstaffing, complex administration, pervasive corruption, and lack of public participation.

Under the system chosen by the East Timorese, much of the executive power will lie in the hands of the prime minister, who will take decisions collectively with the council of ministers. This will mean compromises between the priorities of different ministries and departments, all of whom will be competing for scarce resources. The members of the Legislative Assembly will also play a crucial role in nurturing a healthy democracy. During the first months of independence, members of the Legislative Assembly will have a heavy workload, coping with the large volume of new legislation. They will rapidly need to become familiar with such tasks as analysing budgets and legislation, and understanding how government departments work. Just as important they will need to discover the best ways of keeping lines of communication open with the rest of civil society.

No matter how decisive the government, or effective the legislators, their policies and decisions will be compromised if they cannot be put into effect by an efficient system of public administration. This demands a public administration staffed by officials who have both the competence and the will to serve the people of East Timor.

The development of the public sector will face a number of crucial issues including staffing levels, salaries, training, language skills, participation of women, and the continuing need for international support. All these issues imply a large-scale capacity building process. This will be a long and complex task, but the immediate priority for the civil service must be to deliver services to the people. This entails ensuring that civil servants have the basic management capacity to run the essential institutions of government. Unless the government is seen to be delivering services efficiently it will lose legitimacy in the eyes of the people.

No matter how good the official policy on the many strands of human development, these efforts will be thwarted if the public institutions are incapable of implementing them. There are many crucial issues to address: the structure and character of the institutions; the capacity and motivation of civil servants; the strength and independence of the judiciary, and the best ways to prevent corruption.