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UNIVERSIDADE NACIONAL TIMOR LOROSAE

Carrying the People's Aspirations

A report on focus group discussions in East Timor

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National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)

The Faculty of Social and Political Sciences
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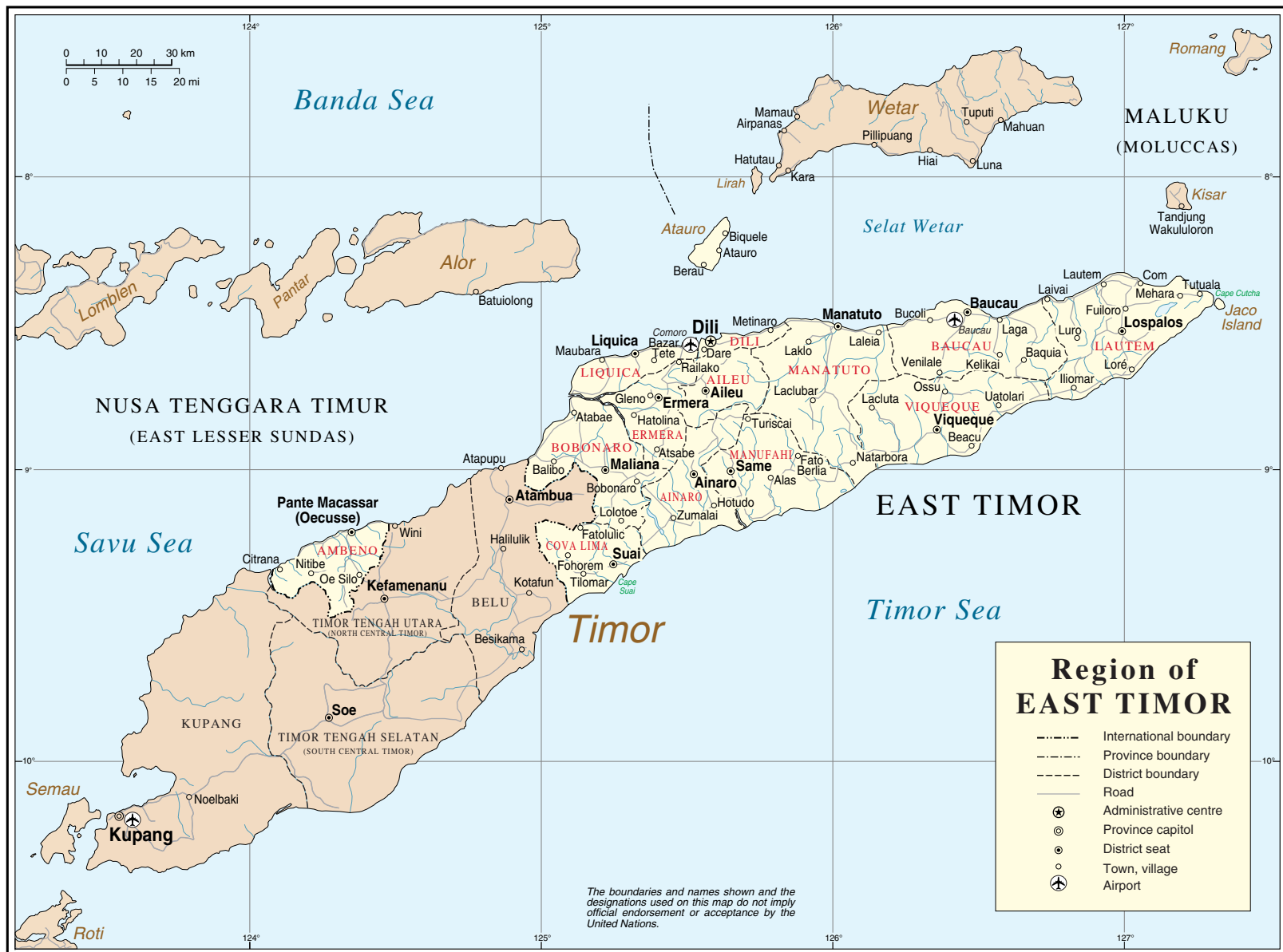
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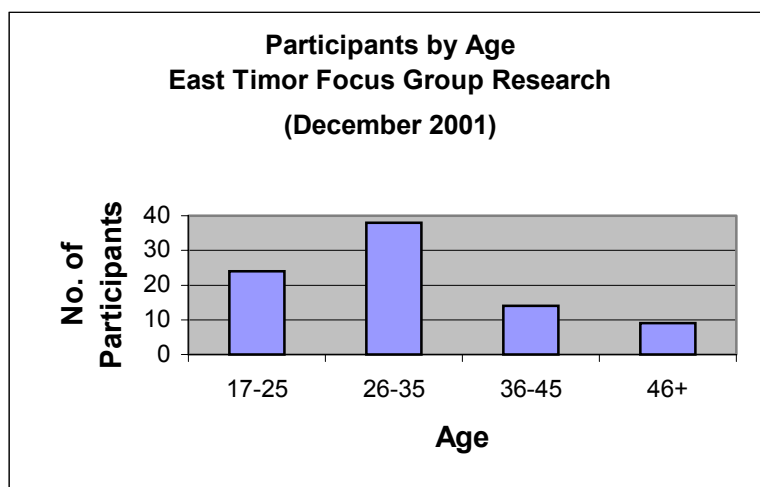
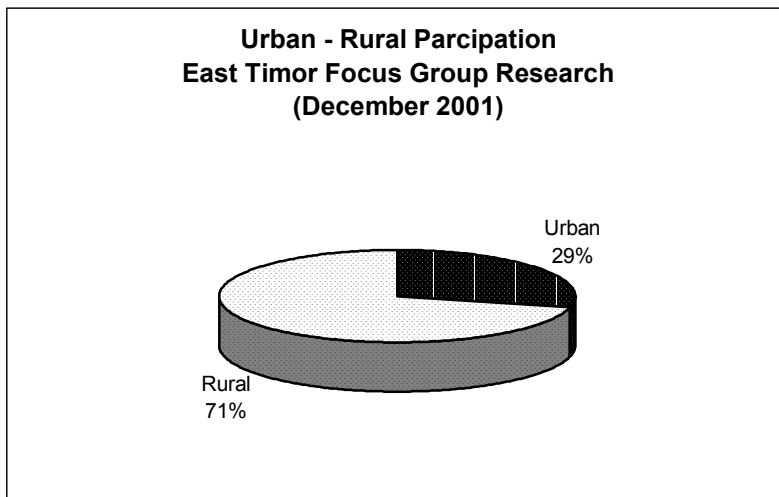
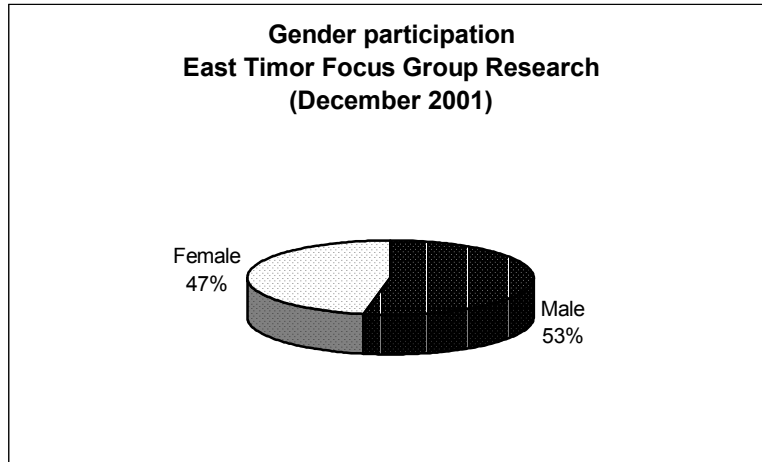
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TERMS USED IN THE REPORT

Aldeia	Sub-village
APODETI	Democratic Popular Association (Associação Popular Democrática)
BRTT	People's Front for East Timor (Barisan Rakyat Timor Timur)
Bunak	Local dialect spoken in western border districts
CEP	Community Empowerment Project
CIVPOL	International Civilian Police
CNRT	National Council for Timorese Resistance (Concelho Nacional da Resistencia Timorense)
CPD-RDTL	Committee for the Popular Defence of the Democratic Republic of East Timor
ETTA	East Timor Transitional Administration
ETPA	East Timor Provisional Administration
FALINTIL	Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor (Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor L'Este)
FDTL	East Timor Defence Force (Força Defesa Timor Lorosae)
FRETILIN	Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor (Frente Revolucionaria de Timor Leste Independente)
GOLKAR	Functional Groups (Golongan Karya)
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
INTERFET	International Force in East Timor
Kemak	Local dialect spoken in western border districts
Makasoe	Local dialect in eastern districts of Baucau and Viqueque
Mambae	Local dialect spoken in central highlands of East Timor
MPR	People's Consultative Assembly
NC	National Council of East Timor
NCC	National Consultative Council
Noeti	Local dialect spoken in Viqueque
PKF	UNTAET Peace Keeping Force
PNT	Timorese National Party (Partai Nasional Timor)
PPP	United Development Party (Partai Pembangunan Persatuan)
PSD	Social Democratic Party (Partai Social Democrática)
PST	Timorese Socialist Party (Partido Socialista de Timor)
Suco	Village
Tetum	Major local dialect spoken in East Timor and national language
Timor Lorosae	East Timor in Tetum
TLPS	Timor Lorosae Police Service
TNI	Indonesian military (Tentara Nasional Indonesia)
UDT	Timorese Democratic Union (União Democrática Timorense)
UNAMET	United Nations Mission in East Timor
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor

FOCUS GROUPS AT A GLANCE



REGIONAL AND LANGUAGE BREAKDOWN

<u>District</u>	<u>Sub-District</u>	<u>Profile</u>	<u>Primary Language</u>	<u>Secondary Language/s</u>
Dili	<i>Dili</i>	University Students	<i>Tetum</i>	Indonesian
Dili	<i>Dili</i>	University Students	<i>Tetum</i>	Indonesian
Dili	<i>Dili</i>	School Teachers	<i>Tetum</i>	Indonesian
Bobonaro	<i>Cailaco</i>	Farmers	<i>Tetum</i>	Kemak
Bobonaro	<i>Bobonaro</i>	Women's group	<i>Tetum</i>	Bunak
Ainaro	<i>Maubisse</i>	Church youth group	<i>Tetum</i>	Mambae
Viqueque	<i>Uato Lari</i>	Community Leaders	<i>Tetum</i>	Makasae/Noeti
Viqueque	<i>Uato Lari</i>	School Students	<i>Tetum</i>	Makasae/Noeti
Baucau	<i>Quelicai</i>	Returnees	<i>Tetum</i>	Makasae
Baucau	<i>Baucau</i>	Ex-Civil Servants	<i>Tetum</i>	Makasae
Baucau	<i>Venilale</i>	Farmers	<i>Tetum</i>	Makasae

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In little more than two years, East Timor has undergone a nearly complete political transformation. While a majority of the nation's citizens have never lived in a democratic society, citizens and political leaders have worked together since the historic referendum in 1999 to define and implement a sustainable democratic transition. For the first time East Timorese are participating in a democratic process without widespread threats of violence and terror and the country is politically energized in a way it has never known. The past year has been a period of particularly rapid and intense political change culminating in a peaceful election – with 91 percent voter turnout -- contested by 16 political parties for 88 seats in a Constituent Assembly charged with drafting the country's first constitution.

In December 2001 NDI conducted 11 focus groups in five districts throughout East Timor. This focus group research was conceived as one way to widen the views and perspectives available to policy makers and those taking part in the public debate shaping East Timor's political future. We hope that our research findings will inform future efforts to create democratic institutions and governance in East Timor with the knowledge, attitudes and opinions of a wide cross section of East Timorese society.

This report provides insight into the thoughts and concerns of the East Timorese people in the period immediately following a wave of vigorous political activity – including civic education campaigns, constitutional consultations and elections for a Constituent Assembly. The individuals who participated in this round of research experienced, during a 10-month period, political changes that citizens in many democratic countries may never experience in a lifetime. Much of the report's value is its ability to give voice to the views and opinions of these East Timorese. The report is not intended to be a comprehensive study of public opinion or of the political process in East Timor. It is designed for use in conjunction with other information sources and surveys.

Participants in this report voluntarily took part in this research project with the understanding that their ideas, thoughts, fears and hopes would be transmitted to those with the responsibility of leading this fledgling nation. The report is part of a long-term program of such consultations that NDI plans to support and make publicly available as one contribution to the ongoing transition in East Timor.

The focus group results clearly indicate that the people of East Timor have enthusiastically embraced democracy. Participants are eager for a better political and economic future and they look to their leaders to take them there. However, participants expressed no blind faith in political leaders -- after a traumatic 24 years of Indonesian occupation and resistance, the people of East Timor are an alert and demanding constituency. Focus group participants acknowledged that they have high expectations from their leaders and that they want their interests represented by their elected representatives.

This current round of focus group research further indicates that, when asked, East Timorese are ready to give their opinion and eager to participate if given the opportunity. Key findings include the following:

- Participants feel secure, safe and optimistic about the future, including the reduction of UNTAET's presence and the handover of authority to their own national leaders. This confidence is based in part on a belief in the capability of the newly formed Timorese institutions such as the Constituent Assembly, transitional cabinet, armed forces and police.
- There is a high level of frustration with elected representatives. Participants feel they have not been kept well informed regarding the progress of writing the country's new constitution. In general, they are concerned about the ability of their elected representatives to truly reflect the interests of the common people.
- East Timorese continue to fear an elite driven political process. They believe and demand that political leaders and elected representatives must be accountable to constituents.
- Participants are aware that the nation will soon go to the polls for the first time to directly elect a president and are enthusiastic to do so. This is seen as an essential right of passage on the road to independence.
- Even after a peaceful and non-violent election campaign, there remains a strong association between political parties and the fear of violence. Despite this enduring legacy of the 1975 civil war, support for a multi-party system persists and is regarded as an important part of the "checks and balances" of democracy.
- Generally, the electorate has developed heightened cynicism towards political parties based on the unrealistic and unfulfilled promises made by the parties during the campaign. Threats and harsh words among parties during the campaign period served to sow unease in the community and prompted calls for national unity.
- East Timorese are reassured by the creation of indigenous armed forces and police as the UN Peacekeepers (PKF) and police (CIVPOL) reduce their presence. However, participants caution against any attempt to return to an Indonesian-style security regime that allows the armed forces to play an active role in political affairs.
- The responsibility for local government remains unclear and participants desire better organization and possibly decentralization as well as rule of law at the local level.
- Active and high profile participation in the recent election by women candidates and the election of a significant number of women to the Constituent Assembly has left East Timorese women feeling that their interests are better represented in government policy making.

The information gathered during the focus group discussions is summarized in this report. It is the hope of NDI that this report will encourage debate among East Timorese elected representatives, government officials, political parties, NGOs, education institutions, civic educators, and other civil society organizations as the process of nation building goes forward in coming months.

INTRODUCTION

Since February 2001, when NDI first measured East Timorese public opinion through focus group research,¹ East Timor has quickly passed a number of political milestones. Perhaps the most important and telling of these milestones was the August 30 election for the Constituent Assembly, the body that will draft and promulgate the country's first constitution. 16 political parties registered for the election, fielded candidates and peacefully competed for seats in the 88- member body. The campaign period and election day were regarded as "uneventful" – but this in itself was historic. In a nation scarred by 24 years of political violence and turmoil and with the memory of the devastation following the 1999 referendum for self-determination still painfully fresh, an election campaign and polling day with no notable violence and no loss of life were essential steps toward stable democratic governance.

The Constituent Assembly election indicated quite clearly that, if given the opportunity, the overwhelming majority of East Timorese would participate in all aspects of the political process. Not only did 16 political parties field candidates and compete in the election, voter turn out on polling day was more than 91 percent. Additionally, in excess of 1,100 independent domestic election observers monitored the vote across the country's 13 districts and more than 500 international observers joined them. Both groups judged the election, run by the UN's Independent Electoral Commission, to be free and fair. Our current focus group research indicates that the East Timorese people agree with this finding.

88 representatives from 12 different political parties and one independent were elected to the Constituent Assembly. Each of East Timor's 13 districts had its own representative, with the balance of 75 Assembly members chosen from national party lists. The Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor, known by its acronym FRETILIN, won 55 of the 88 seats, including 12 of the 13 district seats. Immediately following the election, the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) appointed 25 members of the Second East Timor Transitional Government, all of them East Timorese, to govern the territory jointly with the UN until full independence in 2002.

In September 2001, the Constituent Assembly began deliberations on the constitution in a newly refurbished building in central Dili. In October, the Assembly passed a motion requesting that the UN Security Council transfer power to a sovereign East Timorese government on 20 May 2002. The United Nations acceded to this request. The following month the Constituent Assembly requested that the United Nations prepare for a presidential election in April 2002. In January 2002, a special committee of the Assembly approved a Regulation to Elect the First President of the Democratic Republic of East Timor. This poll has been set for 14 April 2002.

At the time of writing this report, the Assembly has nearly completed a draft constitution with more than 150 articles. The adoption of this constitution is expected on 9 March 2002.

¹ *Timor Loro Sa'e is our nation: A Report on Discussion Groups in East Timor*, National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the East Timor NGO Forum's Working Group on Voter Education (KKPP), March 2001.

In December 2001, NDI conducted 11 focus groups in 5 districts throughout East Timor. This research was conceived as one way to widen the views and perspectives available to policy makers and those taking part in the public debate shaping East Timor's political future. The major findings of this research are presented in this report. A description of the methodology utilized is included in the appendices.

MAJOR FINDINGS

NATIONAL MOOD

The people of East Timor want to leave the past behind and look forward expectantly to a better future.

“My hope is that we forget the past that was full of revenge, jealousy and such things,” *female university student, 18 years, Dili district.*

The constituent assembly election is viewed as opening a new chapter in the life of the nation they called Timor Lorosae. The people credit the United Nations with bringing peace and stability to the country. While some question the fairness of the allocation and distribution of international aid, overall the impression that the participants gave was that their experience of UN governance was a positive one. They are aware that the United Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) is winding down and will transfer power to an East Timorese government in May 2002. They accept this but do not want the international community to forget East Timor. Participants expect and desire some continued assistance, particularly in the field of security.

“The United Nations has already given much assistance and now they are going back. We must thank them for this aid. We must accept our independence with joy and not forget each other. They are leaving to assist other nations which need them,” *male farmer, 30, Bobonaro district.*

The East Timorese people are optimistic, but not free of day-to-day worries about employment, education, health and water. However, most appear ready for the final stages of the transition to independence, facing it with a degree of self-confidence.

“We must thank the UN for their assistance and after the UN leaves we must build our own nation,” *male teacher, 30, Dili district.*

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY AND FUTURE PARLIAMENT

The participants spoke with confidence that they now live in a democracy; having an elected body of representatives has given them this self-assurance. They embraced the opportunity last August to choose 88 members of a constituent assembly that, since September 2001, has been diligently writing a constitution for this fledgling country. However, they speak with one voice -- from east to west, young to old, from the city to the countryside -- when they express their frustrations that while they have democratically elected their representatives, they do not always feel their interests are being represented. From both sides of the democratic equation, East Timor is struggling to build a sense of constituency. Participants of all backgrounds urged their leaders again and again to take notice of the needs and opinions of those who elected them.

In one group of farmers in the east, this sentiment was represented in the first thoughts expressed in the focus group: “Our leaders must listen to the us from the lower levels of society”. A similar group of peers 150 kilometers to the west struck the same note: “Don’t forget the aspirations of the community, they must be taken into account in the articles (of the constitution) and not ignored.” In Dili, a university student sounded the

same complaint in different words: “In theory, political parties represent the people. But the reality is that political parties do not yet carry the general aspirations of the community.” East Timor’s political system is based upon the notion that political parties, with 12 represented in the Constituent Assembly and only one of the body’s 88 members not a party member, are meant to represent the interests of their constituents. There continues to be widespread doubt about the ability and the desire of the members to represent the people’s interests.

By definition, with the constitution unfinished, the machinery to properly represent the interests of the people remains incomplete. The new constitution will outline the basic principles on which the institutions of the executive, legislature and judiciary will be built. Each arm of government will require a significant body of law and regulation to make it work that has not yet been written. In time, new conventions, practices and political cultures will need to be developed. East Timorese officials will need to acquire much needed experience in governing. This will be a long-term process.

For most East Timorese, their experience of elected representatives is a negative one. Until now, the only model of representative government and parliamentary practice came from the period of Indonesian rule when members came, sat, said nothing, got paid and went home. Between elections, citizens rarely saw their elected representatives despite choosing deputies for the three tiers of government – national, provincial and district. Since the Constituent Assembly election, there are already feelings of frustration about how the process of building new political structures has proceeded. This should raise concerns that the perceived “sidelining” of the people could be creating an elite driven process – or at least the appearance of one -- that could ultimately undermine the legitimacy of the constitution.

At the time of this focus group research, the East Timor Constituent Assembly had been sitting for four months, but most of the focus group participants were uninformed about its deliberations. In the focus group discussions, participants often pleaded for information from the facilitators. They demanded that their representatives come back to the people to consult and provide information about the process. A concerted public information strategy with adequate resources and time is required.

While not part of the focus group research, members of the Constituent Assembly have publicly stated that they are too busy to return to the districts that elected them to provide even basic information about the proceedings in the Constituent Assembly. In private, after prompting by various civil society groups, some district representatives pleaded that they are too shy to speak in public. Still others, fearing they may violate the party line while speaking in public, have chosen to remain silent in the capital and ignore the calls for accountability from people in the districts. Institutionally, there has been no attempt to establish an ongoing dialogue with the people beyond the first step of weekly media conferences. Poor media coverage indicates that using the mass media alone is an inadequate form of outreach by elected officials. To date, the Assembly’s only attempt at outreach has been the article in the body’s rules and procedures providing for one week of “consultation” after the constitution has been drafted. At the time of this research, no date or timeframe has been publicly specified or communicated to the people regarding when such consultations would occur. Given the limited time allowed, many doubt whether this consultation will be a two-way process where the views of the people will be heard and

taken into account, or a one-way public information campaign or socialization of the constitution.

Perhaps the source of passion concerning the Constituent Assembly is a reflection of the sense of ownership East Timorese have over the institution. The body is often mentioned with pride, and as an illustration of how things have changed from the days of terror and intimidation under Indonesian rule. East Timorese making the basic laws for East Timor is a recurring sentiment. Side by side with these feelings of pride, East Timorese hold their elected representatives to high standards. They expect them to be well educated, have strong morals, a good work ethic, live up to their promises and be free from corruption. They want them to represent the people's interests and not their own or those of the party with the most votes. Already, there are echoes of the same criticisms leveled at representatives during Indonesian times.

“Only half of (the Constituent Assembly members) are channeling the people's aspirations, the remainder come, sit, be quiet and go home and many promises remain unfulfilled,” *male university student, 25, Dili district.*

Those able to follow developments in the Constituent Assembly seem uncomfortable with some of the things they are witnessing or hearing for the first time, although many practices are standard in vigorous democracies. A number of participants seemed uncomfortable with voting along party lines and the party with the most seats dominating proceedings. Perhaps this concern is allied with a common desire among all groups for national unity, and reflects an aversion to practices that appear divisive. Rancorous debate in the Assembly also appears to make people uncomfortable, as did the harsh words or mutual criticism on the campaign trail during the Constituent Assembly election campaign. Perhaps in its outreach campaign, the Assembly, its members and any future legislature need to reassure the community about the role of the legislature as the forum for such disagreements in society to be resolved through discussion, lively debate, powerful words and ultimately, laws.

“Those who sit there making the laws, they must make the laws in accordance with the people's aspirations, not following their own desires. The party that has the most members must not dominate everything,” *former female civil servant, 32, Baucau district.*

There could be another undercurrent exposed by these comments. Perhaps the East Timorese community views the constitution writing exercise more as an opportunity for nation building and the construction of a national consensus rather than the grounds for a political contest where the winner takes all.

PAST AND FUTURE ELECTIONS

There were few complaints regarding the organization and conduct of the Constituent Assembly election of 30 August 2002. While some party leaders grumbled about their share of the vote and of support levels that were lower than expected, no participant of the focus groups questioned the result. However, in the western districts, some participants did feel that they and others had not been truly free to vote for the party of their choice due to intimidating remarks by FRETILIN leaders during the campaign in those districts. At the time of campaign, FRETILIN was publicly criticized for its use of the metaphor of post-election "sweep". Many East Timorese interpreted these remarks, based on their experience under the Indonesian military occupation, as meaning a round-up of opponents rather than the literally street cleaning exercise that FRETILIN leaders said they were promoting. In NDI's initial focus group report in February 2001, participants reacted strongly against the tactics of the Indonesian ruling party GOLKAR and its pattern of using intimidation and threats to manipulate voters.

In general, voters were reassured by the fact that the election was carried out by the Independent Election Commission (IEC), a body of the UNTAET. Some noted the presence of domestic and international observers at polling stations, including party poll agents, as an additional comfort. Participants did not mention problems with the electoral roll and the allocation of polling stations --- a major headache for the IEC, who had relied on Civil Registry data to compile the roll.

All focus group participants were of voting age and almost all had voted. Those participants who did not vote were primarily supporters of the Committee for the Popular Defense of the Democratic Republic of East Timor (CPD-RDTL). CPD-RDTL boycotted the civil registration, the campaign and the poll in accordance with the group's political position not to acknowledge the legitimacy of the United Nations presence in East Timor.

On the whole, participants are enthusiastic about the forthcoming presidential election and are ready to vote as soon as they know when and how. There were no strong sentiments expressed by CPD-RDTL supporters for a boycott of the forthcoming presidential poll; however, if members of this movement boycotted the civil registration process, they do not hold a registration card and are ineligible to vote.

In contrast to February focus groups, most participants from the variety of groups and districts included in the research are aware that the next election will be a presidential election. Similarly, as in the research conducted ten months before, the sole name mentioned by the participants as a possible presidential candidate was former leader of the FALINTIL guerrilla movement and the umbrella resistance group CNRT, Xanana Gusmao.

In part, participants credit the Pact for National Unity with ensuring the relatively peaceful Constituent Assembly elections. The pact was signed in July by the major parties contesting the election, on the eve of the election campaign. The need for unity was such a strong theme in this round of focus groups that political parties and future presidential candidates should consider publicly reaffirming their commitment to the Pact or a new document, such as a voluntary code of conduct for presidential candidates and campaigning.

The focus groups also showed that some participants were confused between candidates for the last election, of which there were several hundred on party lists, and those elected to sit in the assembly. A thorough post-election public information campaign to ensure that the result is properly understood should be incorporated into any future election planning.

POLITICAL PARTIES

The legacy of the 1975 civil war, which started as a struggle for power between the two leading political parties at that time -- FRETILIN and UDT -- remains. The peaceful election campaign in July and August 2001 has not erased this trauma from the collective memory of the East Timorese. Fear of violence caused by political activity remains one of the most prevalent issues when political parties are discussed -- even among people not born at that time. The pain, suffering and consequence of this conflict-- when being a member of the wrong political party could mean summary execution -- has been passed down through the generations; and it may take several more peaceful election cycles to begin to dissipate this fear.

Participants regularly stressed the need for “unity” among political parties, and expressed concern that parties were using harsh words against each other or “mud slinging” during election campaigns. Parties and political leaders were the particular focus of these heartfelt expressions for unity to avoid violence and further suffering for the people of East Timor.

“In the transition period we have 16 political parties, we the people hope the political party leaders will sit together and hold meaningful discussions about how to build and support the progress of development,” *farmer, Baucau district.*

Despite these concerns, the participants did not reject the multi-party system now operating in East Timor. Only a few individuals called for a small number of parties. Most saw the multi-party system as an important check or control against the abuse of power. In other words, participants seemed to indicate that the best group to supervise political parties was other political parties. There is little support for any restrictions on political party activity, although there are calls for self-restraint by the parties and their leaders.

The role of political parties as representatives of sectional interests of the community seems to be poorly understood. Perhaps, this is in part a reflection of the activities of the parties, few of which have any major networks or widespread membership base. Since the election campaign, few, if any, participants have seen or met a representative of a political party.

The numerous promises made by parties during the campaign remain blatantly unfulfilled, and this did not escape the attention of the focus group participants. The last election was for a constituent assembly and not to constitute a government. Parties should have known that they would not be in a position, even if elected, to deliver such promises as free education and no taxes. Fortunately, the most exaggerated of promises appear to have never been believed by the majority of East Timorese and were quickly dismissed.

“Negatively, there were parties that promised the community that if they won, schools would be free and they would build bridges from Los Palos to Oecusse,” *female school teacher, 28, Dili district.*

“In my opinion the most negative aspect of the campaign was the party that said they would create two banks, one for the people and one for the royalty or upper class,” *male school teacher, 30, Dili district.*

The unrealistic nature of the promises, when added to the absence of party representatives since the election, has heightened the East Timorese people’s already well-developed cynicism of political parties that dates back to their experiences during the tightly-controlled Indonesian period. Parties rejoining the campaign trail for the presidential election or any subsequent poll for a legislative body will have to confront this legacy.

SECURITY AND TRANSITION

The first task given to UNTAET by Security Council Resolution 1272 was “to provide security and maintain law and order throughout the territory of East Timor.” The East Timorese who took part in this research feel secure, and they describe their safety in personal terms --- feeling free to move about their community day and night without threat. This feeling of safety extends to focus group participants who are recent returnees, some who had been back in East Timor for only three months at the time of the discussion.

Since the arrival of the INTERFET multi-national force in September 1999, which evolved into the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces (PKF) in February 2000, citizens of East Timor have suffered no major external or internal threat. Participants say they feel free from arbitrary execution, state-sponsored terror and intimidation. They give some credit for this personal safety to PKF and International Civilian Police (CIVPOL), and acknowledge that the security of the nation has been achieved by the more than 8,000 international troops present during the transition period. However, they see themselves and members of their communities, such as village chiefs, traditional leaders and youth groups as playing an important role in creating a safe atmosphere in their immediate communities.

East Timor is a poor and multi-ethnic community. Like all societies, it has a need for a police force and justice system. Small, intra-communal problems still exist. For example, in this round of discussions, participants from Bobonaro and Baucau districts worried about conflict between FRETILIN supporters and those rallying around the flag of the splinter group CPD-RDTL. In Viqueque, long standing grievances between the Makasae and Noeti ethnic groups are a cause for ongoing concern, and unsettle the community. These disputes seem based as much on land problems as ethnic rivalries. In urban Baucau, where the new and old town sections alternate nights to receive electricity, the residents have a heightened sense of alert for robbery and theft on evenings the neighborhood must spend in the dark. In various districts, women mentioned ongoing problems with domestic violence and rape.

For external security, particularly for those living near the border, the PKF is vital and its continued presence is supported, albeit in reduced numbers. While a draw down of

PKF forces is underway, East Timorese see this as balanced by the creation of the East Timor Defense Force (FDTL) and the East Timor Police Service (TLPS).

“If there are less PKF and CIVPOL, I don’t think there will be any effect because now we have Timorese who have become the FDTL and Timor Lorosae police,” *women’s group member, 28, Bobonaro district.*

Participants saw the FDTL taking on the future responsibility of managing external security once a sufficient number of soldiers are trained. Participants alternatively described the FDTL as the “fence of the nation” or “a border security force”. Most participants allocate the role for internal security to the TLPS, although some see this as joint responsibility of both the army and police. No one wants a return to the Indonesian security system where the military (TNI) was involved in politics and governance.

“The duty of the FDTL is to secure the borders, be they land, sea or air and we want to avoid a ‘dual function’ military like Indonesia,” *male farmer, 30, Bobonaro district.*

LOCAL GOVERNANCE

UNTAET’s administrative reach below the district capitals is limited. There are sub-district offices as well as a CIVPOL and TLPS presence at that level. However, below the district level, bringing order or some sort of governance to the local community is left to a mix of traditional leadership and former CNRT officials, such as the Chefe Zona (sub-district), Chefe de Suco (village) or Chefe de Aldeia (hamlet). In times of dispute, church leaders can also become involved. The most serious cases of conflict are brought to CIVPOL or TLPS. This situation, where village-by-village governance has found its own level, has not pleased everyone.

“As far as I know, our village chief is no longer active since his position is no longer legal, because the CNRT has disbanded,” *male returnee, 35, Baucau district.*

Among some participants, there appears to be a desire for a more ordered existence based on rule of law.

“Threats of terror, intimidation and discrimination will appear if the law is not socialized and upheld,” *male returnee, 45, Baucau district.*

In matters of development, the Conselho de Suco (Village Council) or Conselho de Posto (Sub-district Council), formed under the World Bank-sponsored Community Empowerment Program (CEP), plays a role. Participants seem most critical of these councils or this program when excluded, or when benefits bypass them. The distribution of projects and assistance, particularly by those supported by foreign donors, either humanitarian or development in nature, is largely perceived by participants to be arbitrary and haphazard. The principles or plans behind the distribution of this assistance remain unclear and/or are not publicized properly. There is jealousy and frustration when a village is bypassed for development assistance. There are existing calls for openness and transparency in local governance even before local governance actually exists. There is not always a permanent presence of ETTA/ETPA at the sub-district level.

“In our sub-district, the activities undertaken by local government are secret and we are seldom told about forthcoming activities. They have not yet had an open meeting with the community,” *male returnee, 45, Baucau district.*

In the draft constitution, it states that the law will determine the system of local governance. When legislators address this matter, they should not ignore these calls for an open and responsive local government system that is accountable to the people it serves.

WOMEN AND POLITICS

East Timorese women who participated in the focus group discussions universally assumed that if there were female members of the Constituent Assembly, then the interests of women would be represented.

“Women have the same rights as men. I am proud that many of our women friends sit in the Constituent Assembly to defend the rights of women,” *former civil servant, 40, Baucau district.*

Some women’s groups, closely following the progress of the Constituent Assembly, may question such assumptions; but outside of Dili, women participants regarded the election of a significant number of women to the constitution making body to be a proud achievement --- 24 of 88 members elected to the assembly are women. However, the reality of male-dominated political parties and the implications this has for women’s political issues have not yet sunk in.

Female focus group participants were most often able to refer to their elected representatives by name, although in doing so, a number of women from different districts failed to differentiate between women candidates and those elected. In particular, two high-profile women’s activists, Maria Domingas Fernandes and Olandina Caeiro, who ran unsuccessfully for national seats as independent candidates, were often named as sitting members of the assembly. This has implications for post-election public information campaigns and future civic education. It is an indication that beyond a few high profile members, constituents do not know most of the representatives in the Constituent Assembly.

IMPLICATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS OF THE FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The focus group research findings have significant implications for the numerous institutional and individual actors involved in East Timor's transition to democratic self-governance. These implications and observations are summarized below. The implications result from an analysis of focus group transcripts and drawn from NDI's international comparative expertise. They are, therefore, not necessarily direct quotes from focus group transcripts.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

- While there has been a high level of interest in the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly, the amount of accurate information available to the public has been very limited. Any future legislature will need to craft a public information strategy that goes beyond using the mass media and reaches all the communities of East Timor.
- There is high expectation from the people that their elected representatives will regularly visit their communities to inform them of proceedings in the national parliament as well as consult with them on their needs and opinions. This means that any future legislative body should allocate sufficient time and resources to elected representatives to hold some form of regular consultations with community members, even at the village level.
- This expectation that district representatives, in particular, will visit all communities shall, under current circumstances, place a significant burden on the representatives of the 13 districts. A future parliament will need to consider ways and means of sharing this burden among all elected representatives and not just a small minority of parliamentarians.
- Participants' expectations regarding their involvement in law-making goes beyond socialization and extends to active consultation. A future parliament will need to develop mechanisms for regular consultation with the people that reach beyond the educated elites of the capital.
- Based on its traumatic and divided past, the East Timorese community puts a premium on unity. There appears to be some concern regarding the conduct of debate in the Constituent Assembly, particularly the vigorous expression of conflicting opinions. Any public information campaign by the legislature or its members will need to explain the role of a parliament in a democracy, highlighting its function as the forum for peaceful, and often passionate, expression of conflicting views.
- In general, the people of East Timor have high expectations of their newly elected representatives --- demanding that they be active, both inside and outside the chamber, be of high moral standing and free of corruption. In

fact, they expect all members, regardless of party affiliation, to work for the greater good of community and not for private interests.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CIVIC EDUCATION

- While there is now significant radio coverage throughout East Timor, the access of people to this medium remains limited due to the nature of their daily work in the fields, limited access to radios, and limited hours of availability of electricity. Therefore, there should not be an over reliance on broadcast media for civic education.
- People outside of the capital expressed a clear preference for information to be disseminated in person, either orally or with written materials. The research reaffirms the suitability of NDI's Civic Forum program in East Timor.
- Tetum is the most widely spoken dialect, although citizens in many parts of East Timor still prefer to speak their own language or dialect. This reinforces the need to deliver information orally and to involve local community organizations in this effort.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ELECTIONS

- The people of East Timor do not appear to be disillusioned with representative democracy and appear to be as enthusiastic as ever to take part in a direct election for their president. There appears to be no need for a "get out the vote" campaign at this stage of East Timor's transition to independence, only a public information campaign regarding how people can exercise their right to vote.
- Participants expressed support for the creation of an independent body to organize and conduct the presidential election.
- According to some opinions expressed in the focus groups, people's confidence in the election would be increased if independent domestic or international organizations as well as members of the political parties monitored elections.
- There appears to be some confusion between candidates for the Constituent Assembly and those members actually elected. Electoral authorities should consider a wider post-election public information strategy informing the community of the result of any poll. Strategies should go beyond the use of mass media.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

- Despite a peaceful election campaign in July – August 2001, there is still a strong association in the community between political parties and violence dating back to the civil war of 1975. Participants regularly stressed the need for unity among political parties, and this emphasizes the need for a

confidence building mechanism such as the Pact of National Unity or a political party code of conduct agreed to by all groups.

- In general, the participants in the focus groups equate a multi-party system with democracy. Most participants support a multi-party system, seeing it as an important part of the checks and balances of a democratic system. There is little support for any restrictions on political party activity.
- There is a general perception that political parties are formed to represent their own interests and not those of the community. Political parties need to work on their structures to become more representative of community interests. The development of permanent branch networks outside of head offices in the capital would be an important step in fulfilling this need.
- There is a great distrust of political parties based on the exaggerated promises made during the campaign for the elections for the Constituent Assembly. Political parties need to have realistic policies and platforms that are in line with the attitudes and expectations of the community.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

- The Pact of National Unity is credited with ensuring the peaceful campaign period for the Constituent Assembly elections. Therefore, candidates for the presidential election in April should consider publicly reaffirming their support for the Pact, or working together to develop their own code of conduct for the presidential campaign.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE GOVERNMENT OF EAST TIMOR

- While East Timorese have thus far survived by mostly governing themselves at the local level, participants seemed uncomfortable with the lack of structure and legal basis for local government below the district level.
- East Timorese do not want a return to the “dual function” of the armed forces that they experienced under Indonesian rule. Participants were reassured by the creation of an East Timorese police force and the defense force. They saw the role of the police as being responsible for internal security, and the role of defense force as guarding the country’s borders. However, a clear operational doctrine needs to be developed and propagated for the future role of these two key security institutions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR UN TRANSITIONAL ADMINISTRATION (UNTAET)

- The people of East Timor credit the United Nations with bringing peace and stability to their lives during the last two years. Most seem comfortable with the forthcoming transfer of authority and scaling down of UNTAET. However, there appears to be some confusion about the transition process and, in particular, the nature and scale of the withdrawal of peacekeeping forces and international civilian police (CIVPOL).
- UNTAET and its successor mission should intensify its public information efforts, particularly outside the main towns, to explain the transition in greater detail to the population and hence reassure them of the continued support of the international community. This public information campaign should not be over-reliant on the mass media, which has limited reach throughout East Timor. Any distribution of printed materials needs to be done in a planned and systematic manner beyond the district capitals and involving the village level.

APPENDIX A - METHODOLOGY EMPLOYED

The focus groups were constructed to reflect a cross-section of East Timorese society, without any one-group dominating. From a target of 10 groups, 11 focus group discussions with 85 people were conducted in total, with participants for three sessions drawn from the main urban center of Dili and a fourth group from other key urban area, the second city of Baucau. The balance was drawn from rural areas in four diverse districts from east to west. The aim was to ensure that all levels of society were included, from the educated elite in Dili, represented in this report by school teachers and university students, to those with only a rudimentary formal education living in remote rural communities.

While a particular location always had to be chosen to conduct the focus group, in more than one case, the participants were recruited from outlying communities to include the isolated and traditionally excluded. A number of participants walked up to three hours in the wet season to take part. Others used public transport to travel significant distances to join the focus groups. This means that the views of those living in the many remote and isolated communities in East Timor are represented by this research. Dili participants also often referred to experiences from the home villages. Hence, the sample is geographically more dispersed than may first appear.

This report includes a table that provides a simple classification of the participants and allocate a broad understanding of the people who took part in this research. However, it must be remembered that the participants, in fact, have “multiple identities”. The farmers are members of church groups and political parties, and took part in the constitutional consultation process that preceded last year’s Constituent Assembly election. This also applies to many of the women participants who were active in women’s resistance groups in the past, and are involved in current political activities. The refugees, some who had returned less than three months before being interviewed, are former members of the Indonesian military and quasi-militia groups. They now earn their living by working their own land. Teachers and students, while recruited in Dili, spoke with first hand knowledge of the situation in their home villages across East Timor.

East Timor is a youthful population, and an attempt was made to reflect this fact when choosing people to take part in the focus groups. At the time of writing, there was continued debate in East Timor regarding the quality and reliability of demographic data. While the researchers aspired to have an equal representation of men and women, in practice the ratio of men to women who took part in the focus groups was just under 53:47. Minor alternations in attendance would have tilted the percentages in either favor.

A Word on Focus Groups

Focus group discussions are semi-structured discussions on specific topics conducted by a trained moderator with a group of approximately six to 15 participants. The discussions generally last around two hours. The average for this research was closer to three hours. The participants are recruited because they have certain characteristics. These characteristics might include demographic factors such as age, sex and occupation. Alternatively, the focus group participants might be selected because they are part of a unique subset of the community, such as former refugees.

Focus Groups are a means of eliciting public opinions on particular issues. A focus group is not a survey or a poll. Unlike the results of a quantitative survey, which are statistically representative of the sample population, focus groups are not precise measures of public attitudes due to their small sample size. Rather, focus groups are considered qualitative research, which is helpful in gaining a more in-depth understanding of public attitudes and attitude formation. Focus groups can reveal insights, underlying values and orientations, thought processes, intensity or emotions, and reactions to certain information. The Asia Foundation (TAF) released the first voter knowledge survey in May 2001 and its results reinforced the findings of the initial focus group research conducted by NDI. A follow-up survey was in the field at the time this report was being written and will be released in coming months.

The Discussion Guide

In order to assist the focus group facilitators, NDI developed a discussion guide. The guide, or questionnaire, of issues to be discussed was developed for facilitators to use in leading discussions. To NDI's knowledge, this was only the second time that focus groups of this nature were conducted in East Timor. The first was conducted by NDI and East Timor NGO Forum's Working Group on Voter Education (KKPP) in February 2001. The questions were deliberately designed to be general in nature to acquire knowledge about attitudes and motivations. Facilitators were encouraged not to read them verbatim, rather to rephrase them in the local language, if necessary. Because the original guide was in Indonesian and all of the focus groups were primarily conducted in local languages, this adaptation was inevitable. It was often interesting to observe how different groups reacted to the same questions.

In keeping with standard focus group procedure, the East Timorese moderators were instructed to ask questions in an open-ended manner. The facilitators tried to encourage participants to share their opinions rather than to provide an analysis of the situation in East Timor. Though it was sometimes difficult to stimulate the kind of intra-participant dialogue focus groups try to encourage, it was not difficult to encourage East Timorese to speak out. Participants were told their views would be made public, albeit without attribution. They were told this report would be presented to political leaders and elected members of the East Timor Constituent Assembly, and this was their opportunity to speak directly to the future leadership of their country. As was the experience with the last focus group research, participants welcomed the fact that the country's emerging leaders in the capital would hear their voices. Facilitators often found it difficult to stop the discussion. While a number of groups had discussion for two hours -- the ideal length of time --- the average was closer to three hours. None of the subjects included in the guide were considered too sensitive to discuss, though discussions on elected representatives and political parties were generally more passionately discussed than other topics.

The Focus Groups

Since the massive displacement of the East Timorese population in the post-ballot violence of September 1999, the only accurate statistics on where people are living in East Timor has been UNTAET's compulsory civil registration process, the bulk of which was completed in the first half of 2001. However, given the large number of coding errors and the poor quality control of the data input --- which was exposed when the civil registry data was used to compile the electoral role for the August 2001 election --- there is no

reliable population data available in East Timor at this time. A boycott of the registration process in some areas also cast doubt. Despite these problems, East Timor's population is calculated at around 750,000. It is a youthful populace, reinforced by the Indonesian-conducted census figures from 1996. The sample of focus groups, therefore, has concentrated on younger rather than older people with the focus groups concentrating on those of voting age (above 17 years) and under 40 years of age.

While the researchers had taken all these factors into account in choosing focus groups, they had to balance these against the linguistic diversity of East Timor, where there are said to be 17 local dialects. While Tetum is widely used, it is not spoken everywhere in East Timor, such as in the west districts of Bobonaro and Covalima as well as in the enclave of Oecussi. In principle, focus groups should be conducted in the language in which the participants feel most comfortable. Therefore, when researchers were unable to recruit facilitators from the eastern district of Lautem or the enclave of Oecussi, they did not attempt to conduct focus groups there.

NDI had planned to conduct 11 focus groups in this round so as to allow for any operational difficulties in the wet season, and ensure that a minimum of ten groups would be conducted in a two-week timetable. In the end, no groups were cancelled. The groups were conducted from 7 to 17 December 2001. Inevitably, the period of the Christmas and New Year holidays slowed down production of the report.

The Facilitators

NDI worked with the final-year political science students from the University of East Timor for this project. The facilitators were given a formal four-day training course in Dili by a professional focus group facilitator trainer. Representatives from NDI and UNTIL were present in the field for 9 of the 11 groups.

All the focus groups were conducted in a mixture of languages that reflected the linguistic tapestry that is East Timor. The working language of the documentation of the study was Indonesian, although the most commonly used language in the focus group discussions was Tetum. All the focus groups were audio taped, and transcripts were prepared in Indonesian by the facilitators. This report was originally written in English, and the authors bear all responsibility for Indonesian to English translation of the transcripts. Facilitators were volunteers who received a modest per diem to cover their costs. No payments were made to any participants.

APPENDIX B – FACILITATORS GUIDE

[ORIGINAL IN INDONESIA]

NDI EAST TIMOR – FISIPOL UNTIL

Facilitator's Guide for Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

December 2001

Times: 120 minutes

Facilitator - Be sure to

Prepare yourself for focus group discussion – read discussion rules as the follows:

Introduce yourself and the cooperation research between FISIPOL-UNTIL and NDI

Make sure the room is set up to facilitate a participatory discussion

Get participants introduce themselves

Give a verbal agenda and length of the meeting

Set goals that this is a research, not education

Clarify your role as a facilitator

1. Introduction (Approx. 10 minutes)

Welcome everyone; introduce yourself and get members introduce themselves.

Explain the program objective as under:

This research is a cooperative effort between FISIPOL/UNTIL and NDI. The aim of these focus group discussions is to collect ideas and aspirations of East Timorese regarding the issues of election, constitution, politic and local government from several locations and social classes. The information will be collected and analyzed in one report, which it is hoped will have an impact and influence on government policy and also assist local and international organizations– who are active during transition period in the field of civic education program.

Ask participants if they clearly understand the program objectives. If not please explain so that everyone is clear about the objectives.

Explain the format of the discussion. Emphasize anonymity, explain the use of the tape recorder as means to ensure their comments are properly recorded, speak up so their voice is recorded, emphasize tapes will only be used for transcription purposes.

Remind participants that there are no right or wrong answers. Participants are present as individuals from the community. Relax, this may be unusual but it will be an interesting experience.

Start with yourself and ask the group about themselves, their occupations/situations, use first names, or nickname. Ask participants their family and work? [The facilitator can ask the age of the participants and assistant facilitator can take notes. The aim of this exercise is for yourself and others in the group to get to know each other to encourage a good discussion]

2. Mood

(Approx. 15 minutes)

Hold a discussion about the situation in East Timor at the moment. Encourage responses from all participants about whether the situation is improving or getting worse. Why and who is responsible? What can the participants do themselves to improve the situation?

When will East Timor be independent? What does this mean? Ask them about their expectations one year from today? Will life be better or worse? Why?

What does the transfer of sovereignty mean for participations? What does independence mean to the participants? What does the departure of the UN mean to them? Why?

3. Elections & Constitution

(Approx. 30 minutes)

Have a discussion about the participant's experiences with the Constituent Assembly elections.

What was their experience of the campaign? Positive or negative? Why? What did they think of the result? Do they feel represented?

What have they heard since the Constituent Assembly conducted its deliberations? How have you received information about the Constituent Assembly? What were their impressions of the Constituent Assembly's performance? Have they seen or heard from their representatives since they were elected?

Have participants heard any details about the constitution? Ask them their thoughts on what they have heard? Do they think it is a good constitution? Do they think it represent their interests?

Have a discussion about the next election in East Timor. When will the next election in East Timor be? What will the people of East Timor be choosing? Will they participate? Why? Who do they think will be nominated for president?

In their experience, what makes a free and fair election? How do you guarantee a free and fair election? What is the role of East Timor organization to determine a free and fair election?

4. Political groups and leaders

(Approx. 15 minutes)

[If there have already been discussions of political parties you can abbreviate or skip this section]

Hold a discussion about the participants experience with political parties in East Timor.

Ask them to describe the activities of political parties in their area before and after the Constituent Assembly election. What is the role of political parties in the East Timorese community? If there are members of political parties present, ask them further about their activities and motivation. If there are no members of political parties, discuss the image of political parties and whether participants would consider joining one.

Discuss the meaning of a “multi-party” system.

How did political parties behave during the campaign period? Was this positive or negative? Whose interests do political parties in East Timor represent?

5. Local authority and governance **(Approx. 15 minutes)**

What is the role of local government in your area? Who makes decisions regarding the development of your village/neighborhood? What do you know of the work of the Conselho de Suco and Conselho de Posto? How have they operated in your area? Have you participated in any projects or activities organized by these bodies? Have you ever involved in CEP activities? What do you think about the result?

Hold a discussion about community leaders in this area. Who are the important people in solving problems and what is the way in which problems are solved.

6. Security **(Approx 15 minutes)**

Do participants feel safe? If so, why? If not, why not? Who is responsible for security in your neighborhood or village? Who is responsible for security throughout East Timor? The UN PKF and UN CIVPOL are decreasing their numbers ahead of the transfer of sovereignty? Do you feel secure with the transition? What is the biggest threat to security?

What role do CIVPOL or TLPS play in maintaining security in your neighborhood or village? What is the impression of the performance of TLPS? In the future, what is the role of TLPS?

What is the role of FDTL in East Timor?

What are the difference between TLPS and FDTL?

7. For women only
(Approx. 10 minutes)

Hold a discussion about who represents women's interests in East Timor.

Do the political parties represent women's interests? Can women name the women representatives on the Conselho de Suco or Posto?

Can women name women representatives in the Constituent Assembly? How have women elected to the Constituent Assembly represented women's interests? More than one quarter of the Assembly members are women, do women feel they have a positive on issues important to women?

8. Close

Express thanks. Explain participant's contribution is secret. Make commitment to return with report after finished research.

APPENDIX C – ABOUT NDI

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

In many countries, advocates of democracy lack the institutions and the experience of democratic practices. NDI assists political and civic actors in efforts to build and strengthen democratic structures. These include: national legislatures and local governments that function with openness and competence; broad-based political parties that are vehicles for public policy debates; election commissions that administer transparent and fair balloting; and nonpartisan civic organizations that monitor elections, and promote democratic values and citizen participation.

In East Timor, NDI is conducting a democracy assistance program focused on civic education on electoral processes and constitutional development and, to a lesser extent, political party building. In June 2001, NDI implemented Civic Forum, a participatory grassroots program that builds sustained citizen participation in political processes. Through a nation-wide series of community level discussions, Timorese facilitators work with existing Timorese community-based organizations to expand citizen knowledge of basic democratic principles and practices and to empower citizens and communities to be more politically active. As of December 2001, NDI has organized 210 Civic Forum discussion groups in all 13 districts, providing an opportunity for more than 3,200 participants to learn about and discuss democracy, the constitutional process and constitutional development, and the work and responsibilities of the Constituent Assembly.

In preparation for the August 30 Constituent Assembly elections, NDI also worked with East Timor's political party leaders to advance the discussion of an electoral code of conduct, and to promote the hosting of candidate debates at the district level.