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“Timor Loro Sa’e is our nation”¹

A report on focus group discussions in East Timor

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¹ Comment made by fisherman during focus group in Beacu, Viqueque, 18 February 2001

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A majority of East Timor's citizens have never lived in a democratic political system and familiarity with several basic democratic concepts is lacking. However, central to the call for independence by the Timorese resistance movement was a demand for the establishment of a democratic state and political system. In other words, while many East Timorese citizens may not be able to say exactly what democracy is, many certainly know and are prepared to say what it is not. It is important to build upon their experience, local knowledge and cultural traditions to support democratic practices.

In February 2001, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) conducted 14 focus groups in East Timor. This focus group research was conceived, given the limited amount of time available, as one way to widen the views and perspectives available to policy makers and those taking part in public debate. NDI also hopes that this research will inform future civic education activities with a deeper understanding of the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the East Timorese people. As part of the planning process of its own civic education program, NDI considered it important to determine attitudes towards and experiences of democracy, past and future elections, political parties, local governance and the position of women in the political processes.

This report provides an insight into the thoughts and concerns of the East Timorese people at a critical time when the transitional political agenda is being formulated and its implementation planned. It is not intended to be a comprehensive study of public opinion or the political process in East Timor and should not be interpreted as such. It is designed to be used in conjunction with other information sources and surveys planned or underway. As public opinion is constantly evolving, reacting to new information and changing circumstances, the information in this report will require constant re-examination. As part of its long-term program in East Timor, NDI intends to conduct focus group research at regular intervals and make this information publicly available as one contribution to the ongoing transition in East Timor.

The focus group results clearly show that the people of East Timor have many well-developed ideas about democracy and the form of government they would like to see in their emerging nation. They express themselves in strong and direct language that sometimes might be lost in the translation. However, those who aspire to the political leadership of this new nation must not forget they are making demands for participation, not polite requests. At this crucial time in East Timor's history, there is a sense of impatience in the direction and pace of East Timor's transition. They have unrealized hopes and are looking for action rather than more words. They seek proof that they are being heard and demand active participation in the development of this new nation. To ignore the demands of the East Timorese people will only add to the burden of their frustrations.

The focus group research revealed that the people of East Timor have clear opinions regarding their country's transition to independence. Key findings include the following:

- It is widely understood that elections are going to take place, but there is little knowledge of the nature or the timing of the elections or of the political parties and their platforms.
- Participants, including many women, indicated concern regarding the integrity of the elections and called for the presence of international and domestic election observers, heightened security measures and protection of the secrecy of the ballot.
- Participants support a multi-party system as a key part of their future, but are concerned that political party activity could spark violence.
- East Timor's districts possess distinct regional identities based around geographic areas as well as local culture and language.
- Young people are worried about the lack of jobs, despite the apparent "economic boom" provided by the large international presence, particularly in Dili. High school graduates are resentful that only those who speak English or Portuguese and can use a computer are accepted into the civil service.
- There are common concerns about law and order issues, such as ongoing gang violence and women regularly mention the fear of rape.
- Many participants feel that consultation with UNTAET has been inadequate and want to actively participate in the political process, including the creation of the country's first constitution. Participants clearly want more local ownership of the transition process.
- Those who know of UNTAET's National Council do not regard it as being a representative body.
- East Timorese from the districts believe the existing political process is dominated by a Dili-based elite and that they have been left out of it.

While ideas of democratic government could find fertile ground on which to grow in East Timor, there appears to be a need for an inclusive process to create a common vision through wider participation in the East Timor's transition to independence.

The information gained from these focus groups is summarized in this report. It is NDI's hope that these insights will be useful to East Timorese NGOs, political parties, the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), international NGOs, donors, multi-lateral organizations and other groups active in East Timor's ongoing transition process. NDI also believes that this information will be especially helpful to organizations, as religious groups, academia and the media, which are active in the area of civic education.

ACRONYMS USED IN THE REPORT

APODETI	Democratic Popular Association (Associação Popular Democrática)
BRTT	People's Front for East Timor (Barisan Rakyat Timor Timur)
CNRT	National Council for Timorese Resistance (Concelho Nacional da Resistencia Timorens)
CPD-RDTL	Committee for the Popular Defence of the Democratic Republic of East Timor
ETTA	East Timor Transitional Administration
FALINTIL	Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor (Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor L'Este)
Fataluku	Local dialect of the Lautem district
FDTL	East Timor Defence Force (Força Defesa Timor Loros'ae)
FSDK	Front for Peace, Democracy and Justice (Front Perdamaian, Demokrasi dan Keadilan)
FRETILIN	Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor (Frente Revolucionaria de Timor Leste Independente)
GPA	Governance and Public Administration pillar
GOLKAR	Functional Groups (Golongan Karya)
INTERFET	International Force in East Timor
MPR	People's Consultative Assembly
NC	National Council of East Timor
NCC	National Consultative Council
PDI	Indonesian Democratic Party (Partai Demokratik Indonesia)
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)
Tetum	Major local dialect spoken in East Timor
TNI	Indonesian military (Tentara Nasional Indonesia)
UDT	Timorese Democratic Union (União Democrática Timorens)
UNAMET	United Nations Mission in East Timor
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor

INTRODUCTION

The political process in East Timor is moving ahead at a rapid pace despite frequent criticism that there is insufficient consultation with the people of East Timor about the agenda being set. This focus group research was conceived, given the limited amount of time available, as one way to attempt to widen the views and perspectives available to policy makers and those taking part in public debate.

The major findings of this research are provided below. Policy implications for future civic education programs, political party organizing as well as elections & constitutional development are noted. A description of the methodology utilized is included in the appendices.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The Present

East Timorese are united by their frustration with the transition period. Clearly, this was not the way they conceived their society would be when they voted overwhelmingly on 30 August 1999 to reject the autonomy package offered the Indonesian government and move towards independence under the supervision of the United Nations. The widespread destruction of this small nation, as Indonesian troops and their East Timorese militia withdrew, has not helped. But for those on the side of independence, who suffered greatly under 24 years of Indonesian occupation, there is a clear sense of unfulfilled entitlement.

Young people are worried about the lack of jobs, despite the apparent “economic boom” provided by the large international presence, particularly in Dili. High school graduates are resentful that only those who speak English or Portuguese and can use a computer are accepted into the civil service. Many are left with an Indonesian education that has left them unequipped and sidelined from employment in the international sector. Fishermen fret over the ability to get their catch to markets where it could be sold. Coffee farmers lament the lack of buyers and low price of coffee, the product of the violence that drove many traders away and the added blow of weak world prices. Demobilized soldiers of the former guerrilla army are confused why there was not place in the newly formed East Timor Defense Force (FDTL). People from the western districts claim their sons are discriminated against in the FDTL recruitment, those ex-guerrillas in the east make similar claims against those in the west. The activist elite of Dili, many of them close to the center of power and regularly consulted about East Timor’s future direction, are unhappy with the structures set up to involve the East Timorese in self-governance, claiming they are unrepresentative.

There are common concerns about law and order issues, such as ongoing gang violence and women regularly mention the fear of rape. There seems to be a lack of confidence in UNTAET to solve these problems. East Timorese political leaders complain that they have no political power as the UN Security Council’s resolution 1272 vests all legislative, executive and judicial authority in the Transitional Administrator. However, the people of East Timor still look

to their own to solve the nation's problems. Perhaps, rightly so, seeing these problems as long-term and UNTAET as being only a temporary shelter along the road to independence.

Democracy

East Timor is one of a handful of nations that was born through a democratic act and exercise of universal franchise. Its people possess a strong sense that their future nation will be a democratic one and a clear idea that participation of the people is the foundation of any democracy.

From Dili to the village, the ideas about democracy have similarities based around the expression of the will of the people:

“Democracy, if we look at its definition, means that the people have the power.”
Activist, Dili

“Democracy is the institution through which the community receive and give their opinions and wishes to the government.” Fisherman, Viqueque.

But the parameters or definition of democracy differ. The participants of the focus groups recognized the importance of rule of law and the central nature of the protection of rights in democratic nations. There are others who underline transparency and the absence of corruption as hallmarks of democracy. Others see a multi-party system and democracy as being synonymous.

Participants also saw democracy as a system that protects the basic rights of citizens. For example, the right to life, freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom of movement and the right to vote are all common to most of the discussion groups. The freedom of religion of religion was frequently cited. East Timorese are a deeply religious people. Their Catholic religion has been important to them throughout the occupation. Some see a prominent role for the Catholic church in the consolidation of democracy and independence in East Timor. In addition, young people stress the right to work and the right education. The right to own land is important for farmers, as is the right to exclude foreigners from owning land. During the occupation period, constraints were placed on where people could live and farm. Many farmers are concerned that new corporate projects or the reclamation of plantations by owners from the Portuguese period could see them moved off land they have been working for many years and see limitations on foreign ownership as a way to guarantee the right to own land.

“During Indonesian times there was no freedom to go where ever you wanted. Since 20 September 1999 [arrival of INTERFET] up until now the people have had the right to sleep where ever they want.” Fisherman, Viqueque.

Interestingly, those rights perceived to have been most restricted under Indonesian rule such as freedom of speech, freedom of movement and the freedom to vote for the party of one's own choosing were most regularly mentioned in the focus groups. Freedom of expression was

sharply curtailed during the occupation and those expressing dissident views lost their jobs, were imprisoned or worse. Participants clearly distinguished from the sham elections they witnessed under the occupation and the free and fair elections in which they believe they have the right to participate.

Significantly, different groups describe and rank various rights in different ways. This may prove significant to political parties campaigning to have representatives elected to any constituent assembly. In addition, it is an important issue for those given the responsibility to prepare a constitution and consider such options as the creation of a bill of rights.

Other less commonly mentioned rights arose that would possibly need to be debated and considered. Some participants expressed frustration that there was a lack of information about the transition process and that there was no transparency in government. They demanded the right to information. Many participants clearly believe that if you have wealth, political connections and power then you are exempt from the law. This sentiment is a holdover from the occupation period but is also seen by some to be a problem in the post-referendum era. These participants cited the importance of equal protection under the law for all East Timorese as an important right. Many participants pointed to what is seen as an unfair wage differential between expatriate and domestic employees. They believe that East Timorese employees are paid too little and that they do not receive enough to live on. These participants demand the right to a fair wage. One group in Lospalos demanded the right to oppose arranged marriages, citing this as a significant problem arising from local customs and traditions. The equal rights of women are readily acknowledged, in theory, but in reality participants admit that in practice women rights are often subordinated or secondary to those of men.

There is an awareness that these rights belong to the citizens of East Timor, however, there is also a need identified to define and legislate who is an East Timorese. There is also confusion over how the various rights should be enacted and protected. There was a clear need for a dialogue on which rights should be protected in constitution, which could be enacted in law, and which would need to be addressed through other means. It will be important to prioritize these rights and determine how to best protect them.

The Indonesian Occupation

After 24 years under Indonesian “democracy” there is a growing cynicism among the East Timorese people. Focus group participants did not differentiate between the time under former President Suharto and the less restricted period under former President Habibie. In fact, there was even repeated criticism of the way the current Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid was elected and a wish to see such a method of indirectly choosing a president not used in East Timor. They speak bitterly of the hollow experience of the five general elections held under Indonesian rules, strongly critical of the way in which the principles of democracy mouthed by the Indonesian government were never put into practice, instead the population was intimidated and terrorized by the use of state forces such as the army and police.

“We were not free to speak and the aspirations of the people did not reach the top as there was too much bureaucracy. The hearts of the people were hurt because

there were large stones in their mouths which blocked the words they wanted to speak.” Schoolteacher, Ermera.

East Timorese yearn for democracy, but some feel it still eludes them.

“We the people hear that our nation is now a democracy, but democracy has not yet reached the little people and we’re not happy.” Coffee farmer, Ermera

For almost all the focus groups participants, the Indonesian experience seems to be the key reference point. This common experience under Indonesian rule is still fresh and is recounted repeatedly. Fewer references are made to the inter-party conflict and civil war during 1974-75. Surprisingly, even among older participants, there was little mention of the period of Portuguese colonial rule that preceded Indonesia’s 1975 invasion and annexation of East Timor the following year.

Elections

While all participants are aware of the forthcoming elections, most of the discussion seemed to be in the abstract. Only those from the elite group of activists in Dili were aware of the type of elections that are planned and when they might be held. This subject has been the subject of constant debate in the scant East Timor media. Clearly this is not reaching most people, even in Dili. This has serious implications for any civic or electoral education program.

The possibility of elections this year is greeted with some trepidation by East Timorese. Elections are associated with violence, disturbance and riots as a result of both the popular consultation of August 1999, in which Indonesian authorities did little to restrain militia violence and actively encouraged it, and previous Indonesian elections. The civil war of 1975 is also recalled.

The focus groups specifically explored people’s concepts of what makes a free and fair election. While participants almost unanimously agreed that free and fair elections are necessary for a successful transition to democratic independence, few if any could articulate what constitutes a free and fair election. When pressed, participants indicated steps that should be taken to help ensure a clean electoral process. The participants clearly understood what they did not want, a return to the sham elections of the occupation or the violence of 1975 and 1999, even if they could not identify the characteristics of a free and fair process.

Participants did suggest significant steps to safeguard the process that clearly indicates that East Timorese do not assume, like many in the international community do, that internationally sponsored elections will be free and fair. Many participants urge the deployment of both international and domestic election monitors to ensure there was a legitimate and accepted process. Others said political party poll watchers would be required.

Experience with elections under Indonesian occupation has affected the views of many East Timorese. Participants suggested that the Indonesian method of counting votes on location at the polling site should be re-employed rather than the centralized count used by the United

Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) for the referendum. Many actively advocated a direct presidential election rather than an election of the president by parliament or “electoral college” system employed in Indonesia. Many do not want to emulate a system that allowed the candidate of the party who won the most votes fail in the presidential election to the less popular candidate from a coalition of smaller parties.

Additionally, a significant security presence is widely seen as a pre-requisite for a successful election. While recent international media coverage of the security threats has focused on cross border incidents, East Timorese seem to foresee a larger threat coming from disturbances and conflicts resulting from political party activity. However, it must be noted that for reasons of language and logistics there were no focus groups conducted in the border districts and people living in those regions would probably have given external security a higher priority.

Constitutional Debate

There is a repeated expression that the East Timorese people should be involved in writing the new constitution, though there is clearly a lack of knowledge about how it will be written and what part the community will play in its preparation. There is also no clear link in the minds of the focus group participants regarding the role of the constitution in protecting their rights.

People are aware of their interests and want them represented in laws. There may not be a detailed understanding of the process, but there is a clear expectation that they will participate in the development of the first constitution of an independent East Timor. The way a modern constitution should function may be beyond their political experience, but it would not be incorrect to say that the constitution is seen as a rulebook for political life. This is a solid starting point for any “bottom-up” constitutional development process. To deny the people an opportunity to participate would only magnify their frustration.

Among the community there are many ideas that would make the basis of lively and relevant constitutional debate if the opportunity were given to the people.

“A constitution can respect the people, keep them safe, protect them, give them a comfortable life and ensure the well-being of the nation of Timor Loro S’ae.”

Community Leader, Ermera,

Some key constitutional issues that are already being debated in the minds of focus group participants are the role of traditional law, the role of the Catholic Church in an East Timorese state, the protection of rights, the election of governments and the system of representation.

There is a clear expectation that the people will be involved in this process and a reluctance to leave it to a Dili-based elite. There is outright rejection that foreigners should be involved or that a constitution should be based on or written an overseas model. There is a strong desire for the constitution to represent the interests of the Timorese and Timorese values, though these would have to be defined through debate and discussion as attitudes and culture are varied throughout the country.

A strong sense of nationalism pervades any political discussions. At all levels of society the people of East Timor know there is a process of nation building going on in their country and are concerned about being left out of this process as important decisions regarding the future of the nation are made. Those who know of UNTAET's National Council do not regard it as being a representative body.

"We will choose the people who will write the constitution of our nation and our leaders must be truly representative of the people. With all due respect, who are those people who sit in the National Council? Who really chose them to sit there? We must have a constitution that reflects the thoughts of the people of East Timor itself and not adopted from another nation." Activist, Dili.

Political Parties

Given the low level of political party activity reported by focus group participants, there is significant fear of that multi-party political competition will lead to conflict and violence. Collective trauma resulting from the role of political parties in the 1975 civil war, where parties reportedly killed members of opposing groups merely for the political affiliations, is a significant phenomenon that the political parties and election organizers will need to take meaningful steps to resolve.

However, despite repeated expression of these fears, there is a pervasive desire for the candidates from the parties explain their principles, platforms and policies. There is limited knowledge of the candidates or their positions.

"Who are candidates? They need to have exposure. We need to see their photographs, their complete curriculum vitas in order that people can know their ideology and the party structure so that we can make a choice." Community leader, Ermera.

There is hope that the policies proposed by the parties and candidates will be relevant to the problems the East Timorese people face in their everyday lives, most pertinently employment opportunities. The two parties that reportedly have some representation in the districts, Fretilin and the Timorese Socialist Party (PST), have apparently not yet begun this process. Participants did not speculate on who might actually win or dominate an election.

East Timorese have great expectations of their political leaders and representatives. They want them to listen to the people, visit them regularly to understand their problems and remain accountable and responsible to those who elected them. At the same time, East Timor's political leaders should avoid corruption, collusion, nepotism, self-interest, ambition and always maintain high standards of moral conduct. They want them to find solutions to the many political, economic, social and cultural problems that currently beset the people of East Timor.

“Many young people feel like taking revenge as they are not taken notice of by the leaders of the nation because they are still using a family system. If you sit in an office, certainly your family members get all the jobs.” Ermera woman

There is a strong expression to see political parties and their activities regulated closely by laws. There are regular pleas for them to avoid conflict, personal attacks, corruption and personal ambitions. There are bitter reminders of the way the Indonesian government forced civil servants to join the ruling Golkar party and through intimidation forced their families. There are already concerns regarding rumors of one East Timorese political group having an inside connection for positions in the civil service.

There appears to be little to no support for the ideology of the Committee for the Popular Defense of the Democratic Republic of East Timor (CPD-RDTL), whose central policy platform is a rejection of the UN-sponsored transitional process and an immediate return to the Democratic Republic of East Timor (RDTL) declared on 28 November 1975. Nobody in the focus groups questioned the legitimacy of the UN-sponsored transition process to independence through an election. The CPD-RDTL is seen often seen as splinter or dissident group of Fretilin rather than viewed as a political party in its own right. CPD-RDTL is not automatically linked to pro-Indonesian causes. There is qualified political tolerance for the CPD-RDTL as long as they do not continue to use the “sacred” symbols of the Fretilin flag and the date of 28 November 1975 when the RDTL was declared on the eve of the Indonesian invasion.

This qualified political tolerance only extends so far, however. Participants were virtually unanimous in their rejection of an organized political role for pro-integration political parties, despite UN efforts to keep political competition open by not banning parties advocating for integration with Indonesia. It is clear such parties would not be welcome in the community, despite recognition in principle that in a democracy people should have the right to set up and join the political party of their choice. There is also a strong association between pro-integration parties that are presumably supported by Indonesia and “money politics”.

“I don’t agree with them being allowed to found again a pro-autonomy party here because later it will wreck everything because they will come with lots of money and before you know it there will be chaos.” Coffee farmer, Ermera

There are signs of relatively widespread tolerance for those associated with the pro-integration cause to return to East Timor in their personal capacity. However, there is a passionate rejection of the re-establishment of pro-integration parties. There is often bitter dismissal of the rallying call of those pro-integration groups in Indonesia that “the red and white Indonesian flag should one day fly over East Timor again.” To be truthful, there is only naked hostility to the prospect that pro-integration groups may be politically active again.

“Those who want to form a [pro-integration] political party must consider their own safety.” University student, Dili

Local Institutions

UNTAET's presence outside the district capitals is limited. When asked about important local institutions, there was no mention in the focus groups of either the district representatives of UNTAET's National Council or UNTAET's District Advisory Council's. Similarly, the *conselho* or councils created by UNTAET regulation and supported by the World Bank's Community Empowerment Program were noticeably absent from the discussion of local institutions. The focus groups illustrate that in the districts the traditional mechanism of village chiefs, tribal elders and the church leaders are the key building blocks of community life. Some of these figures serve concurrently as local leaders of the Council for National Timorese Resistance (CNRT), the main pro-independence umbrella group. Others may have allegiances to Fretilin, the main political party and only one active in all districts.

There seems to be pattern of trying to solve problems traditionally or informally before resorting to the formal law and reporting incidents or problems to UNTAET's Civilian Police (CIVPOL). There seems to be a lack confidence in CIVPOL as an institution and little profile for the handful of East Timorese police now walking the beat. In the capital Dili, however, with its large number of new arrivals who are unfamiliar with traditional community structures, this pattern is often reversed. CIVPOL is seen by new arrivals as the point of first call when you do not know who the local village chief, traditional leader or parish priest.

Women and Politics

During the conduct of the focus groups, it was commonly agreed that men and women had the same rights. However such statements were almost always followed by qualifications on women's rights in terms of their responsibilities to their families or husbands. To this day, East Timorese families are split on political grounds, both ideologically and physically with many still refugees in Indonesia. Women seem under pressure not to be responsible for forming new rifts in families by taking different political positions from their husbands. However, some women see the secrecy of the ballot, something strongly reinforced by the UNAMET public information campaign for the referendum, as a protection against pressure on how to vote from their fathers or husbands.

There is no disagreement among women that female political representatives will advocate their interests better than men. It is curious the female focus group participants looked overseas for female role models – to Indonesia and the Philippines – rather than to the female cabinet members or the one third of women represented in UNTAET's National Council, its peak advisory mechanism. This fact is perhaps illustrative of the remoteness of the political process in Dili from the lives of most participants. There were no views expressed on the best mechanisms for increasing women's political participation. No mention was made of the use of quotas, either direct or indirect, in the forthcoming election as has been debated extensively in the National Council. In general, women participants in the focus groups appeared less confident about expressing their views about politics than men.

IMPLICATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS OF THE FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The focus groups findings have significant implications for a many institutional and individual actors involved in East Timor's transition to democratic self-governance. These implications and observations are itemized below and are grouped based as they relate to civic education activities, elections and constitutional development and political party organizing. The implications below result from an analysis of focus group transcripts and drawn on NDI's international comparative expertise and are therefore not necessarily direct quotes from focus group transcripts.

Implications for Civic Education

- While Tetum is widely used and Indonesian widely understood, people feel most comfortable speaking their local languages, many of which are not written languages. The oral transmission of civic education messages will be very important.
- The existing East Timorese mass media, such as radio and newspapers, do not effectively extend outside of Dili and are not a useful medium for the widespread distribution of civic education messages. Written civic education material must be directly delivered to lowest levels of society to reach the greatest numbers of people.
- Participants understand and demand protection of their human rights, but not how the protection of these rights relates to the unfolding political process or the system of government. Civic education and public dialogue will be necessary to ensure public confidence that their rights are sufficiently protected under law.
- Citizens appear to rely of their own past experiences, particularly with the Indonesian government, for the formation of their political views.
- Focus group participants were poorly informed about recent political developments. There is little knowledge of political issues debated openly in the Dili media since December 2000 and the new governmental institutions created since UNTAET's arrival. There was no evidence of any post-referendum civic education activities.
- The inter-generational, language, communication, and transportation challenges present in East Timor will present significant challenges to civic education efforts. Civic education providers should coordinate their activities in order to be effective and avoid duplication of efforts.
- Civic education messages should clearly express the rights and responsibilities of citizens and also be designed to foster citizen-government dialogues, policy consultations and other kinds of partnership with the newly established government. Civic education activities should be two-way dialogues rather than one-way processes.

Implications for Elections and Constitutional Development

- Despite widespread concern that competition between political parties might lead to a return to the violence associated with 1975 and 1999, there is public acceptance of a multi-party political system.
- While the conventional wisdom persists that CNRT President Xanana Gusmao will be East Timor's first elected president, there are no widespread views among the population about which political party will win or dominate the forthcoming election.
- Many people see a high profile for the UN security forces, such as the PKF and CIVPOL, as being important to ensuring there is no violence during the election.
- The secret ballot was seen an important mechanism to help women resist pressure from their husbands and fathers regarding their choice at the ballot box.
- Women participants wanted a constitution that addresses the needs for equality between the sexes.
- Participants are frustrated with the apparent imbalance in importance of opinions about the future state between the international community and East Timorese citizens. Constitutional development process should include mechanisms to solicit and incorporate the ideas and opinions of the young people of East Timor.
- Young participants want to be more involved in the political process but find few avenues of participation open to them. This sentiment extends to many who are active in civil society.

Implications for Political Party Organizing

- People are concerned with fundamental issues such as employment, agriculture and regional development rather than political competition. Political parties that clearly communicate their positions on these "real life" issues are likely to be more successful in attracting support of voters.
- Young people are concerned about employment and educational opportunities. Political parties seeking to win votes from young people should consider platforms that offer specific ideas on these problems.
- Young people are aware and resentful of the continued corruption, collusion and nepotism. Political parties seeking to win support from young voters should take strong positions on these issues and act to eliminate even the appearance of impropriety in their organization.

- Voters are concerned with a perceived lack of participation in the transition process in East Timor. Strong political messages emphasizing political participation, responsiveness, district representation and accountability are likely to resonate.
- Many women voters in East Timor believe their interests will be best represented by other women. Political parties should consider selecting a gender balanced slate of candidates.
- Likewise, political parties are likely to benefit if their party platforms have been developed in consultation with the people and represent their aspirations.
- Voters are concerned that multiparty competition could lead to a resurgence of political violence as experienced in 1975 and 1999. Voters want to see parties demonstrate that they are committed to solving political and electoral disputes peacefully through dialogue rather than violence.
- If a Code of Conduct for political parties is developed, the parties should demonstrate that they will adhere to it to show they are committed to peaceful competition and that peaceful competition is an integral part of the democratic process.
- Focus group participants rejected violence as a political solution. Political parties should reject the use of physical coercive techniques or para-military groups in order to persuade citizens that the elections and multi-partisan politics in general will not turn violent. People see no role for the military or security forces in politics. The newly formed East Timor Defense Force (FDTL) and East Timorese police should remain uninvolved in politics.
- Candidate Forums, involving representatives from a number of different parties, could be an acceptable way to facilitate a structured interaction between the political party candidates and East Timorese citizens in a peaceful manner.
- Participants are aware of their basic rights and expect their future leaders to protect those rights. Political parties will likely benefit if they respect freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of movement and freedom of assembly. Likewise the leaders who are elected would likely receive continued support after the election if they listen to people, visit them regularly to understand their problems and remain accountable and responsive to those who elected them.
- Political parties with links to the districts outside of Dili could be a key instrument for fostering national ownership over the nature, direction and management of the transition process.

Other Significant Observations

- Many women are concerned about the rule of law and the security of person as it related to issues like crime, domestic violence and rape.
- Young people are often resentful that only those who speak English or Portuguese and can use a computer are accepted into the civil service.

CONCLUSION

In East Timor today, frustration is the mood, openness to the future is the attitude and participation is the demand. While there are undercurrents of cynicism, fear and powerlessness, the people have clearly not lost hope and want to help make the transition to democratic self-governance a success.

It is NDI's hope that these insights will be useful to East Timorese NGOs, political parties, the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), international NGOs, donors, multi-lateral organizations and other groups active in the field of civic education in East Timor. NDI is also pleased to make this information available to individuals and groups concerned with the civic education in East Timor such as religious groups, academia and the media.

For additional information please contact NDI's Resident Representative in East Timor Jim Della-Giacoma (nditimor@hotmail.com) at (61 417) 775-359, Senior Program Officer Jennifer Ganem (jenng@ndi.org) in Washington, DC at (1 202) 328 3136, or NDI Asia Regional Director Peter Manikas (pmanikas@cbn.net.id) at (62 21) 392 1617.

APPENDIX A - METHODOLOGY EMPLOYED

The focus groups were constructed to reflect a cross-section of East Timorese society. Fourteen focus group sessions were conducted in total with six sessions held in Dili district and the balance in four other districts outside the capital. All levels of society were included, from the elite, including highly educated members of the National Council to those with only a basic education living in remote rural communities. 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. While our goal was 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 60:40.

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 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 FALINTIL members.

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 emotion and reactions to certain information.

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 the first time that focus groups of this nature were conducted in East Timor. Therefore, the questions were deliberately designed to be general in nature to collect baseline knowledge. Facilitators were encouraged not to read them verbatim, rather to rephrase them as 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. The guide was developed in conjunction with local groups and designed not to have significant overlap with a comprehensive voter attitudes survey planned for April 2001.

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 try to encourage, it was not difficult to encourage East Timorese to speak out. In fact, many participants said it was the first time they had been given an opportunity talk publicly about such issues. In addition, those outside Dili welcomed the fact that the countries newly emerging leaders in the capital would hear their voice. Moreover, once a group opened up facilitators often found it difficult to stop people talking. While a number of groups were the ideal length, about two hours, the average was closer to three hours and one group lasted for more than five and half hours. In a welcome sign of openness, not present in East Timor before the August 1999 referendum, none of the subjects included in the guide were consider too sensitive to discuss, though some participants had clearly better formed opinions than others.

The Focus Groups

Since the massive displacement of the East Timorese population in the post-ballot violence of September 1999, there are no accurate statistics on the people now living inside East Timor. UNTAET began a compulsory civil registration process in March 2001 that will take some months to complete. Given that there remains a large refugee population in West Timor, rough estimates suggest East Timor has a current population of around 700,000. Anecdotal evidence suggests there has been a large influx of people into Dili and other urban areas since the beginning of UNTAET's mandate in October 1999. The Indonesian-conducted census figures from 1996 show a young population and in selecting the focus groups we have concentrated on those of voting age (above 17 years) and under 40 years of age.

While we have taken all these factors into account in choosing focus groups, we have had to balance this 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, particularly in the east in Lautem district, 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 we were unable to recruit facilitators who came from the western districts or Oecussi in the short time available, a decision was made not to attempt to conduct focus groups there. However, while we did not hold focus groups in the districts of Manututo, Alieu, Ainaro, Manufahi, Bobonaro and Covalima, people from all these districts participated in Dili-based focus groups.

NDI had planned to conduct 10 focus groups. In the first half of the program the teams found themselves overwhelmed with potential participants. Rather than turn away those who often walked long distances to join the groups, the facilitators split the number of participants and establish more focus groups. Out of respect for those people who took the time to give us their opinions, we have retained these extra groups in our results.

It was the intention of this project to recruit equal numbers of men and women participants to reflect the East Timorese electorate. However, the sudden additions to the sample also affected its gender balance. Another problem in this regard was the high drop out or non-attendance rate of recruited female participants that could not be explained by any single factor. It was also regrettable that female facilitators had a low participation rate in the implementation of the field research, once again for a variety of apparently unrelated factors. Future focus group research by NDI in East Timor will need to pay closer attention to this matter.

The focus groups targeted high school students of voting age from the capital, university students from the agriculture faculty from across the country but studying in Dili, a Catholic women's group in a rural town, coffee farmers, community leaders from a rural town, demobilized freedom fighters leaving in the country's second city, fishermen from a remote village, school students from a distant district capital, traditional leaders from a small town, elite leaders from the capital and a women's sowing group in the capital.

The Facilitators

NDI worked with the East Timor's NGO Forum's Working Group on Electoral Education (KKPP) to identify facilitators who were given a formal two-day training course in Dili by a professional Indonesian focus group facilitator trainer, who was also present in the field for the first eight focus group to give additional guidance as required.

All the focus groups were conducted in a mixture of languages that reflected the linguistic tapestry. 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 author, NDI's Resident Representative in East Timor, bears all responsibility for Indonesian to English translation of the transcripts. Facilitators were volunteers who received a modest per diem to cover their costs.

APPENDIX B – PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

East Timor Focus Groups February 2001

District	Location	Profile	Men	Women	Total	Primary Language	Secondary Language/s
Dili	Bairo Sentral	High School Students	5	5	10	Tetum	Indonesian
Dili	Bairo Sentral	High School Students	4	5	9	Tetum	Indonesian
Dili	Caicoli	University Students	5		5	Tetum	Indonesian
Dili	Caicoli	University Students	5		5	Tetum	Indonesian
Ermera	Old Ermera	Catholic Women's group		6	6	Tetum	Indonesian & Portuguese
Ermera	Old Ermera	Catholic Women's group		7	7	Tetum	Indonesian & Portuguese
Ermera	Old Ermera	Community Leaders	5		5	Tetum	Indonesian & Portuguese
Ermera	Old Ermera	Coffee farmers	5		5	Tetum	Indonesian & Portuguese
Baucau	Kota Baru	Demobilized Falintil	7		7	Tetum	Indonesian & Portuguese
Viqueque	Beacu	Fisherman	6		6	Tetum	Indonesian & Makasoe
Lautem	Los Palos	High School Students	4	3	7	Tetum	Indonesian & Fataluku
Lautem	Com	Traditional Leaders	6		6	Fataluku	N/A
Dili	Bidau	Activists	5	3	8	Tetum	Indonesian
Dili	Villa Verde	Women's sowing group		5	5	Tetum	Indonesian & Portuguese
			57	34	91		
			63 %	37 %			

APPENDIX C – FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

[The original facilitators guide for the East Timor focus groups is in Indonesian.]

Facilitator’s Guide for Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

Introduction

(Approx. 10 minutes)

Introduction

Introduce yourself
In the name of KKPP and NDI
Emphasize secrecy
Remind participants that there are no right or wrong answers
Participants are present as individuals from the community
Use a loud voice so it can be recorded for the internal transcript
Relax, this may be unusual but it will be an interesting experience

Getting to know you

Start with yourself and ask the group about themselves, their occupations/situations, use first names. 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]

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? Ask them about their expectations one year from today.

Democracy

(Approx. 15 minutes)

Hold a discussion with all participants about the meaning of democracy. Citizens in a democracy possess what rights? Do all citizens possess the same rights? Do men and women possess the same rights? What does it mean to live in a democratic nation?

[Write down the responses regarding the meaning of democracy and the rights of citizens in a democracy on paper or on a board. After all of them have been listed, ask the participants as a group to prioritize those that are most important.]

If it has not already been mentioned, after this discussion put the following two special questions. What is a constitution for and why is it important for you as a citizen? Who is responsible for writing a constitution?

Elections

(Approx. 15 minutes)

Have a discussion about the participant's experiences with the Indonesian elections and the referendum. Ask about their motivation to take part in the Indonesian election and the referendum. Have a discussion about the election this year in East Timor. Ask them what the people of East Timor will be choosing. Who will join and for what reasons will they do so? In their experience, what makes a free and fair election? How do you guarantee a free and fair election?

[Write the response to the motivation question on a piece of paper. List the suggestions for a free and fair election.]

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. 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.

If not mentioned, put forward these two specific questions:

Would you allow the CPD-RDTL to be active in your community?

Would you allow pro-integration parties to be active in your community?

Local authority and governance

(Approx. 10 minutes)

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

For women only

(Approx. 15 minutes)

[If there is a mixed FGD, the men can leave the room for a short while]

Hold a discussion about who would best represent women's interests in East Timor. Are there obstacles to women's involvement in political activity? What organizations or parties represent women? How? Is a woman's choice at the ballot box influenced by her husband or father?

Postcard to the top

(Approx. five minutes)

We have already discussed many things, but as East Timor approaches its election, what matter is most important for the leadership of this nation?

Write a sentence to Xanana Gusmao or Transitional Administrator Sergio Vieira de Mello.

Do not write your name.

[Explanation: This letter will not be sent but will be used as a summary of today's discussion.]

APPENDIX D – 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, however, advocates of democracy lack both the institutions and the experience with democratic practices. They have turned to NDI for assistance in addressing the difficult task of building their 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.

While NDI puts much effort into the consolidation of new democracies, elsewhere, autocratic political regimes persist. And, in other countries, democratic gains have been reversed. In these situations, NDI works with advocates of democracy who courageously struggle against tremendous odds to end conflict and promote peaceful, political change.

Headquartered in Washington, D.C. with field offices in four continents, NDI has conducted democratic development in more than 40 countries. Currently NDI's largest office outside of Washington is located in Jakarta, Indonesia where NDI works with political parties, civil society organizations, parliamentarians, academics and journalists.

NDI's Program in East Timor is funded by a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), without whose support this work would have been impossible.