Timor Leste: The contested place of women in contemporary society

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Abstract

The impact of conflict and violence in Timor-Leste (TL) has been profound for the new nation and its people. The causes of the 2006 crisis lie in a complex mix of elite political divisions and fractures in the general community exacerbated by the post-conflict environment; poverty and disillusionment with independence and justice. One of these underlying fractures in TL is a well-documented gender inequality favouring men. A deep anger within women, partially resulting from this inequity, is even the focus of new research. This paper explores a deeper understanding of gender roles in ‘traditional’ and contemporary East Timorese society and how conflict and the post-conflict environment has affected these dynamics, questioning the potential for change. A discussion of how this manifests in current affairs in Timor today is also attempted.

Feto hakat klot; mane hakat luan
a woman is born for narrow steps while a man is born for wide steps
Indigenous East Timorese adage
(Cited by Aurora Ximenes, Prime Ministerial counsellor,
15 March 2007, UCAN)

Gender inequality

While women represent 50% of the world population, they perform 90% of the world’s work: they care for the sick, the young, the old and all of the world’s sick and the sick of the world. Women’s work, more than that of men, is undervalued. [Image of a child carrying a basin of water on their head]

The status of women in Timor-Leste

No female combatants were included in any formal Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programs

Gender-Based Violence in TL

Violencia Domestica Ne’E Kreme
Early morning domestic violence

The national struggle and the women’s movement

REDE FETO TIMOR-LESTE is built upon its constituency - 18 women’s organizations coming from throughout the nation. It was established on March 11, 2000 during the first National Women Congress
Women in PNTL (police) and F-FDTL (army)

- 2008 “Women in the F-FDTL and PNTL” Report
- Report provides insight into difficulties women in the police and military face in TL
- discrimination
- sexual harassment
- lack of gender awareness
- linked to the ‘gender-blind ideology of the resistance struggle’

Traditional Vs. modern roles for women

Culture is frequently cited as the reason why women should not participate in politics or why it is difficult to press for women’s rights in TL

What is the ‘traditional’ role for women anyway?

Current revitalisation of indigenous culture—
What are the implications for gender?

Weaving at Com Cultural Festival Sept 2008

Such as the status of barlarque...

Gender analysis of the 2006 crisis

Women’s peace march 1 June 2006: Banner reads ‘Feto no Labarik Hakarak Deme iha Nassau Timor-Leste’ (Women and Children Want Peace in East Timor)
Is there a crisis of masculinity in TL?

Alfredo Reinado with a light anti-armour weapon The Age January 14, 2007

Father and daughter with their traditional weavings, Oecussi, 2008