

Viewing Young people as Assets in the Development Process: key findings of a national survey in Timor Leste

Richard Curtain¹ with Brent Taylor²

17 March 2005

Introduction

Research and policy intervention in relation to young people in developing countries tends to view them in narrow and negative ways. Young people are often seen as overly vulnerable to health risks such as HIV/AIDs or as a threat to civil order. Studies of young people, viewed more positively as valuable assets in the development process, are much less common.

The challenge in developing an evidence-based national youth policy is to go beyond narrow and negative stereotypes of young people to understand the world from their own perspective. The starting point for research, particularly in the context of poverty reduction, needs to be young people's own capabilities and their access to power resources.³ This approach involves asking young people about their access to economic, social, political and information-based assets, their perceptions of personal security, the quality of education if current students and assessments of their current and future prospects.

Background to the survey

Timor Leste became independent on 22 May 2002 after a long history of Portuguese control, an occupation by Indonesia for 24 years and a short UN interregnum of two years. However, the transition to Independence and independence itself has not solved basic problems in relation to the economy. The President, Xanana Gusmao, has noted, in his introduction to the UNDP's 2006 Human Development Report on Timor Leste, that:

Poverty and chronic deprivation continue to tragically affect more than forty per cent of our society today. The number of those in absolute poverty in Timor-Leste might have increased since three years ago. While the gap between the rich and the poor might also have widened, the poor continue to be chained by what is called "poverty trap."⁴

Young people aged 15 to 30 years account for one in four of the population in Timor

¹ Consultant to UNICEF Timor Leste, September 2005 - April 2006.

² Research Director, Values Bank Research Centre, Melbourne www.valuesbank.com.au

³ Uphoff, N; 2005, 'Analytical issues in measuring empowerment at the community and local levels' in Narayan, D (ed), 2005, *Measuring Empowerment: cross-disciplinary perspectives*. The World Bank, Washington DC; pp 224-226.

⁴ UNDP, 2006, *The Path out of Poverty: integrated rural development*. Human Development Report, Dili, Timor Leste, p1.

Leste.⁵ This fact alone means young people are a significant group in the population. How well they are faring economically, socially and politically will have major consequences for the whole of the society.

However, there are also other reasons policy makers want to develop a specific national policy for young people. These relate to the particular concerns and difficulties young people face in moving from the dependency of childhood to the independence of adulthood. Policy makers are also concerned that the substantial investment made in the education and health of many young people be utilised in productive ways. Governments also recognise well that the lack of opportunities for young people can lead to major frustration, spilling over into conflict and civil unrest.

The key purpose of the survey reported below was to ask on a one-to-one basis a representative sample of young people, including the illiterate, for their views on a range of issues central to their livelihood and well-being. Key questions that the Timorese policy makers want answers to are:

- ⊕ what age grouping defines young people; what particular problems do young people have;
- ⊕ in relation to their economic situation, do young people view a paid job as the only way to earn a living in preference to making a living from the land;
- ⊕ do young people in rural areas, especially those with higher levels of formal education, reject working in agriculture, and
- ⊕ how many young people want to start their own business and do they believe they have the skills to do so.

Policy makers also want information about the nature and extent of the group activities undertaken by young people, and the importance they placed on participating in these activities. Other topics of interest are young people's attitudes to political participation, and their perceptions of the role of government, their degree of tolerance of people from other religions and to what extent their views of the world are influenced by mass media. In the post conflict setting, young people's attitudes to violence and feelings about their personal safety are also of major concern to policy makers. Finally, of major interest is information about how young people view their current and future prospects.

The imminent release of the 2004 national census results meant that there was no need to replicate the information that this source would provide about the key socio economic characteristics and geographical location of young people in Timor Leste.

⁵ Ostergaard, L; 2005, *Timor-Leste: Youth Social Analysis Mapping and Youth Institutional Assessment. Final Report*. With contributions by Domingos Savio and Antonio da Conceicao. World Bank Country Office, Timor Leste

The survey

A national survey of young people in Timor Leste aged 15 to 35 years was undertaken between late November and mid January 2006. The national survey was one of several data collection and consultation exercises undertaken to inform the development of a national youth policy.⁶ Timor Leste, although only a new country, has already achieved a strong track record on consultation in relation to major initiatives.⁷ This survey and the accompanying focus group discussions were seen as continuing in the newly established practice.

Populations surveyed

The survey was also designed to provide detailed information about three distinct groups of young people:

- ⊕ those who cannot read or write, regardless of whether they have attended school or not;
- ⊕ those who have attained basic literacy and
- ⊕ those who have attained a high level of literacy as demonstrated by having completed senior secondary school or some level of higher education.

To obtain a representative profile of these three groups of young people, two populations were sampled: young people aged 15 to 35 years resident outside of the main city Dili and current students in senior high schools and universities. The first population was sampled by randomly selecting 25 villages from a total of 498 villages. The sample was selected in each proportion to the population within each of the country's five regions. The sample was stratified according to the extent of illiteracy among young people, with villages selected from the district within each region with the highest proportion of illiterate young people. Households were then randomly selected within each village and household heads and young people within the scope of the survey interviewed. The result was a sample of 780 young people.

In addition, a separate sample of 300 young people in high schools was selected. The rationale for surveying this population of young people was that many young people in Timor Leste live elsewhere, often for reasons of education. Young people are over represented in urban areas and in the capital, Dili, in particular. About half of the senior high school students attend institutions located in Dili. A household survey, therefore, was likely to under represent young people who are living in group or institutional accommodation.

Limited resources and time also precluded the conduct of a household survey in Dili. So an institutional sample frame of high schools and tertiary level institutions was

⁶ These include an analysis of existing studies, relevant census data, focus groups discussions and an assessment of the organisational capacity of youth associations. See Lene Ostergaard, 2005, *Timor-Leste: Youth Social Analysis Mapping and Youth Institutional Assessment. Final Report*. With contributions by Domingos Savio and Antonio da Conceicao. World Bank Country Office, Timor Leste

⁷ UNDP, 2006, *The Path out of Poverty: integrated rural development*. Human Development Report, Dili, Timor Leste, p 5.

compiled and four senior high schools from areas outside of Dili and four within Dili were selected at random. In addition two universities were also selected at random. Thirty students within each institution were selected at random from the student body with care to ensure that equal numbers of males and females were represented.

The questionnaire

The information sought on the key characteristics of individuals was based on the questions proposed for use in the 2006 Living Standards Survey. These key characteristics covered gender, age, relationship to head of household, occupation, whether married, main language, whether father or mother attended school and to what level. Respondents were also asked whether they could read and write and this was tested by asking them to read out a sentence in Tetum or Bahasa Indonesia.

Other data collected were: whether attended school, if not attended school why they had not and if had leave school, why they had left school. Those still attending school were asked to rate their response to a series of statements about the quality of the education they are receiving. Information was also sought on the respondent's primary occupation, industry, if earned an income and if so, how much.

Respondents were also asked about whether they took part in activities as a group such as a sports club, martial arts, shield-bearer or other church group and if so, how often they had participated in the activity in last three months.

The main focus of the questionnaire, however, was to ask respondents to rate on a five-point scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, a series of statements about a range of economic, social, political, security and future prospects issues. The purpose of these statements was to tap the perceptions of young people in relation to these issues.

Respondents were also asked to rate on a five-point scale the adequacy of their household's food consumption in the last month, their household income, housing situation, health treatment situation, and whether they had bought clothes in the last month. They were also asked about the amount in terms of an approximate cash value of food and goods their household consumed in the last month. They were also asked the approximate cash value of food and other goods their household would need each month so that they could think of themselves as "not poor".

Respondents were asked to rate 64 statements related to key issues for young people. These key issues concerned their own economic and social assets and political assets, their access to economic and social resources, the type and extent of political participation, attitude to religious tolerance, the influence of the mass media, extent of concerns about personal security and perceptions of current and future prospects. A set of 11 statements in relation to the quality of education and aspirations were also included for those currently in education. Many of these statements were suggested by the results of analyses reported in the recent book *Measuring Empowerment: cross disciplinary perspectives*.⁸ See Appendix 1 for a complete list of the attitude

⁸ Narayan, D (ed), 2005, *Measuring Empowerment: cross-disciplinary perspectives*. The World Bank, Washington DC. Relevant chapters were: 'Analytical issues in measuring empowerment at the community and local levels in relation to the typology of power resources'; 'Gender, power and empowerment: an analysis of household and family dynamics' in relation to empowerment and

statements.

The survey analysis included data on the characteristics of the villages surveyed. These were: the region of origin, a rating of the remoteness of the district in which the village was located, the village's estimated population in 2001, its main language, the number of kilometres to Dili, time it takes to get to a passable road in the wet season, main use in terms of subsistence or cash crop of the three most important crops, the number of months in the year a family normally does not have enough to eat and its rating on a village development index, developed by the World Bank.

The results

The results are presented in their unweighted form. The sample for the household based survey was selected to reflect the distribution of the youth population. However, it is not known, until the 2004 National Census results are released in April 2006, to what extent the sample of 300 senior high school and university students over represents this group of young people. In any event, any skewing in the representativeness of the sample is likely to have little effect on the results of the modelling exercise presented below, other than change in a minor way the reported correlations.

The attitudes and the geographical and demographic variables were analysed separately to identify any associations. A statistical model was developed comprising two sub-models: one to identify key geo-demographic factors and the other identifying clusters of attitudes.⁹ The extent of the relationship between the key characteristics of young people and their attitudes was also explored.

Key differences between young people

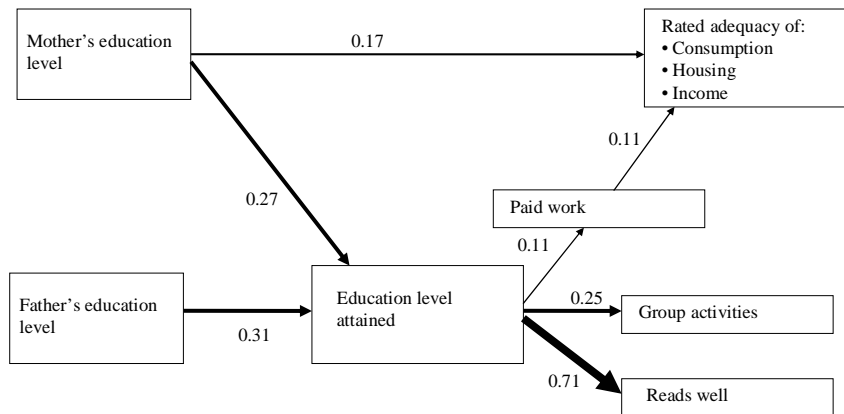
The geo-demographic modelling produced only weak to moderate internal correlations (see Diagram 1). This indicates that young people in rural areas in Timor Leste are mostly similar in terms of their main characteristics. The one exception to this is whether they are illiterate or not. The correlations show that a young people's chances of gaining an education are influenced by whether their father and mother separately had received an education. In other words, if one or more parents are illiterate, it is more likely that their progeny will be illiterate. It appears that entrenched inter-generational factors are at work in Timorese society perpetuating illiteracy.

Another interesting result is the link between mother's education and a young person's positive rating of their situation as measured by their assessment of the adequacy over the previous month of their household's food consumption, housing situation and income. This shows that the benefits of educating women are long-term ones as demonstrated by perceived improved well being of their children aged 15 to 35 years.

physical space for women; and 'Subjective well-being and objective measures; insecurity and inequality in emerging markets' in relation current and future prospects.

⁹ The multivariate analysis was undertaken by Brent Taylor and reported in 'National Youth Survey Timor Leste, a Multivariate Analysis', 2 February, 2006.

Diagram 1: Geo-demographic sub-model



Note: All geo-demographic factors in the survey were tested for this model. Those factors not included in this model did not have a significant relationship with either rated adequacy of consumption, housing and income or education level attained.

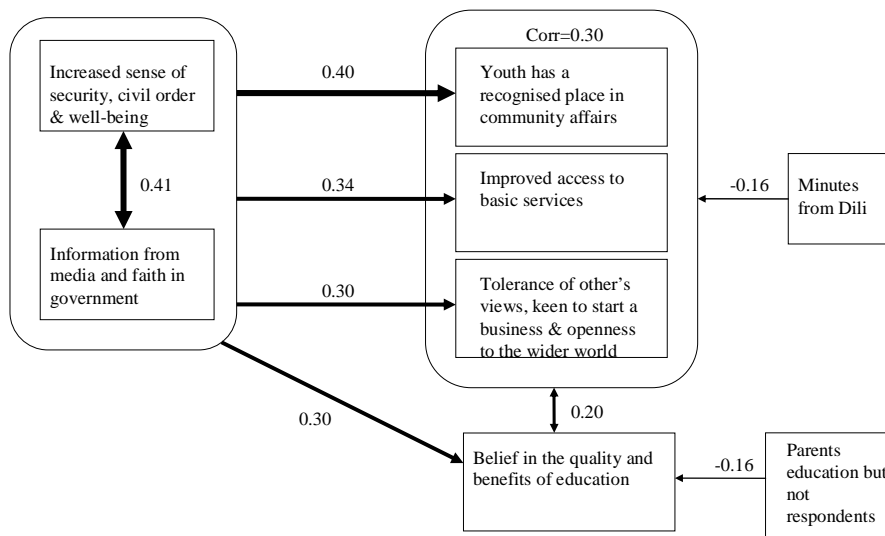
Other relationships shown in Diagram 1 are more self-evident such as the more educated the young person, the greater the likelihood that they are able to read well. The relationship between the young person's level of education attainment and whether they participate in group activities such as sport is also easily understood. It indicates that access to resources such as playing field and equipment is an important ingredient in whether young people participate in group activities or not.

The remaining relationship to be explained is the link between education level and paid work. The correlation between the level of education attained of a young person in a rural area and whether in a paid job is a weak one. This shows that the rural economy has few employment opportunities for young people, especially for work requiring formal education. If the household survey had been administered in Dili, it would have, no doubt, shown a somewhat stronger link between education and paid work.

Young people's attitudes

Clusters of attitudes were identified by using factor analysis. Each of the major factors is made up of responses to specific statements. A cluster of attitudes consists of statements which are strongly correlated with each other. In other words, respondents who agreed with one statement also agreed with similar statements which taken together constitute a distinct set of attitudes.

Diagram 2: Attitude sub-model



Note: All attitude factors in the survey were tested for this model. All are contained in summary form in this model.

Importance of a sense of improved security and well being

The attitude sub-model, in contrast to the geo-demographic sub-model, is based on moderate to strong internal correlations (see Diagram 2). The most important cluster of attitudes revolve around agreement from respondents that security and a sense of well-being has improved. Those who agreed that there was improved security and well-being were also likely to agree that they had good access to information from the media and showed faith in the government’s capacity to solve the problems they face.

The cluster of attitudes concerning internal security issues consists of correlations between 17 statements which attracted a high level agreement from respondents. The level of agreement with the security related attitude statements ranged from 54 to 86 per cent (see Appendix 2 for details) and included statements about perceptions of personal security, the role of police and what conditions are like compared to those experienced in the past by the young person’s parents. Also included is a set of attitudes related to whether young people agree that there are now improved living conditions compared with their parents in relation to health, economic prospects and security (see Appendix 2).

Positive attitudes to improved security results in other positive self images

Those who believe that internal security civil order has increased, supported by information from media, were also likely to agree with statements concerning the positive role of young people in the local community. This cluster of attitudes in includes agreement with statements such as ‘youth like myself have an important role in our local community, the role which I play in my local community makes me feel good and my local community helps us youth in various ways and I am happy working with other youth in local associations’ (see Appendix 3).

Those young people who agreed that internal security and well-being has improved

were also likely to agree that access to basic services had also improved. This includes not only services related to health, education, water supply and better sanitation but also perceptions that the community helps young people.

Those who agreed that security and well-being have improved also claimed that they were tolerant of other's views, were keen to start a business and showed openness to the wider world. Tolerance was measured by the positive responses to the following statements: 'East Timor is a society which gives equal treatment to all religions'; 'I see/treat people from other religions like members of my own religion' and 'I know many people from other religions'. Also included in this cluster of attitudes are those seeking to improve their economic situation by wanting and knowing how to start a business. Finally, an openness to the wider world was also a component of the cluster based on positive responses to the statements: 'Things which happen in other countries are more interesting than things which happen in East Timor' and 'based on what I know about other lands, youth now have more opportunities'.

Those young people who believed they had experienced improved security and well being, supported by access to the media and a faith in government, were also more likely to have a positive attitude to the quality of the education they were receiving and the likely benefits they anticipated reaping.

Links between the characteristics of young people and their attitudes

The analysis showed little relationship between the two sub-models. Only distance from the capital Dili and parents' education showed some effect. The closer respondents were to Dili, the more likely it was that they believed they better access to basic services, believed that youth had a recognised place in community affairs and were more tolerant of other's views, and had an openness to the wider world.

Young people's belief in the quality and benefits of education was affected by whether their parents had received formal education or not but not in the expected direction. Surprisingly, young people were more likely to value the education they were receiving if their parents had had little or no education. Also, young people's rating of the value and benefits of their education did not rise with higher levels of education attainment.

These results suggest that those young people who come from households where their parents have little or no education are more likely to rate favourably the quality of the education they are receiving and see greater potential in its benefits. Young people whose parents had received more formal education are likely to be enthusiastic about the value and benefits of education. The results also show that young people who have progressed up the education ladder do not look more favourably on the quality of their education and are likely to be more sceptical about its benefits, particularly in relation to its link to paid work.

In general, the above modelling shows that the attitudes of young people in rural areas in Timor Leste do not differ very much among themselves. The level of education young people have received or its absence makes little difference in how they react to a range of issues. Nor does education appear to have an inter-generational effect on attitudes. Although educated young people are more likely to have parents who have received an education, this inter-generational support for education has not produced major differences in attitudes between literate and illiterate young people.

The limited value of education to rural residents

These findings suggest that education is only likely to affect people's attitudes where education results in a better standard of living. The poverty of the rural areas and the low level of economic activity there means that education offers few benefits to those who acquire it and stay in the rural economy. The lack of a link between education and access to new opportunities applies not only to the current generation of young people in the rural areas of Timor Leste but also appears to be missing in their parents' generation.

This is not to claim that education offers no benefits. The survey results showed that mother's education did have a beneficial effect in terms of perceived adequacy of household income, food consumption and housing.

Young people's attitudes to violence

One in five young people agreed that violence should be met with violence and one in four agreed that young people are the cause of violence in the local area. However, it was not possible to find an association between the young people expressing these views and any identifying characteristics. Despite the high proportion of young men in martial arts groups, attitudes to violence and whether violence occurs in the area appear to be shaped by highly local conditions or perceptions of the likelihood of violence that are simply random.

Conclusion

Timor Leste has three distinguishing characteristics relevant to interpreting the results of this survey of its young people. It is a poor country, the poorest in the Asian region, with a per capita income of only \$370 per year.¹⁰ This extreme poverty means a lack of basic resources for young people, despite their willingness, to start businesses or to take other steps to help the communities in which they live.

Timor Leste is also small country of a million people. As with other small states, Timor Leste suffers from a number of inherent disadvantages that limit severely the prospects for employment growth in the private or government sectors.¹¹ Its third defining characteristic is that the country has just emerged from a 24 year occupation where the Timorese, particularly those in rural areas, were systematically denied access to a range of opportunities for employment and economic advancement.

These three factors help to explain the lack of differentiation among rural young people in Timor Leste. The more important differentiator was the extent to which young people felt their security and well-being had improved. For those who did, this led to other positive attitudes related to their role in society and openness to the wider world. In a post conflict setting, concerns about security and sense of well-being compared with conditions facing parents in the past dominate other considerations.

The survey results also show that illiteracy is not merely caused by lack of access to

¹⁰ UNDP, 2006, *The Path out of Poverty: integrated rural development*. Human Development Report, Dili, Timor Leste, p 1.

¹¹ See World Bank website on small states.

schools. A more important factor appears to be the lack of support from parents to send their children to school if they themselves have not gone to school. Subsistence farmers struggling to survive in a highly precarious environment cannot afford the opportunity cost of losing their children's labour by sending them to school.

In a situation where nearly two-thirds of rural households suffer from food insecurity in Timor Leste, subsistence farmers require the help of all able members of a household to survive.¹² Efforts to convince illiterate parents that it is worthwhile educating their children need to be based on evidence of the benefits of education to the child's household. At present this evidence is hard to find. The survey results do show the value of education for women. As noted above, people with a mother who received some level of formal education are more likely to rate their household's standard of living as adequate or better. However, many illiterate parents may reject the need to educate their children if they fail to see how it leads to improved economic conditions in the area in which they live.

These survey results also suggest that the best way to empower young people in Timor Leste is to give them opportunities to increase their capacity, especially using their education, to improve their living conditions in their local area. Strong feelings of security and social cohesion among young people are likely to drive other changes which will benefit the local community. These changes include more young people participating in local representative bodies such as the Suku Council, working with local associations and starting businesses.

The absence of a diversified rural economy due to a lack of demand for goods and services is a major obstacle to young people finding ways to contribute to the development process in Timor Leste. The UNDP's Human Development Report for Timor Leste has noted that achieving the Millennium Development Goals 'requires effective national policies, but most of the work has to take place at the local level and particularly in the rural areas'.¹³

The UNDP has called for Timor-Leste to develop urgently a strategy for pro-poor agricultural and rural development and for rural service delivery.¹⁴ According the UNDP report, the Government's current policy on rural development is to provide infrastructure and social services but to rely on market forces to generate economy activity. However, the UNDP notes that this approach does not acknowledge the inherent weaknesses of the private sector - it may take up to ten more years for enough entrepreneurs to emerge and, in the meantime, rural communities are denied many essential services and opportunities to escape from poverty.¹⁵

The pro poor strategy the UNDP proposes is for the Government to fund the delivery of a range of basic and support services for the rural population. It needs to do this through a variety of mechanisms including use of its own staff, local cooperative associations, non-government organisations and for-profit enterprises. This pro poor rural strategy also needs to tap in a fundamental way the skills and aptitudes of young people so they can play a key part in delivering these services.

¹² UNDP, 2006, p 2 and p 20.

¹³ UNDP, 2006, p 5.

¹⁴ UNDP, 2006, p 32.

¹⁵ UNDP, 2006, p 30.

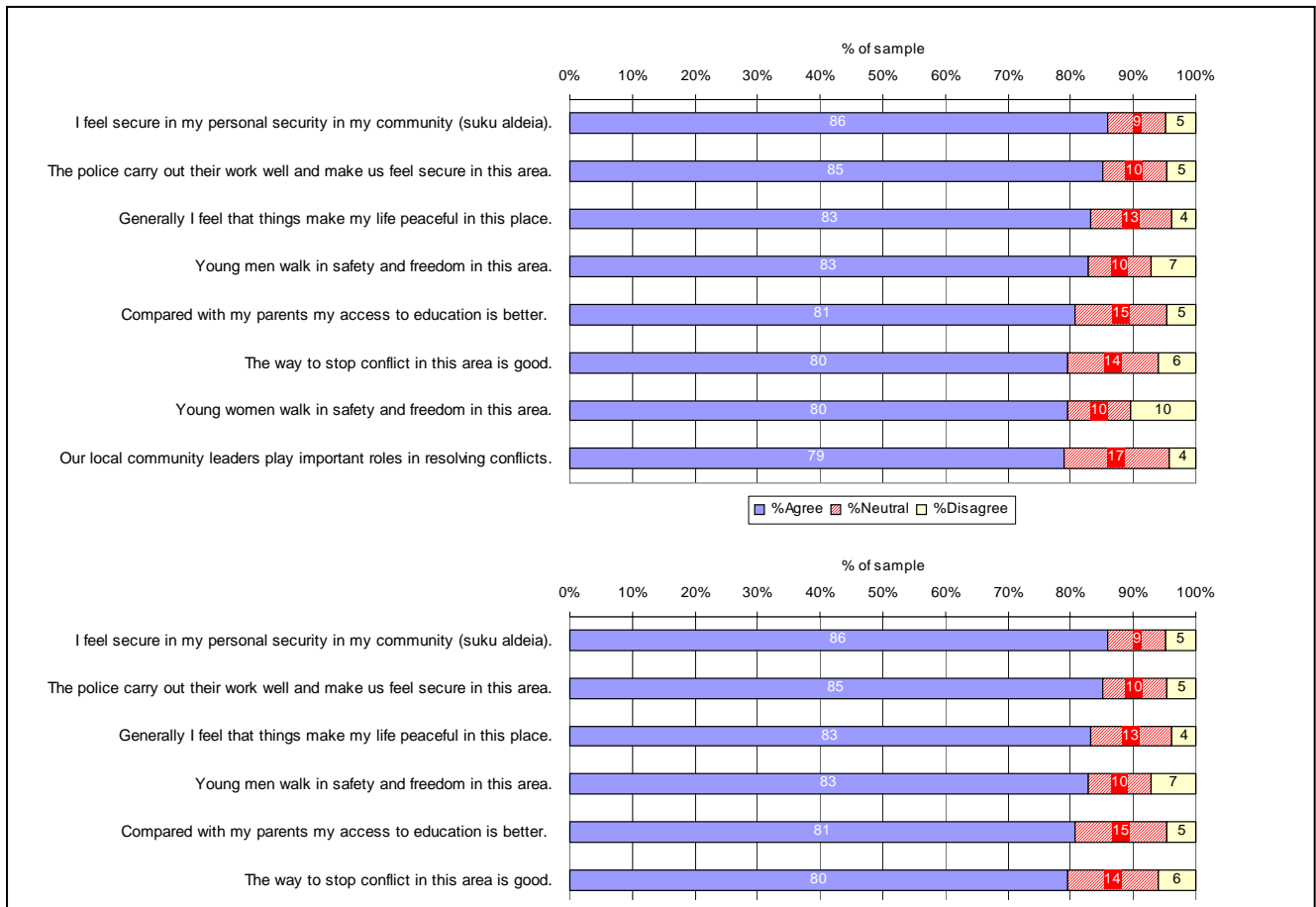
Appendix 1: List of attitude statements (translated from the Tetum version of the questionnaire)

Economic assets
I feel planting food for my family is a good thing I do.
I feel that working planting food is a good thing I can do for my family
In my area it is easy to plant food to supply the family's daily needs.
In my area it is easy to look for money if I try.
I have good access to government services.
It is easy for me to go to school.
I have good access to health clinics.
I have good access to water.
I have sufficient access to sanitation
I have good access to services which help me to improve the food which I plant.
Not knowing reading and writing doesn't really affect my life.
If I can read and write, I will be able to do many things to improve my life.
I want to start a new business.
I know how to run a new business.
We have a local association which helps us to plant [invest? Or start?] a business.
Political assets
Youth like myself have an important role in our local community (suku)
The role which I play in my local community (suku) makes (me) feel good.
My local community (suku) helps us youth in various ways.
My local community (suku) is good and helps me.
I am happy working with other youth in local associations.
I am happy participating in sporting activities with other youth in my area.
I think youth play an important role in East Timor.
East Timor is a society which gives equal treatment to all religions.
I see/treat people from other religions like members of my own religion.
I know many people from other religions.
It is important for educated youth to help youth who cannot read or write.
Youth are represented as a group in my suku council.
In our suku council, people listen to youth.
The elections for the suku heads and aldeia heads was important for youth to express their voice.
School is a good place to learn to become a citizen and to participate in society.
Nationally, youth are well represented in parliament.
Nationally, the government knows the problems which youth face.

Access to information
Radio, cinema/film and newspapers give me information about a world (sic) better than the one my parents know.
Things which happen in other countries are more interesting than things which happen in East Timor.
Based on what I know about other lands, youth now have more opportunities.
Good opportunities for girls and young women are better now than when my parents were still young.
Good opportunities for boys and young men are better now than when my parents were still young.
Radio gives more information about what is happening in other places.
Newspapers give more information about what is happening in other places.
Cinema/film gives more information about what is happening in other places.
Television gives more information about what is happening in other places.
Information from the national government gives me more information about what is happening in other places.
I am satisfied with the information I receive about what happens in other places
Personal security
I feel secure in my personal security in my community (suku, aldeia).
Violence involving youth does not continually happen in this place.
Violence must meet with violence to stop violence.
Young women walk in safety and freedom in this area.
Young men walk in safety and freedom in this area.
It is young people who are the cause of problems in this area.
The way to stop conflict in this area is good.
Our local community leaders play important roles in resolving conflicts.
The police carry out their work well and make (us?) feel secure in this area.
Generally, I feel that things done for me are sufficient to make my life peaceful in this place.
Current prospects
Compared with my parents, I think my economic prospects now are better.
Compared with my parents, my access to health is better.
Compared with my parents, my access to education is better.
Compared with my parents, my access to home is sufficient.
Compared with my parents, my access to basic necessities like water and sanitation is better.
Compared with my parents, I have good access to a healthy environment.
Compared with my parents, my home/dwelling is better.
Compared with my parents, I feel more secure in terms of violence and crime.

Future prospects
I have strong faith that the government will help our prosperity/good life in the coming five years.
Compared with my parents, I believe my economic prospects in my whole life are better.
I believe that the government will help more of us (or: help us more) to get prosperity/a good life.
Statements related to quality of education and aspirations
The quality of education which I receive is good.
My teachers work hard.
My teachers have good comprehension of what they teach us.
The material which I learn will help me to carry out my life.
Getting work from the government is a very good way for me to use my education.
If you try with striving, people with good education will get good jobs.
I believe that my knowledge, skill and experience is really needed.
I am diligent seeking work which can make me help my nation.
I am diligent in seeking work which will enable me to help other people.
The thing which is important to me is the money/salary I will receive from the work I seek.
I am diligent in seeking various ways to help my nation.

Appendix 2: Attitude statements making up the internal security cluster of attitudes



Appendix 3: Attitude statements making up the recognised role of young people cluster of attitudes

