



POPULATION MOVEMENTS, ETHNICITY AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
IN WEST TIMOR

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ABSTRACT

Research studies, involving the relevance of changing patterns and processes of population mobility in Indonesia have tended to focus on permanent mobility, rural to urban movements and migration at an interprovincial and international level. In addition, most population movement studies have been carried out in Western Indonesia. The challenge of this study was to examine the characteristics of internal migration at the village level in West Timor, Eastern Indonesia, where intraprovincial movements, of a temporary and permanent nature, including both rural to rural and rural to urban areas, were expected to be important for rural development and policy making. In addition, mixing of ethnic groups had occurred in the coastal villages close to Kupang, the provincial capital. It seemed appropriate to examine the influence of ethnicity on development, since many ethnic groups live in close proximity to each other in rural areas of Indonesia as a result of spontaneous movements and resettlement programmes. The overall aim of the study was to explore the complex relationship between population movements, ethnicity and development processes and sustainable rural activities.

It was found that there was significant intraprovincial movement to the coastal areas which was not recorded in the census. While the level of immigration, together with natural increase, contributed to increased population pressure on resources, the HTI take-over of land for industrial forest plantations was seen as the main factor hindering adaptive responses. Prior to the HTI take-over, hills people were resettled towards the coast by the government. The impact of the HTI take-over affected the six villages differentially and was influenced by land settlement history and the type of farming system. The coastal villages of Pariti and Oeteta were more dependent on irrigated rice farming and were in better position to cope with the loss of land to the HTI while the coastal villages of Poto and Nuataus and the highland villages of Oelbiteno and Nunsanen were more disadvantaged due to their greater loss of dryland farming resources on which their livelihood depended.

The impact and types of responses to this pressure were examined and discussed in relation to factors influencing sustainable development. These showed that the village farming systems were not flexible enough in the short term to adapt to the rapid changes that had occurred. The HTI take-over further exposed the vulnerability of livelihood sustainability of both coastal and highland villages which was already constrained by a number of factors operating at the village and higher levels. These included the isolation of villages, the centralised approach of the government, the insecurity of land tenure and the lack of political and economic empowerment of villagers. In this context the management of natural resources became more difficult with added risk to the environment.

The close association of ethnic groups, along with social and cultural aspects of each ethnic group, were seen as important factors contributing to the relative harmony under which the Timorese, Rotinese and other ethnic groups live in the same community. This contrasts with the ethnic tension that has resulted from sponsored programmes of resettlement in which there were greater religious, social and cultural differences between ethnic groups. The beneficial effects of ethnic groups living together in the coastal villages, and their diversity, provided opportunity for village development and could be supported by government and non-government efforts, particularly through education, skills development and incentives for small scale enterprises.

Local studies of this kind assist in defining the role of government and non-government agencies toward villagers so that they can respond in an appropriate way to a number of pressures that constrain sustainable livelihood opportunities.

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