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# International Approaches to Literacy for Gender Empowerment:

A Review of the Literature and Analysis in Relation to Timor-Leste

A research project presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of International Development

Development Studies

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## **Abstract**

After 400 years of colonial rule and illegal occupation Timor-Leste gained independence (World Bank, 2004). However, in the wake of this, as they sought to rebuild the country, the newly founded government was faced with numerous development challenges, such as wide spread illiteracy and a non-existent education system. Given this non-existent education system and the extent of illiteracy noted more in the rural areas and in relation to women, part of the solution to addressing the issue was to implement informal literacy programmes. It was argued that increasing women's literacy was an important strategy for increasing women's social, political and economic participation and achieving empowerment (Olufunke, 2011). However there are also debates contesting that participation in literacy programmes automatically leads to the empowerment of women, rather the programmes on offer need to be understood in the context of the place where they are being delivered (Stromquist, 2002).

With this in mind this research project seeks to critically explore firstly, international approaches to adult literacy with a specific focus on gender and empowerment, and secondly, the relevance of these international approaches to adult literacy as an empowering tool in relation to women in Timor-Leste. This desk-based exploration unpacks four international approaches to adult literacy, which come under the umbrella of critical literacy approaches, these are: 'New Literacy Studies' (NLS), 'Real Literacies Approach' (RLA), the 'REFLECT' Method, and the 'Community Literacy Approach' (CLA). These four approaches are critically discussed in relation to women's empowerment focusing specifically on debates by Rowlands (1995, 1997) and Kabeer (1999), who draw on Freire's (1970) concept of empowerment, conscientization.

Having interrogated these four approaches I then reflected upon them in terms of the Timor-Leste situation, focusing specifically on issues of effectiveness and appropriateness. I conclude that rural women can experience empowerment through participation in adult literacy programmes. In considering the REFLECT Method, the common empowerment dimensions experienced are the personal sphere or dimension (Rowlands, 1995, 1997), the achievement dimension (Kabeer, 1999), with evidence of 'conscientization' or critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). The REFLECT Method is thus considered to be the most appropriate and effective

approach to adult literacy and gender in Timor-Leste. However, this approach can also be combined with other approaches (in particular the RLA), which is implemented nationwide in Timor-Leste. However it is important to note that literacy itself does not guarantee empowerment, there is a need to think beyond literacy and how (within) this process women can access their fundamental rights, as well as possibilities of power (Archer, 2002).

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*A Luta Continue,,, Viva Timor-Leste!*

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## List of Acronyms

AODETI – Associação Popular Democrática Timorense <sup>1</sup>  
ASDT – Associação Social Democrática Timorense <sup>2</sup>  
CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women  
CLA – Community Literacy Approach  
DAWN – Development Alternatives with Women for new Era  
EFA – Education For All  
ETTA – East Timor Transitional Administration  
GAD – Gender and Development  
FALINTIL – Forças Armadas da Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste<sup>3</sup>  
FRETILIN – Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente <sup>4</sup>  
MDG – Millennium Development Goal  
NGO – Non-governmental Organisation  
NLS – New Literacy Studies  
NSD – National Statistic Directorate  
OPMT – Organização Popular de Mulher Timorense <sup>5</sup>  
PRA – Participatory Rural Appraisal  
RLA – Real Literacies Approach  
REFLECT – Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community  
Techniques  
TLSLS – Timor-Leste survey of living standards  
UN – United Nations  
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme  
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation  
UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund  
UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund  
UNTAET – United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor  
UNW – United Nations Women  
WID – Women in Development

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<sup>1</sup> English Translation: Popular Democratic Association of Timor

<sup>2</sup> English Translation: Timorese Social-Democratic Association

<sup>3</sup> English Translation: The Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor

<sup>4</sup> English Translation: Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor

<sup>5</sup> English Translation: Popular Organisation of East Timorese Women

# **Chapter One: Introduction**

## **1.1 Background to the research**

### *1.1.1 Education as empowering*

In recent decades, across the globe, development interventions to address gender inequity have been substantial. One of the main areas of focus has been in the area of education. Specifically in formal education with a focus on addressing low levels of literacy, with the argument that increasing literacy level for girls and women will lead to empowerment (Olufunke, 2011). The promotion of education for girls and the need to address gender inequality firstly, in its entirety and secondly, in terms of education, is laid out also by the MDGs. That is ‘MDG 3: Universal education for all’ and ‘MDG 4: Promote gender equality and empower women’. Yet the gains that should have been made regarding education and literacy for girls have not been fully realised, particularly for rural populations (Allden, 2007).

Various reasons have been given for this lack of ‘real’ progress, for example, in patriarchal dominated societies the education of girls is generally undervalued in comparison to boys. That is education of girl children is often viewed as a poor investment of family resources, due to the departure of girls/women to their husband’s village upon marriage and thereby their knowledge and skills go with them (Walter, 2004, p.425).

Moreover, there are also inadequacies surrounding the schooling system and curriculum. That is there are too few female teachers, school are too far away or lack gender appropriate facilities such as girls toilets, which raises issues of safety. Or the text books used reinforce stereotypical gender roles (WB & GoTL, 2008; WB, 2004).

There has also been much debate saying that formal education aimed at girls is not the only solution, that consideration has to be given to utilising non-formal education, and adults also have to be targeted (McCaffery et al., 2007). However when adult education is available for women, it often focuses on women’s reproductive roles and it takes an instrumentalist viewpoint which considers up skilling women for development gains, such as income generation or increasing production as the end goal, as opposed to it being a right or being about gender

equity or empowerment. The curriculum of literacy programmes has often served to reinforce women's traditional reproductive and productive gender roles under patriarchy, rather than promote greater participation of women within community roles and commercial activities which is seen to be men's domain (Walter, 2004, p. 425).

However, recent studies have shown that a different type of literacy programme can encourage human 'capabilities' and Nussbaum (2003) suggests "providing a space where individuals can encounter one another and pursue social and educational activities corresponding to their own activities" (Prins, 2008, p.10). Around the world, government agencies, local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), researchers and international organisation are endeavouring to implement these new approaches which take on this idea of literacy encouraging capabilities or literacy as empowering. These new supposedly empowering approaches, known collectively as critical literacy approaches include the 'New Literacy Studies'(NLS), the 'Real Literacies Approach' (RLA), the 'REFLECT' Method, and the 'Community Literacy Approach'(CLA), and these are now influencing current thinking around the delivery of women's literacy with a focus on non-formal education.

In saying this, it is important to not just assume that even these different types of literacy programmes will automatically leads to empowerment for women, rather gender empowerment and any programme implemented which is trying to achieve empowerment, must be located within the socio-political, cultural context in which the programme is occurring.

With this in mind, this report seeks to understand better current approaches to gender and literacy from an empowerment perspective while also situating this understanding within the socio-political cultural context of Timor-Leste. The section to follow justifies this study by outlining briefly the current situation in Timor-Leste in relation to women's status and in terms of literacy.

## **1.2 Justification for this study**

Due to the long struggles of conflict, many rural adult women and youth missed out on formal schooling during the Portuguese administration and Indonesia's illegal occupation (Boon, 2011). When this is coupled with Timorese culture which is very patriarchal, rural women in particular, have found themselves in a disadvantaged position status-wise and in terms of access to education (Alden, 2007, p.17). These two points will now be briefly outlined.

### ***1.2.1 Brief overview of rural women's status in Timor***

Since independence Timor-Leste has continued to make progress in some areas of gender and development, especially in the area of gender inequality and women's empowerment. For example, improvements in mother and under-five mortality, increasing access to improved sanitation, and an increase in the number of children enrolled in primary education can be noted (UNDP, 2009, p. 8-9). However, women and girls continue to show lower human development indicators compared to males. Problems, such as domestic violence and sex trafficking (especially in the border district) are just some of the issues that contemporary Timor-Leste has to deal with (UN Women).

Societal structures within Timor-Leste are heavily influenced by strong traditional patriarchal beliefs and customs, which present a formidable challenge to women's social, economic and political participation. Timorese society assigns strict gender roles for men and women that have led to discriminatory practices against women (Critical & Scott, 2005). As a result of gender-defined norms relating to culture and customs women have traditionally been responsible for domestic activities related to reproductive work and unpaid productive work. Traditional gender roles, enforced from a young age, dictate that men are the leaders and decision-makers in their families and communities and women should support their husbands and families as obedient wives and mothers (Narciso & Henrique, 2010, p.54). Child bearing, caring for the family's daily food needs, collecting water, caring for the sick and elderly (and in rural areas working in the fields) are considered to be the important and main

tasks that women have to assume and perform every day (Criticalis & Scott, 2005, p.23).

Rural women in Timor-Leste appear to be doubly disadvantaged as a result of geographic and gender disparities. The focus of development initiatives in Dili and other large urban areas has resulted in the neglect and underdevelopment of rural areas and this situation has further marginalised the development of rural women in particular, since they continue to live in extreme poverty with limited access to health care, opportunities for employment and education (Allden, 2007, p.17). This is evident in the low levels of literacy we see with rural women.

### ***1.2.2 Brief overview of Timor's literacy situation for rural women***

Timor-Leste has adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) targets and indicators within its National Strategy Plan 2011-2030, in addition to adopting the 'Education For All' (EFA) goals and emphasising the TL National Education Policy (2008-2012), which seeks to improve the quality of the education system and ensure equal access to all Timorese within all levels of education (p. 11). There are certainly some improvements in the area of formal education, in relation to female enrolment, for example, female enrolment (in higher education) has improved by 70% since 2009 (TLSDP, 2011-2030), however there are still more boys than girls in school overall.

While the overall adult literacy rate for those 15 years and over has improved from 36% in 2000 to 47% in 2004 and has further increased to 58% in 2007 (TLSLS, 2007), according to Census 2010, a decline can be seen (NSD & UNFPA, 2011). The adult literacy rate for those 15 years and over is now recorded at 56.1%, which is down 2% from the figure noted above. In terms of gender only 50.9% of women are literate, compared to 61.3% for men, and the differences for rural women are substantial, reported to be 44.6 %, in comparison to the 80.9% reported for urban areas (NSD & UNFPA, 2011, p. xvii). These figures show that while progress is being made, it can fluctuate, and much more effort is needed to improve the adult literacy rate for rural women.

While the government recognises the need to develop formal education, positively emphasis has also been placed on the role of non-formal education (Boon, 2006). The government recognises if they are to reduce gender inequality and empower women throughout the country via education, as noted in the MDGs, women in the rural environment must be actively included.

### **1.3 Aim of the research**

The overall aim of this research is to critically investigate international approaches to literacy for gender empowerment. This is a desk-based study and via a literature review and in drawing at times my own lived-experiences from working in the area of women's literacy for empowerment I will unpack the various approaches to adult literacy. The approaches I will critique include the 'New Literacy Studies' (NLS), the 'Real Literacies Approach' (RLA), the 'REFLECT' Method, and the 'Community Literacy Approach' (CLA) and I will consider these approaches in relation to women's empowerment. Finally, this examination of the literature will be reflected upon in terms of the Timor-Leste situation, focusing on the effectiveness and appropriateness of these approaches to achieve women's empowerment and address gender inequality.

### **1.4 Research questions**

In undertaking this investigation I will answer the following research questions:

**Question 1:** Through application of an empowerment lens, what are the strengths and limitations of international approaches to literacy and gender empowerment?

**Question 2:** Which of these approaches are appropriate and effective in terms of women's empowerment in Timor-Leste?

## 1.5 Overview of this report

*Chapter One* has introduced the study; the notion of education for women's empowerment is introduced also. The overall aim of the research is then presented, as are the research questions. An overview of the current status of women in Timor-Leste is presented. The high adult literacy rate prevalent amongst rural women is given.

*Chapter Two* examines theoretical approaches to women, gender, education and development tracing the way in which knowledge concerning women and education in relation to development has evolved. To do this I draw on discursive threads identified by Wild (2007), these are 'education for reproduction', 'education for production', 'education for submission', and 'education for empowerment'. As part of this examination the changing attitudes toward women's literacy from an instrumental approach focusing on what women could do for development, to one which asked what development could do for women, and education for women's empowerment will be made clear. In this regards, the chapter also highlights how education/ literacy can empower women. The chapter concludes by highlighting the importance of men in the process for women's empowerment.

*Chapter Three* critically explores four international approaches to literacy. The four approaches are the NLS, the RLA, the REFLECT Method, and the CLA. The chapter highlights the contribution of adult literacy to people lives, considering also the ways that adult literacy can enhance gender equity and achieve empowerment for women. This analysis will focus on the relationship between literacy and empowerment focusing on key ideas from Rowlands (1995, 1997) and Kabeer (1999), who draw on Freire's (1970) concept of empowerment, conscientization. These ideas are then to be applied in *Chapter Five* when I consider whether literacy programmes, such as the RLA and the REFLECT Method have been empowering for rural women in Timor-Leste.

*Chapter Four* considers the context of Timor-Leste from the Portuguese colonial period and Indonesian occupation through to independence. Unpacking colonial rule, ensuing underdevelopment, and the occupation period which was thwart with conflict and little development, are important as these have had a major effect on the

development of women. The chapter will show that women in Timor-Leste, particularly rural women, missed out on formal schooling during Portuguese rule and the Indonesian illegal occupation. When this is coupled with Timorese culture which is very patriarchal, girls and women continue to have poor access to formal education. Non-formal education literacy programmes are providing women with an alternative means for accessing educational opportunities and potentially overcoming their disadvantage and disempowerment.

In presenting the research findings *Chapter Five* achieves the aim of the research and answers the research questions. As the chapter will show the four approaches to literacy and gender have different strengths and limitations and they contribute in different ways to empowerment. However the REFLECT Method is considered to be the most appropriate and effective approach to adult literacy and gender in Timor-Leste. This approach should also be combined with other approaches (in particular the RLA), which is currently implemented nationwide in Timor-Leste.

*Chapter Six* concludes this research report by reflecting on the contribution of adult literacy to women's empowerment. In the case of Timor-Leste, literacy itself does not guarantee empowerment, there is a need to think beyond literacy and pay close attention to the meaningful use of literacy and how (within this process) women can access their fundamental rights, as well as possibilities of power (Archer, 2002).

## **Chapter Two: Theoretical Approaches to Women, Gender, Education and Development**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In using a framework developed by Wild (2007), this chapter gives an overview of the way in which knowledge concerning Third World women's education for the purpose of development has been constructed and implemented in terms of policy and practice. While Wild (2007) focuses specifically on higher education, and my report focuses on informal literacy/education, the categories or discursive fields identified by Wild (2007) for understanding development policy and practice approaches to women's education are still useful. Wild (2007) talks about 'education for reproduction', 'education for production', 'education for submission', and 'education for empowerment' (Wild, 2007, p.46).

The chapter will start with an overview of the 'education for reproduction' discourse, which is understood to encompass a traditional approach to women's education seen very much during the colonial era. I will then discuss 'education for production', the relationship between the drive to modernise the Third World can be seen here. Parallels between Women in Development (WID) thinking and practice can be seen also. Next I will present 'education for submission' which emphasises the Western model of education, and finally, the discourse of 'education for empowerment' where greater reliance on humanist ideas about education as a tool for the promotion of 'human flourishing' can be seen (Wild, 2007, p.60).

### **2.2 Education for reproduction**

Colonialism did not distinguish between women and men; it had a detrimental effect on both. However, evidence suggests that colonialism impacted more severely on women's lives than men's (Waylen, 1996), particularly in the area of education. There were few educational opportunities for Third World women during early colonial times, this kept female literacy rates very low until the end of the eighteenth century. The two main providers of education were the colonial administrators and the church (Kelly & Altbach, 1978, p.2). Colonial administrators saw education as an

instrument that could be used to up-skill native elite men through skill-based education so they could take up low-level administrative positions within the new colonial government. Women were targeted for church-based 'moral' education by missionaries who saw women's responsibility for family well-being as a perfect mode to convey Christian values and implement cultural change (Kelly & Altbach, 1978, p.12). Consequently, women's education throughout colonial times was driven by a focus on women's domestic roles, in other words, 'education for reproductive' (Wild, 2007, p. 47).

Education policy-makers at this time were also searching for ways that education could modernise women's domestic and reproductive roles (Moser, 1989, p.1809). Education of women was argued to have a positive impact on quality of life as it would assist women to make informed choices concerning the wellbeing of their family. Women with some education would pay more attention to the health and nutrition of the family, have less children, have a higher life expectancy than their illiterate counterpart and would look to encourage and support their children to get an education (UNESCO, 1994, p.5). This statement has been perpetuated by mainstream development organisations who were concerned with the idea that educating Third World women would show benefits regarding the reproductive aspects of women's lives. For example, there would be a decrease in infant and child mortality rates and a reduction in fertility levels due to the fact women would learn more about family planning (Pong, 1999, p.155), limiting also population growth.

Since the 1970s, feminist theorists have been increasingly critical of the tendency to put emphasise on women's reproductive roles rather than recognising the productive roles women play in Third World economies. The critique with impetus from the United Nations Decade for Women has prompted a widening of education and development discourse to include the impact of education on women's productive capacity. The UN Decade in relation to education will be briefly discussed.

### ***2.2.1 United Nations Decade for Women (1976-85) and the impact on women participation in education***

The UN Decade for Women (1976-85) arose after increased attention was placed on the position and condition of Third World women. It was a significant milestone in legitimising feminist activism and mobilising women's development on a global stage. The decade called for action to improve the education, employment opportunities and social and political participation of women throughout the world. Within the UN Decade for Women also three world conference ran (1975: Mexico City, 1980: Copenhagen, and 1985: Nairobi), as well as the Beijing (1995) conference which followed later. This had a major influence on networking among women, on securing resources for women's development, and in terms of how these resources were to be applied. This resulted in a World Plan of Action (1975) and ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979).

A significant outcome of the conferences was the Beijing Platform for Action, and important milestones regarding gender equality in education were also stated. These included the World Declaration on 'Education For All', reaffirmed again much later in the Dakar Framework of Action (UNESCO, 2000). Boserup's<sup>6</sup> book highlighted women's important role in production, thus in the area of education a shift was also noted. Education was seen as vital to increasing production.

## **2.3 Education for production**

Education policy in the newly independent nations was governed by a concern with modernisation and economic development (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, p.63). Education policy-makers were concerned with how to incorporate a greater number

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<sup>6</sup> Ester Boserup published a seminal text, *Woman's Role in Economic Development* and is considered the first piece of research which looked at what was happening to Third World women as part of modernization, she also argued that their contributions, both domestic and in the paid/unpaid workforce contributed to development but were invisible and not counted. Her findings inspired the UN Decade for Women and encouraged feminist development scholars and practitioners to question the assumption that women automatically benefited from development.

of individuals into the modernising economy through skills-based training, in other words, 'education for production' (Wild, 2007). Whereas the colonial era sought to restrict the education of the Third World peoples for fear of social disruption (Gould, 1993, p.21), modernisation theory promoted the mass expansion of schooling in the Third World based on the Western schooling system as a primary mechanism for achieving culture change and rapid industrialisation (Fagerlind & Saha, 1983, p.63; Fox, 1997, p.58). This idea was based on 'human capital theory' which argued that rapid economic growth relied on education as a productive investment (Youngman, 2000, p.56). During this era, large investment of public resource and foreign aid supported a rapid expansion in education, which promoted universal education as the most efficient means of building human capital and increasing the skill-level of people entering the labour-based economy. Offering primary education was considered to be the perfect solution, however, this policy resulted in many problems as the demand for education exceeded the resources available and there was a lack of job opportunities after (Youngman, 2000, p.56). In creating a skilled workforce the education system was viewed as an important nation building mechanism. Adult education, in particular, was viewed as fundamental to a nation's development. However, the normative value assigned to development within the modernisation paradigm, and the purpose of adult education were hardly questioned (Youngman, 2000, p.58).

Education, thus largely reproduced colonial attitudes to the education of women. This period put emphasis on the economic value of education for production and reproduction looking at what education could bring to newly independent developing countries. However, formal education opportunities, post-primary in particular, were still largely targeted at men. Modernisation theory assumed women would benefit from the income that their husbands received from their participation in "economic development in the public, largely an elite male sphere, and this would naturally 'trickle down' to women in the private sphere" (Chowdry, 1995, p.31).

The assumption that progress through modernisation would benefit men and women equally was increasingly called into question in the 1970s as evidence highlighted that women did not benefit from development to the same degree that men did (see Boserup, 1970). Development had failed to "trickle down" to the poor and

marginalised in society, which tended to be disproportionately women (Sen & Grown, 1986, p.17), and in some situations there had actually been a decline in the position of women in society (Boserup, 1970; Rathgeber, 1990; Tinker & Bramson, 1976). It became clear that women were severely disadvantaged in the productive sector in which they faced widespread discrimination and barriers to their participation; they were usually assigned lower-paid, lower-skilled, and lower-status jobs.

Women also experienced strong prejudice against their involvement in educational activities. This was due to the commonly held belief and the Western, patriarchal assumption, that Third World women were confined to the home or private sphere (Kelly, 1996, p.75). As they would not acquire well-paying jobs in the productive sector, the best return on a family's investment would be to educate the boys. This belief still exists in many parts of the world nowadays. As mentioned, this invisibility was the focus of early feminist critiques of development.

The feminist critiques and solution to developing women that emerged during this decade are labelled the 'equity' approaches to development or the Women in Development (WID) approach because the critique was dominated by liberal feminist concerns about enabling women to achieve equality with men within the development process (Moser, 1989, p.1810). Liberal feminism sought to bring about the emancipation of women through transformation of the legal system to guarantee equal rights for men and women, and equal opportunity for women in the production sector. The rise of liberal feminism in the 1970s inspired educational research into the ways in which women in the West were disadvantaged in the Western education system, resulting in lower earning capacity of women in the productive sector (Wild, 2007, p.52). Feminist research too began to explore women's prominence and educational disadvantage in the Third World. They found that similar to the West men's education was privileged over women's (Wild, 2007, p. 53).

Feminists, were active in advocating the need for development policies that recognised women's productive roles, in addition to their reproductive roles (Tinker, 1997, p.37). From an education point of view, this called for greater emphasis to be placed on providing women with the skills and training that would increase their ability to participate more fully in the modern productive sector (Leach, 1998, p.13).

Recognition of the need to provide education to support women's productive roles was bolstered by the emphasis on addressing poverty and provision of basic needs within the development agenda. This supported the assumption that literacy education would provide the means by which women would develop the skills needed to match their male counterparts and they would then become equal partners in the development process. This viewpoint implied that illiteracy was (in part) the cause of women's lack of progress and their marginalised position in society, rather than a symptom of underdevelopment in the Third World (Robinson-Plant, 2004b, p.8). This view was reflected in many studies undertaken during the 1970s and 1980s measuring women's and men's illiteracy in the Third World. These studies stressed the correlation between female literacy rates and indicators of development such as mother and child health and income (Robinson-Plant, 2004c, p.17). Most of these studies were commissioned by the World Bank and were used to justify their policies on women's education (Robinson-Plant, 2004c, p.17).

The policy focus regarding women's education was to prepare women to keep up with the rapidly changing economy. However, not all education theorists shared this enthusiasm for the liberating potential of Western education as expressed in the work of modernisation theorists, human capital theorists, and the contributions of some early WID writers and the 'Western' model of formal education also came under sustained attack from a number of quarters.

## **2.4 Education for submission**

The early 1950 and 1960s were noticeable in terms of educational expansion in many areas of the Third World and by the late 1960s it became clear that even with this massive expansion illiteracy continued (Bacchus, 1997; Zachariah, 1985). Education delivery, it was argued, was uneven and poorer, rural populations missed out, while urban elites used educational opportunities to reinforce their privilege within their societies (King, 1991, p.242).

A state of 'crisis' existed within many newly independent education systems these included irregular school attendance, high dropout, widespread relapse into illiteracy and lower rates of school attendance and completion by girls (Zachariah 1985, p.9-

10). This growing disillusionment was bolstered by a range of political critiques of the ways in which Western education was responsible for reproducing structural inequalities inherent in the capitalist mode of production. These included class hierarchies producing an obedient workforce, class-related categories of workers.

One of the arguments related to the issues above, is that education was reconceptualised as a type of ‘cultural capital’, which schools were responsible for distributing in a way that maintained existing class hierarchies (Bourdieu & Passreon, 1990, p.11). This statement is also emphasised by Freire (1972) when he argued that the capitalist education systems with its hierarchical structures and emphasis on rote learning stifles the development of the creative and critical faculties required to stimulate revolution within Third World societies. Freire (1972) is severely critical of the learning approach within Western education, in which the approach is designed to destroy the capacity as well as the creativity of the students, so they will not have the confidence or ability to create a different social order.

A number of indigenous writers during this era also began to criticise the role of Western education systems noting this focus was undermining traditional occupations or livelihoods. These writers pointed to the ways that formal Western-style education devalues traditional subsistence knowledge and denies indigenous people the opportunity to pass on important cultural and environmental knowledge. In addition, the system is argued to have played a role in de-skilling indigenous populations, the expansion of the Western model of education has effectively led to “monocultures of the mind” (Shiva, 1993, p.22).

Finally, other significant contributors to the education for submission school of thought have come from feminist research on sexism within Western education. There is evidence that girls often receive a poorer education, have access to less qualified teachers, and are limited in terms of subjects aimed at promoting “domesticity as a skilled occupation” (O’Neill, 1996, p.25). With this statement, feminist theorists have highlighted the ways in which any advantages of education are often mediated by patriarchal gender rules that restrict the opportunities for women to benefit from education (Wild, 2007, p.59). This prompted a shift whereby schools tried to think more clearly about the role of education in women’s empowerment, noting also the importance of empowerment for women.

## **2.5 Education for empowerment**

There is a growing body of literature connecting education and literacy acquisition and gender empowerment, in particular women's empowerment. Early thinking suggested that education would be empowering for women and beneficial to all societies, because women are recognised as the best teachers of children at home and they 'bring up' the future leaders of any country (Okpoko, 2010, p.66). Women's education, is thus key to development, and in empowering women through literacy she will be an asset to her nation and the world at large, including her immediate community and their family (Okpoko, 2010, p.66). In this case, by educating the population of women, an entire society is argued to be transformed. This suggests that "the acquisition of literacy education empowers an individual to think positively... and acquire other skills that can assist her economically, politically and socially" (Olufunke, 2011, p.66).

Furthermore, literacy education is argued to enable women to have the power to control their own situation. For example, once women are literate and attain a level of education they will be freed from superstitions and the hold of taboos, which have kept them in the background, in addition to ignorance. By using functional literacy skills, they will reach a level of empowerment and (as a result) they will be recognised within their society, and therefore their living standards will also improve (Olufunke, 2011, p.67).

The discourse of education for empowerment can be distinguished from earlier approaches by its greater reliance on humanist ideas about education as a tool for the promotion of 'human flourishing' (Wild, 2007, p.60). Advocates of education for empowerment have argued that education needs to go well beyond mere "enabling" (Aksornkool, 1995, p.53). It has to view women as society's active members who need education, in order to participate effectively and meaningfully in any activity and as equal partners of men. Education is thus critical for the attainment of women's practical and strategic gender needs (Moser, 1993). Education is argued to be a critical for women to gain self-esteem, knowledge and autonomy.

The empowerment approach recognises the importance of women's self-esteem and autonomy for the attainment of women's power, in order to throw off the burden of

male domination. This is acknowledged by Moser (1993) who states that literacy should be a source of power, not for improving national development indicators or performing traditional gender roles more efficiently, but rather for working co-operatively towards social and political transformation, including justice for women.

Freire (1972) is the most well-known promoter of the belief that humanist education can challenge the inequality associated with capitalist development in the Third World. Humanist education is characterised by a commitment to a learner-centred pedagogy that prioritises the full development of an individual's capabilities, rather than meeting the economic and social needs of society (Zachariah, 1985, p.14). Freire (1972) argues that by cultivating a new teaching style "liberating education would enable students to realise their creative potential and analyse their own position in the world – radical pedagogues would create the conditions under which people could have faith in their ability to take control of their destiny and transform unequal power structures" (Freire, 1972, p.90). Furthermore, Freire label this process "‘conscientization’ the educational experience which prepares men for the struggle against the obstacles to their humanisation" (Freire, 1972, p.90).

Radical feminist writings, in addition to Freire's work, with its critiques of liberal feminist reform and its emphasis on the value of 'consciousness-raising' groups, made an important contribution to the popularity of humanist approaches to women's education. These feminist researchers argued that the instrumentalist approach of traditional liberal development theory tended to focus more on how the education of women can contribute to Western development goals, at the expense of whether and how education can be of benefit to women themselves (Assie-Lumumba & Sutton, 2004; Kelly & Slaughter, 1991). This reiterated the importance of gendered analysis of education.

### ***The importance of a gendered perspective to education and literacy***

Much research into gender and education has often focused on exploring the patterns of gender inequality and then explaining why there are gender disparities. Driven by the need to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, research has tended to be a donor-driven and focused on identifying ways to improve girl's access to

educational opportunities, especially in primary school. The focus on primary school education for girls in the Third World by international donor agencies and governments, over the past three decades, has overshadowed the fact that millions of women have already missed out on formal primary school for economic, social, cultural or political reasons, and therefore, they make up a significant proportion of the population who are unable to participate to their fullest potential within society (Rothchilds, 2006).

The continuing problems of inadequate access to formal educational opportunities and very low retention rates in formal schooling (leading to low completion rates) will mean that for the coming decades millions of children will become adult illiterates. Hence, the provision of non-formal education programmes can provide an important opportunity for those who have missed out on formal education, where they can gain knowledge and skills that can help them to improve their livelihoods. Problematically though as Rao and Robinson-Plant explain, “shaped by the assumption that educated women make better wives and mothers, with lower fertility rates and lower incidence of child mortality, programmes invariably adopt an instrumental approach to women’s empowerment” (2006, p.209).

Furthermore, as emphasised by Walter’s in not adopting a gendered perspective to researching adult literacy programmes, we risk the fact that literacy program’s outcomes may be misleading if one is concluding that the programme was overall beneficial and empowering for participants, while, in reality, it may have only been empowering to men and even disempowering to women (Walter, 2004, p.426). This highlights the importance of not only applying a gender lens to understanding formal and informal education but the importance of understanding men’s role in women’s development and looking to work with them.

## **2.6 Involving men for empowerment**

In this era, if the Third World is going to continue to develop goals related to gender equality and women’s empowerment there will have to be a greater effort to involve men (Richardson, 1995, p. 6). This point is also emphasised by Cornwall (1997) who

suggests that one of the most obvious gaps in gender and development studies, where new tools and new approaches are needed, is in relation to men.

In many nations, especially where there are strong patriarchal aspects and the patrilineal system dominates, there is definitely a need to involve or bring men directly back into the picture, as supporters or partners of women, rather than relegating them to the side-lines, or ignoring them (Cornwall, 2000). Including men may challenge misconceptions held by men who at times have understood the focus on gender and women to mean an agenda which is encouraging revolt of women against men, which they perceive will lead to community and familial disharmony (Cornwall, 2000). This may lead to increased hostilities between men and women, and can lead men to sabotage projects such as literacy projects, or in men forbidding their wife, daughter or sisters to participate in programmes.

Men as partners and supporters of women, calls for meaningfully involved at the beginning of the planning process and also at the implementation stage of any programme, hence reducing conflict between men and women and discrimination against women. There is a need to find constructive ways of working with men, in order to transform power and gender relationships, without marginalising women or off siding men. In saying this, it is important not to undermine the hard work already undertaken to advance women's interests by bringing men into these programmes. Hence the current inclusion of men in programme activities provides a potential avenue for programmes to address gender in terms of both sexes. If empowerment means "enabling people to expand their 'power within', in order to have power to make their own choices, then this can be equally applied to working with men" (Cornwall, 1997, p.12).

## **2.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter has outlined theoretical approaches to women, gender, education and development tracing the way in which knowledge concerning women and education in relation to development has evolved. 'Education for reproduction', 'education for production', 'education for submission' and 'education for empowerment' are the main discourses presented (Wild 2007). This discussion helps us to understand the

impacts of education in general and the approaches used to address women's low literacy levels, as well as the need for innovative literacy opportunities for Third World women.

Work within the 'education for reproduction' and 'education for production' traditions has contributed influential comparative statistical analyses of the relationship between education for women and the ability of society to achieve development goals in relation to health, education, and economic wealth. Large scale comparative research has played an important role in the establishment of collective development goals designed to increase women's level of skill and educational attainment. The focus was on increasing the workforce through mass schooling, using a 'one-size fits all' approach.

The 'education for submission' genre has highlighted the importance of paying attention to the ways that education functions to reproduce social inequalities and finally, 'education for empowerment' discourse has not only foreground the need for a more holistic, people-centred approach to understanding educational experiences, it has highlighted the potential of education to emancipate within disadvantage communities. In addition this discourse also emphasised the importance of applying a gender perspective to analysing women's lack of opportunities in development and education. This approach advocates for development policies and initiatives that are specifically targeted to not only women's practical gender needs and interests but more importantly women's strategic gender needs and interests, and thus seeks the transformation of societal structures that perpetuate gender inequality and oppression. Bringing men directly back into the picture, as supporters or partners of women, rather than relegating them to the side-lines or ignoring them, is also reiterated. The next chapter will examine and explore the implication of international approaches to literacy for gender empowerment.

## **Chapter Three: International Approaches to Literacy for Gender Empowerment**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an exploration into international approaches to literacy and gender. This chapter will explain how the development of critical approaches to the study of adult literacy and gender has been led by the New Literacy Studies (NLS) literature, Real Literacies Approach (RLA), The Reflect Method and the Community Literacy Approach (CLA). In outlining each approach I will provide an analysis of the contribution of adult literacy to people lives, considering also the ways that adult literacy can enhance gender equity and achieve empowerment for women. In exploring the relationship between literacy and empowerment I will focus on key ideas from Rowlands (1995, 1997) and Kabeer (1999), who draw on Freire's (1970) concept of empowerment, conscientization.

### **3.2 Critiquing the assumption that education equals empowerment**

Research on women's literacy has continued to expand and diversify, the focus has shifted away from statistical thinking whereby the correlations between health indicators and literacy rates are examined especially the relationship between literacy, gender and development and important issues such as culture, barriers, motivation and empowerment (Robinson-Plant, 2004a, p.1-2). Moreover 'education as a means for empowering women' has also been critiqued (Stromquist, 2002). The premise was education would automatically result in women's empowerment, that education breaks the barriers of inequity and educating girls is a powerful lever for reducing poverty. However these ideas have also been challenged.

In calling into question these ideas Jayaweera (1997) who examined the relationship between education and economic, social, and political empowerment in Asia found that while excluding women from educational opportunities reinforced their disadvantage, education in itself was not enough to overcome the economic and social barriers perpetuating gender inequality. In support of this Gibson (1996) found

that women were paid less than men even though their educational levels were higher than their male workmates in three South Africa farm. Mies's (1982) study on female lace makers found that Christian women lace workers, who had better access to mission school, suffered worse poverty than those women lace makers who had less education but who practiced the dominant religion, Hinduism. This shows that levels of education as an indicator of economic empowerment thus development may not always be so. Rather this relationship should be read within the specific social context of those studies, and that extension to other groups should be approached with concern (Sato, 2004).

Initially, while literacy for empowerment had been conceptualised well, the gender aspect was not as strong (Stromquist, 2006a, p.140). Unlike research into others areas of educational practice, such as primary school education or basic education for girls, gender had received scant attention in mainstream scholarship surrounding adult literacy (Walter, 2004, p.424). For example, while some attention had been paid to understanding existing literacy practices and the ways in which non-formal adult literacy programmes can be more closely aligned with daily life practices of women (Robinson-Plant, 2004b, p.26), the focus was on literacy for production not empowerment. This did not recognise those daily life practices which disempowered women, even simply the idea that these practices might mean women could not attend literacy programmes. Women's actual participation in literacy programmes can be determined by gender roles and relations.

Walter's findings, which provide an important framework of reference for this research, argue:

gender roles and relations had overriding importance in explaining women's participation in the literacy programme

And:

an understanding of the gendered division of labour, women's multiple gender roles (reproductive, productive and community) and their practical and strategic gender needs become a powerful analytical tool in explaining their participation in the literacy programme (Walter, 2004, p.424).

Claims from scholars such as Walters (2004) have led to calls for a more critical understanding surrounding the effectiveness of approaches and methods to literacy and gender. The development of critical approaches to understanding or addressing adult literacy and gender has been led by the New Literacy Studies (NLS), the Real Literacies Approach (RLA), the REFLECT Method, and the Community Literacy Approach (CLA) (Prins, 2008; Rogers, 1999, Street, 1984). Each of these approaches will now be discussed providing a useful analysis of the contribution of adult literacy to people lives and identifying areas in which adult literacy and gender equity can be enhanced.

### **3.3 International approaches to literacy and gender**

#### ***3.3.1 New Literacy Studies (NLS)***

According to Sato (2004) NLS introduces literacy as ideology as well as a part of social practices. By this, NLS seeks to analyse the power relations affecting and reflected in women' literacy interventions by "exploring how women 'take hold of' literacy within the classroom and apply it in their daily lives" (Robinson-Pant, 2004b, p.26). The NLS literature presents a useful distinction between the 'autonomous' model of literacy that is the view that literacy as a technical input contributes to cognitive development. In contrast with this view is this 'ideological' model which views literacy as a continuum of orality and multiple literacies/ languages that we learn over different periods throughout our lives (Robinson-Pant, 2004b, p.26). In this sense literacy is always 'ideological'; it always involves contestation over meanings, definitions and boundaries, and struggles for control of the literacy agenda. The shift in thinking from an autonomous model to an ideological model is particularly relevant when exploring the relationship between women's literacy and health attitude behaviour change because the approach provides space for discussion and materials about reproductive health, for example. Whether women can use this information to improve their lives is debatable however. NLS seeks to focus mostly on women's literacy rather than gender and literacy, thus it is more about practical needs rather than strategic needs.

### ***3.3.2 The Real Literacies Approach (RLA)***

On the other hand, the RLA is concerned with assisting people to develop their literacy skills to enhance their ability to carry out their daily literacy tasks more effectively. The RLA starts from the premise that every person, whatever their literacy level, is engaged in some sort of literacy activity and that these “relate to the cultural and economic activity of the whole community, not to the level of skills of the individual adult” (Roger, 1999, p.222). What this means is adults learn better from their daily lived experiences. For example, in traditional programmes literacy materials are developed by outsiders and are not contextualised, whereas in RLA materials are developed by the learners and facilitators so that they are contextually appropriate and relevant. Using daily based literacy tasks is argued to offer the most meaningful, empowering and effective way for adults to gain literacy skills (Rogers, 1999).

While the RLA is similar to traditional literacy programmes because they also draw on traditional literacy methods such as using text books, the starting point for this approach is very different. That is it does not start with a deficit model (what the participant lacks; what they cannot do) but with a positive attitude towards the participants (what they are already doing). They argue even non-literate persons receive and write letters; need to communicate with the head of school where their children may regularly attend; fill in forms; travel to town; are faced with election posters and signs and other notices. They note that non-literate people have needed to understand signs over buildings and symbols such as the hospital and market; they watch people reading newspapers and often access the information in these papers; they also scan advertisements and inspect packets in the shops they visit (Heath, 1983; Barton, 1994a,b; Baynham, 1995 as cited in Roger, 1999). In dealing with these daily literacy experiences, they have adopted their own strategies. This is recognised. The point is to help people to develop their skills of literacy so that they can use these enhanced skills to undertake more literacy tasks in their daily lives in the differing sphere, for example, at work, in the home and/or in the community. The focus is to improve their own quality of life as well as the quality of life of their family and thus their community (Roger, 1999).

### **3.3.3 The REFLECT Method**

The REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques) method is an approach to literacy inspired by Paulo Freire's teaching methodologies that outlined how adult literacy can contribute to social change by unpacking and enlightening participants about oppressive power structures and organisations in society. REFLECT combines the theory of Paulo Freire and the techniques of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) from Chambers (Dyer & Choksi, 1998).

Freire criticised using literacy primers. He argued that the text is set by teachers and learners are performers as passive vessels rather than transfers of knowledge. Thus he argued if learners are to become the subjects instead of the objects of the learning process, it is important to use the knowledge which already exists in the community in order to provide source material for literacy learning (Freire, 1972). Through this path, literacy is linked with social change as Freire advocated classes initiate a process of "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and taking action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Archer & Cottingham, 1996, p. 5).

As mentioned REFLECT also takes up the PRA principles and combined with Freire's initiative means there can be no pre-packaged solution to literacy, it must start from within, with what the community knows in terms of their experiences. If community knowledge is to be articulated, which can be difficult, visualisation is a powerful way of encouraging participation in that process (Chambers, 1996). PRA techniques thus are used to bring about "collective construction of maps, matrices, calendars and diagrams" (Archer & Cottingham, 1996, p.7). Participants are encouraged to communicate about and act upon the problems to learn, which is called a process of 'conscientization', which refers to the way in which individuals develop critical consciousness and become the 'subject' in their own lives. Also, they learn to recognise the words of the problems they identify through a whole-word method.

Reportedly the approach interweaves literacy with empowerment and seeks to create motivation, confidence, and self-esteem, particularly for women. As noted,

participants do not typically use textbooks, they generate their own according to their particular needs. For instance, natural resources might be mapped out onto the ground with sticks, stones, or other locally available materials; a discussion about water shortage might chart rainfall over time. Discussions also provide the words, in context, for literacy learning (Attwood et al. 2004, 145; Kanyesigye, 1998, p.2).

The REFLECT Method's starting point is social development and the identification and analysis of needs, and then moves onto how literacy can assist with that development. Hence, it differs from traditional literacy approaches which start with literacy as a means of involving people in development processes and activities (McCaffery, et al., 2007, p.40). The method aims to promote active dialogue and empowerment which seldom happens with primer-based approaches. As learners construct their own materials, they take ownership of the issues that come up and are more likely to be moved to take local action, and change their behaviour or their attitudes. For example, women often lose control of banked money, land deeds, and inheritances, because they cannot read and write, and because others consider them to be inferior, even stupid (Kanyasigye 1998). When participatory methods are used, and women's existing knowledge is respected and drawn upon, practical and strategic gender needs can be addressed in the same intervention so they are able to retain land, for example. Women can pool their practical knowledge on agriculture, health, and income generation in order to carry out their daily tasks more effectively, and at the same time acquire the practical skills and 'status' of a literate person. This opens doors to community decision-making (for example, where standing for positions of power has been reserved for men on the grounds that they are literate) and to a more respected position in the family, whereby women's opinion is sought.

#### ***3.3.4 The Community Literacy Approach (CLA)***

The Community Literacy Approach (CLA) is a relatively new approach and is a small scale project compared to REFLECT. This approach was developed by the Community Literacy Project Nepal (CLPN) whose aim was to explore and promote the social uses of literacy positioning the learning of literacy in the community at all levels (Chitrakar & Hodge, 1999). The CLA is similar to the REFLECT Method as it is participatory and process orientated. The participants are viewed as subjects who

are embedded in their own specific historical and material contexts and these approaches acknowledge context-specific multiple literacies. Participants learn self-identified literacy skills through pursuing pre-existing tasks or interests. Usually, the learning process and activities take place in special classes, together with good coaching and mentoring as well as support provided during the learning application (Chitrakar & Maddox, 2008, p.198).

Different to REFLECT, CLA draws on the community for support. CLAs have been developed in some countries to address the needs of both men and women, literate and non-literate, for literacy support. Such programmes may consist of more diverse provisions than conventional literacy classes for instance, training for traditional scribes or extending community enterprises, such as newspapers, to reach a wider and more diverse audience (Chitrakar & Maddox, 2008). For example, the Community Literacy Project in Nepal worked with forest user groups to translate and simplify key texts in order to widen access to official documents for marginalised groups (Maddox, 2001).

The CLA attempts to meet the needs of adult learners in a quality, non-threatening and supportive environment. This recognises that lower level students often progress at a slower pace and may need more support from others and that individual tutoring or small groups can meet their needs (Roger, 1999). Therefore, this approach uses methods, curriculum, materials and program models that respond to the needs of individual adult students. Also key to community-based literacy instruction is a flexible and participatory approach. In this case learner needs are considered at every step and learners are meaningfully involved in agency operations. Different levels of instruction are offered and a variety of instructional strategies are used. Self-esteem and self-confidence are recognised as being integral to student success and agencies value all student goals equally: independence, employment and further training.

In summary, it can be seen that the four international approaches such as the NLS, the RLA, the REFLECT Method and the CLA have various differences and similarities regarding strategies to literacy and gender empowerment. The section to follow looks to get to the bottom of the education for empowerment debate, in doing so key ideas about empowerment will be introduced, specifically Rowlands (1995,

1997) and Kabeer (1999), who draw on Freire's (1970) concept of empowerment, conscientization.

### **3.4 Education as empowerment**

#### ***3.4.1 Formal education and schooling***

During the late 1980s, the issue of empowerment first surfaced in the works of Caroline Moser, Gita Sen and Caren Grown due to concerns development was failing women. Develop for women would not occur until women were empowered to "challenge patriarchy and global inequality" (Parpart, 2008, p.356). This thinking informed the gender and development paradigm (GAD) whereby the focus was to empower women (Jaquette & Staudt, 2006). Gender and development aims to address women's subordination, through analysing the power relationships between men and women. Therefore, the empowerment approach is believed to be able meet these aims, through the achievement of "greater equality by challenging and changing [women's] engendered positions" (Stewart-Withers, 2007, p.34). Education is argued to be one way to empower women.

Yet education can be both a source of power and disempowerment. For example, education as a source of power enables greater access to knowledge and opportunities, which then enables people access to greater resources and the ability to make meaningful choices about decisions that affect their lives. Education can also be disempowering, for example, when the poor and marginalised sections of society are prevented from accessing educational opportunities which are freely accessed by the wealthy and elite (Stromquist, 2006, p.149). Similarly, education delivered through the formal education system can be disempowering for certain groups of people, for instance women, because formal schooling provides "knowledge that reinforces rather than challenges the gendered nature of society" (Stromquist, 2006, p. 149). Rather than being a source of power for women to challenge and transform inequality within the social, economic and political structures which govern society, education provides yet another path for women's traditional gender roles to be reinforced. Schools in particular can act to maintain the existing system and norms (Smith, 2000).

Smith's (2000) review of the literature on gender and schooling concludes continuous reinforcement of existing gender relationships, through text materials and student-teacher interaction occurs. For example, male voices and male activities are privileged in the classroom, even in highly industrialised, democratic countries such as the United States and Australia (Smith, 2000). Myra Sadker and David Sadker (1994) found that teachers in United States are more likely to use their expertise to praise, question and correct boys, which in turn helps boys to sharpen their ideas, refine their thinking, gain confidence and obtain higher achievements (Sadker, 1994). But when a girl is passed over by a teacher, in order to elicit the ideas and opinions of boys, she is conditioned to be silent and to defer to boys and men. Girls receive 'gendered education' in schools. It appears that the gendering they experience at home is reinforced in schools, where girls are encouraged to be quiet, passive and dependent (Staudt, 1998).

In critique of this Rothchild (2006) has argued that the education space or schooling is the most appropriate place to begin the transformation and empowerment of girls in developing countries. Not only can schooling equip girls with the necessary intellectual development, it can also stimulate a liberating and enabling viewpoint of the world (Rothchild, 2006). As Kathleen Staudt states,

Education should do much more than reinforce a gender-constructed social order. It should provide an atmosphere for intellectual development. Comprehensive education has great potential to facilitate awareness of structures of domination and subordination .....Education in and outside the classroom provides the space in which to develop solidarity relations for active involvement in community and social change (1998, p.84).

Moreover, non-formal education is argued to provide a space for adults to not only gain the education they have been denied within the formal schooling system, but it also provides an opportunity to reflect on their experiences of disadvantage and therefore, such programmes can provide an important enabling environment for women to challenge oppressive social, economic, and political structure and to achieve equality with men. This has also been emphasised by Stromquist (2002) in 'Education as a means for empowering women'. Learning how to break the barriers

of inequity and educating girls is argued to be a powerful lever for their empowerment, in addition to reducing poverty. However, before we unpack this issue further, I will look to conceptualise empowerment in more detail.

### **3.5 Empowerment as power and process**

The meaning of empowerment varies greatly (Afshar, 1998; Momsen, 2010; Parpart, 2008). The concept of empowerment is applied in various ways in gender and development practice depending on how the power component within empowerment is interpreted. In order to understand empowerment, it is essential to understand first the various meanings of power. When thinking about power, Rowlands (1997) talks about 'Power over', 'Power to', 'Power with', and 'Power within'.

To explain further, 'Power over' means power is wielded by an entity at another's expense. Therefore, if women aim to gain power in this way it is at men's expense, which then creates an obstacle to women's empowerment since this can create opposition from men (Rowlands, 1997). Power can also be understood as a process this refers to 'power to,' 'power with' and 'power within' (Rowlands, 1997). 'Power to' is productive and it does not use domination to create new possibilities; 'power with' is collective power, where a group is greater than individuals at overcoming challenges and 'power within' describes inner strength and self-respect, self-worth or a sense of hope, which can lead to respect for others or from others (Rowlands, 1997, p. 13).

At times power has not been understood to be fluid, context specific, layered and multifaceted, which has led to a misunderstanding of the term 'empowerment' (Rowland, 1997; Leslie, 1999). Therefore, both Rowland and Leslie have argued that the way in which power is defined will determine how empowerment in the development process is understood, in terms of the way it is facilitated or implemented. As previously pointed out, it is a common misconception to believe that in empowering one person you are taking power from another, that is, power is finite. It is also a misconception to believe that the empowerment process is about radical change. If empowerment is only seen as radical change, then women's less

radical attempts are made light of, undervalued or not counted as being significant (Scheyvens, 1998).

Influential people at the forefront of development theory are specific in what types of power are appropriate for empowerment. Naila Kabeer sees 'power within' as having the most transformative potential, as self-understanding can inspire women to challenge gender inequality. Both Kabeer and Sriwatha Batliwala emphasise 'power with', through participatory grassroots action (Parpart, 2008). Smith, Troutner and Hunefeldt (2004) see empowerment as 'power to' through 'power with', which is produced by 'power within.' Rowlands sees 'power within' as an important first step since:

people who are systematically denied power and influence in society internalise the messages they receive about what they are supposed to be like, and they may come to believe the messages to be true... [so] empowerment must involve undoing negative social constructions, so that people come to see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and influence decisions (1997, p.11,14).

Process is an important aspect of empowerment. "Empowerment is both a process and an outcome or sometimes the process is the outcomes" (Parpart, 2008, p. 358), therefore, empowerment covers several dimensions and settings. The process and outcomes are both important since the outcome measures can focus the mind and encourage new thinking. However fixation on the outcomes may jeopardise the very process of how to come up with an appropriate way for empowering women (Parpart, 1998, p. 358). Through the process of empowerment women are said to benefit from new avenues of knowledge that have previously been denied to them and which open up new opportunities to improve their lives and further assist them to make informal decisions (Batiwala, 1994, p.132). Two generally cited contributors to the field of women's empowerment in the development arena include Rowland and Kabeer, their thinking is combined with Freire's (1970) concept of empowerment for the purpose of this research.

## 3.6 Conceptualising empowerment

### 3.6.1 Rowland's concept of empowerment

Rowland's concept of empowerment understands empowerment as having three dimensions (Rowlands, 1995, p. 103). The dimensions of empowerment are *personal*, as reflected by 'power within', also *relational*, which involves developing the ability to affect and make decisions within a relationship and *collective*, as described in 'power with' (Rowlands, 1995, 1997). Also, Rowland's concept of empowerment acknowledges the social constructions that are thought to be inherent in particular groups of people (Rowlands, 1995, p. 103). Each dimension of empowerment supports the others. Empowerment in the personal dimension is the process that people start to internalised by developing their personal identity, capacity, ability and belief in self (Rowlands, 1995, p. 103), 'power within'. The second dimension of empowerment in Rowland's is relational which is reflected in 'power within' also. This is about the close relationships which look to strengthen the capacity and bargaining ability to determine the boundaries of personal relationships (Rowlands, 1995). This describes inner strength and self-respect, self-worth or a sense of hope which can lead to respect for and from others (Rowlands, 1997, p. 13). Finally, empowerment in the collective dimension reflected in 'power with' which is where a group in having collective power is greater than the individual at overcoming challenges (Rowlands, 1997, p. 13). The settings in which the various dimensions of empowerment occur are "in the public arena, at work and at home, and in the world of cultural production" (Smith, Troutner and Hunefeldt, 2004, p.2).

Rowland's (1995, 1997) does not make a specific link to women literacy, however, Rowland's idea about the personal dimension, can be drawn upon and applied to some examples from grassroots women's educational programme that emerged in 1986 in the parish of Macuelizo, Honduras (Afshar, 1998). For example, gaining literacy skills is about developing one's self, building one's capacity, self-assurance and self-confidence which is about the personal. In regards to Rowland's idea about the collective dimension, for instance, this is achieved by teaching literacy, attendance at literacy classes and using appropriate themes for words and dialogue that have relevance to everyday life and issues, and providing women opportunity to

discuss issues collectively. This may give a group the collective strength to deal with sensitive issues that occur outside of literacy for example reproductive health, or domestic violence.

### ***3.6.2 Kabeer's concept of empowerment***

Kabeer, another lead empowerment author puts emphasise on the notion that empowerment is inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment which refers to the “process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). This is thus linked to the process of change, which is argued to be the key to empowerment. Those people who exercise a great deal of choice in their lives may be very powerful, however they are not always empowered in the sense that they were never disempowered in the first place (Kabeer, 1999).

People who have been denied the ability make strategic life choices are considered to be disempowered. This strategic life choice refers to those choices that make or enable people to live their live in a way that is meaningful to them, this may include choices about family planning and livelihoods (Kabeer, 1999. p. 437). Additionally, Oxaal and Baden (1997) argued that from an empowerment perspective is not only the ability to make choices, but it require also the ability “to shape what choices are on offer” (1997, p. 3).

Therefore, Kabeer argues a multidimensional model of empowerment which understands power in relation to the ability to exercise choice in three inter-related dimensions: resources (pre-condition), agency (process) and achievements (outcomes) (1999, p.437), and it refer to the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. In this sense, ‘resources’ not only includes material resources, but also human and social resources that enhance the ability to exercise choice making. The second dimension of power relates to ‘agency’ refers to “the ability to define one's goals and act upon them” reflected by ‘power within’ (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438). However, Kabeer highlights that agency in relation to power has both positive (power to) and negative (power over) significances. In terms of the third dimension ‘achievements’ in the measurement of empowerment is understood as embodying meaningful choice (1999, p.439).

While it is easy to argue what empowerment ought to be, it is much harder to determine whether it has occurred. Thus there are measurement problems when try to capturing social change through resource, agency and achievements. There is an assumption that:

we can somehow predict the nature and direction that change is going to assume. In actual fact, human agency is indeterminate and hence unpredictable in a way that is antithetical to requirements of measurement (Kabeer, 1999, p. 462).

However, certain indicators have proved popular with those seeking to measure agency. The most common measurement of agency is that of decision-making agency (Kabeer, 1999, p. 445). This measure is frequently used in efforts to conceptualise and measure power, decision making is measured in relation to women's role in decision-making which focuses on certain areas and issues including household consumption and the purchase of food, children's health and education, or work outside domestic area (1999, p.446).

It is essential though to pay attention when using evidence of decision-making as an indicator of empowerment especially decisions about strategic life choices, or where women have previously been denied a choice. This will tell us more about their empowerment than those decisions made within the pre-existing gender-defined roles and responsibilities (Kabeer, 1999, p.447).

Similar to Rowlands (1995, 1997), Kabeer (1999) does not make reference to literacy, however if we pay attention to the Kabeer's arguments about the three inter-related dimensions (resources, agency and achievements) we can make assumptions. For instance, from the ideas of Kabeer about resources we can assume that through literacy women gain literacy skills that can help them in their lives in a way they are able to have greater access to resource and opportunities which in turn impacts on women's ability to exercise significances choices. Women in economically poor households are driven to look outside the domestic sphere in search of employment to meet their economic needs, which can give them some degree of independence and a role in the decision making process. The same can be said for literacy they can

then access others resources such as knowledge and information which may equip them with knowhow to challenge inequality and oppression that they may face.

In terms of Kabeer's ideas about agency or 'power within', through literacy women can access information and knowledge which may make them feel more confident about expressing their views or ideas, they may gained confidence to speak out so they have gained 'power within', to define their own goals. In regards to the third idea of Kabeer's about achievements, we can assume that the process of learning literacy itself and the knowledge and information that people gain is a great achievement. The decision to participate in literacy courses may embodied meaningful choices, particularly for those who have been deprived of an education in the past and are then faced with further obstacles surrounding participation in adult literacy programmes, this point is especially relevant to rural women.

### ***3.6.3 Freire's concept of empowerment***

Freire's (1970) concept of empowerment called 'conscientization', refers to the way in which individuals develop critical consciousness and become 'subject' in their own lives. In other words, it is the process by which individuals become aware of and understand their environment and the dominant socio-economic structures, such as patriarchy, which can serve to oppress and marginalise them. Freire's (1970) concept of empowerment 'conscientization' who Rowlands (1995, 1997) and Kabeer (1999) both draw on, focuses on individuals by analysing their lives through the development of a 'critical consciousness', which looks at both personal conditions and the social environment. Rowlands and Kabeer view the concept of conscientization as a significant step towards understanding how the structures of power operate to marginalise and oppress people, particularly women. Kabeer defines critical consciousness as:

the process by which people move from a position of unquestioning acceptance of the social order to a critical perspective on it ... as these internalised assumptions are challenged "proportions of culture begin to lose their 'naturalised' character, revealing the underlying arbitrariness of the given social order (1999, p. 441).

Critical consciousness is thus dependent on alternatives being available at the discursive level, whereby people are able to envision alternatives and assess the choices before them. For women, conscientization involves the realisation that many of their problems result from gender-based discrimination due to patriarchal systems, which deny women the same opportunities as men perpetuating inequality between men and women (Longwe, 1998, p.21).

### **3.7 Chapter summary**

In summary, this chapter started with a literature review on various approaches to adult literacy and includes ‘New Literacy Studies’(NLS), the ‘Real Literacies Approach’ (RLA), the ‘REFLECT’ Method, and the ‘Community Literacy Approach’(CLA). In doing so a useful analysis of the contribution of adult literacy to people lives is noted particularly women’s empowerment. This review questions the automatic assumption that education or literacy acquisition automatically results in women’s empowerment. While excluding women from educational opportunities reinforces their disadvantage, education in itself was not enough to overcome the economic and social barriers perpetuating gender inequality therefore greater effort and attention is required if we are to understand how existing literacy practices and programmes can genuinely benefit women’s lives and lead to empowerment. I thus argue that importance of unpacking understandings of empowerment in relation to literacy. Hence the chapter considered understandings of empowerment notably contributions by Rowlands (1995, 1997), and Kabeer (1999), combined with Freire’s (1970), thinking about these in relation to literacy.

The following chapter now goes on to highlight the situation of women in Timor-Leste in relation to status, disempowerment and education.

## **Chapter Four: The Timor-Leste Context: Positioning Women and Education**

### **4.1 Introduction**

There have been three periods that have shaped Timor-Leste, the periods are Portuguese colonial rule (1515–1975), the Indonesian administration (1975–1999), and the transition to independence (1999–2001). Colonial rule, ensuing underdevelopment, and the occupation period which was thwart with conflict and little development are important as these have had a major effect on the development of women. These periods have also impacted hugely the education system hence the United Nations International Development Agencies and the Government of Timor-Leste now face various challenges as they look to develop not only a formal education system but seek to educate a nation, especially women. However before these three periods are discussed an overview of Timor-Leste's patriarchal system and implications for women will be given.

### **4.2 *Timor-Leste's patriarchal and patrilineal systems: Implications for women***

Timorese culture is strongly patriarchal, thus customary beliefs and traditional laws and practice which favour men over women continue to be a major constraint, posing a clear challenge to women on a daily basis resulting in much gender inequality and disempowerment. Women experience negative impacts in terms of their allocation of labour, employment opportunities and income earning opportunities, and access health care and education (Narciso & Henrique, 2010, p.53). In terms of education parents keep girls out of school for economic and social reasons. As a consequence, women lag behind men in educational attainment and literacy.

Women do not have the right to access and/or own land and therefore, it is difficult for poor women to gain access to financial services, which require financial assets as collateral (Honohan, 2008). In addition, participating in a financial/ banking

institution requires a certain level of literacy and basic understanding of financial transaction, this poses many difficulties for Timorese women's particularly rural women who are illiterate. A lack of mobility prevents women from having access to information including informal information networks.

From a very young age it is dictate that men are the leaders and decision-makers in their families and communities women should support their husbands and families as obedient wives and mothers (Narciso & Henrique, 2010, p.54). The majority of the population lives in the rural areas, where the sexual division of labour means women undertake the heavy 'triple roles' (Moser, 1989) of ensuring the domestic needs of the family are met (reproductive role), in addition to working in the fields (productive role) and undertaking ceremonial roles, which includes performing ritual dances and welcoming guests (community role) (Criticalis & Scott, 2005, p.23).

#### *4.2.2 Family and Marriage*

Marriage is an important aspect of kinship and it is a means to ensure that strategic alliances between families and communities are maintained. Traditional marriage is arranged by families and women are married at a young age, although this tradition has begun to change, particularly in the urban centres. In this case, it could be argued that this tradition surrounding marriage has significant consequences for the way in which a girl or woman is educated in that they are not, as noted below. The tradition of *barlake* is common amongst both the urban and rural population. *Barlake* is the bride price paid by the groom, which consists of 'masculine' gifts, such as money, livestock (horses, buffalo or goats) and jewellery. The bride's family, in turn, provides to the groom's family 'feminine' gifts, such as *tais* (traditionally cloth), livestock (pig and chicken), rice and woven baskets (Criticalis & Scott, 2005, p.20). Since the husband's family has paid a bride 'price', women are at times seen as a piece of property belonging to the husband's family and this can have a negative impact on women's participation in decision-making within the family, including control over her own body in terms of family planning. After marriage, it is expected that the woman has to leave her family and ancestral village, in order to join her husband's village and it is argued that there is little point in educating girls, since the

knowledge and skills that they learn and acquire will not stay within their family and community (Criticalis & Scott, 2005, p.20). This now leads us into the next section where the three periods that have shaped Timor today will be discussed.

### **4.3 The Portuguese colonial period: Implications for education and women**

The Portuguese education system for the development of the indigenous people of Timor-Leste followed the same system typical of colonial administration, which viewed indigenous populations as inferior. The Portuguese arrived with missionaries, Roman Catholics, and the Church introduced Catholicism to the region, and became the key provider of education. The asset value of religious education was immediately recognised by the colonial administration and the Church as a means to convert local elites to Christianity. They also set about creating a ruling class to align with the Portuguese authority and did this by teaching the children with *liurai* Portuguese history, language and culture (Millo & Barnett, 2004, p. 725, Nicolai, 2004, p. 92). Education also spread social values. Conversely, the Western-style educational policies while creating elites also caused dissatisfaction with colonial rule (Hill, 2002, p.1; Nicolai, 2004, p.30).

In the early days of the Portuguese period, the Church established a number of *colegios* using the Portuguese curriculum. Subsequently, the Church also played a key role in founding and operating kindergartens, primary schools, seminaries, and a teacher-training institution. The language of instruction was Portuguese, other languages were prohibited, and anything about Timorese history, culture and geography, including the information about the state neighbours in Asia were excluded from the school curriculum (Millo & Barnett, 2004, p.725). Encouraging Portuguese culture and Catholic values instead emphasised Timor-Leste links to the Portuguese empire (Nicolai, 2004, p. 42). Eventually, the Portuguese language became mainly utilised by the elite because it was restricted to them, thus the Church decided to use Tetun Praca which was the incorporation of some Portuguese words into the indigenous languages so as to preach the gospel to the people (Millo & Barnett, 2004, p.725). Tetun thus became the lingua Franca in Timor-Leste.

Mass education was not a policy objective of Portuguese colonial rule, the main purpose was to train an administrative elite. The Portuguese administration was centred in the capital Dili, and located here were the educational institutions that were limited to the privileged Portuguese or ‘misticos’. This meant most of the population in the rural areas remained illiterate (Nicolai, 2004, p.42). The first elite school was established during the Governorship of Afonso de Castro (1859-1863). The aim was to provide primary education ‘civilising’ the indigenous leaders and creating a class loyal to the Portuguese (Hill, 2002, p.9; Millo & Barnett, 2004).

In 1902, the Canossians Sister of Charity opened a boarding school called ‘coleigo’ for girls with the objective of preparing girls for their domestic roles as wives, mothers and homemaker. They equipped these girls with the skills such as sewing and cleaning (Cristalst & Scott, 2005, p.24). Only a few women received education during this period and these women tended to be daughters of the elite or their parents worked for government or had a good relationship with the church. For those girls who did not belong to these categories, the only opportunity for them to gain access to education was to become a nun (Cristalst & Scott, 2005, p.24). In this regards, the educational approach applied to women throughout the colonial times was driven by a focus on women’s domestic roles, that is, they tended to be educated for ‘domesticity’. In other words, and as noted in Chapter 2, ‘Education for Reproductive’ (Wild, 2007, p. 47). This was very much the case for the following 30 years.

Come the 1950s the Church and the colonial administration stated to put a lot more effort into expanding the education system in Timor-Leste. Looking to address the high rate of drop out particularly in the rural areas, and also the repetition rate was high. Those students who had not completed their primary basic education encountered great difficulty in passing the entry exams into secondary school (Hill, 2002, p. 37). This increased interest continued until 1965, and more secondary schools started opening in Dili with the duration of schooling at the secondary level increasing to four years. An opportunity for Timorese students to continue their study at tertiary level qualification in Portugal was also made available. This was the first generation of Timor people to really benefit from the education system, they would go on to be the creators of FRETILIN.

In early 1970s more scholarship opportunities were offered and Timorese elites were able to pursue tertiary education in Portugal (Hill, 2002, p. 65; Millo & Barnett, 2004, p.726). This opportunity was mainly available for men however three female local elites, who were members of FRETILIN's committee central, were also part of the contingent. They gained knowledge about politics and feminism which when they returned they sought to apply to the Timor-Leste situation (Cristalíst & Scott, 2005, p.28).

During their study in Lisbon, Portugal, the FRETILIN's leader was inspired by Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educationalist ideology and gained ideas to educate Timorese people through his anti-illiteracy campaign which was to focus on decolonising the learning process (Hill, 2002). At the same time, it would be emphasised as part of the adult literacy programme, the importance of preparing and mobilising the rural population so as to be ready for and participate in the transition to independence. A literacy campaign was implemented throughout the districts by a women's organisation called OPMT (established by FRETILINs). The language of instruction was Tetun rather than Portuguese as this was the language of the rural people. These literacy projects were implemented with help from Vicente Sahe after his finished his study in Lisbon through his Institute called 'The Sahe Liberation Institute' (Hill, 2002, p. xiii).

Despite the efforts to expand the education system the illiteracy rate in Timor-Leste remained high, projected to be 90% at the end of the Portuguese colonial era in 1975 (Saldanha, 1994). In 1990 census amongst adults the male illiteracy rate was 72% and 89% for females and was even higher among older generations (WB, 2004). This intergenerational gap in literacy reflects the lack of emphasis on mass education during the Portuguese time (World Bank, 2004).

In summary, during the colonial period there was little concern for the education of the people. Where education occurred the purpose was to spread 'social value' this was promoted by the Portuguese Catholic Missionaries. As describe by Millo and Barnett (2004) religious education in Portuguese Timor was the "main tool for building a submissive local elite" (Millo & Barnett, 2004, p.5). Any local elite men that were educated by the Portuguese were often sent to Portugal to complete their education, and they took on the leadership of Timor-Leste both at the end of

Portuguese rule and after Independence (Drysdale, 2007, p.44-45). Women had little access to education and Portuguese colonial rule also emphasised women's domestic role as a mother, wives and as submissive to men, women hardly worked outside the domestic sphere (Cristalis & Scott, 2005, p.23-24). This condition has also been emphasised by the strong patriarchal aspects and patrilineal system of Timorese culture, customary beliefs and traditional laws and practice, which favours men over women and which offers limited opportunity for girls or women to gain access to education.

#### **4.4 Indonesia occupation: Implications for education and women**

Ten days after the FRETILIN unilaterally declared independence in Timor-Leste, Indonesia launched a vicious invasion. The illegal Indonesian occupation of Timor was characterised by a programme of brutal military repression, through indiscriminate killing and “a policy of rape, torture, disappearing, and looting” (Franks, 1996, p.159). The brutality of the Indonesia occupation over the years however increased Timorese rebellion. The resistance against Indonesia occupation had three prongs, the international diplomatic front, the internal clandestine movement and the Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor (FALINTIL) (Hohe, 2002, p. 578). FRETILIN and its armed-wing FALINTIL pursued and continued the guerrilla against the Indonesia army during Indonesian occupation. Women gave huge support to the FALINTIL. It was reported that “women made up more than 60% of the clandestine movement” (Cristalis & Scott, 2005, p.39).

During this period, women suffered huge physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Women in the rural areas, particularly those who were unmarried, young and/or their husbands were FALINTIL were enormously vulnerable to enforced slavery and prostitution, rape, sexual violence, and ‘marriage’ to Indonesia soldiers. To avoid forced ‘marriage’ to Indonesian soldiers’ young women and girls married at a young age and some women joined religious orders to avoid rape or abduction (Cristalis & Scott, 2005, p. 38).

During the Indonesia occupation, the FRETILIN continued to implement literacy programmes and run schools while hiding in the mountains and forests regardless of Indonesian attacks (Nicolai, 2004, p.43). In a formal sense, the Indonesian education system replaced the Portuguese system, and Bahasa Indonesian immediately became the language of instruction. Primary education become obligatory, thus primary school teachers from Indonesia were brought in to teach the new compulsory primary curriculum (WB, 2004).

Indonesia pursued a policy of integration and assimilation by improving infrastructure and significantly expanding the education system to reach both urban and rural populations (Nicolai, 2004, p.43). As a result under Indonesia occupation, between 1976 and 1998, enrolments in primary education increased from 10,000 to 165,000 students (World Bank, 2002, p.55). By the mid-1990s, primary education was available in most villages. Over the same period, junior secondary enrolments grew from 315 to 32,000 students, and senior secondary education enrolments grew from 64 to 14,600 students (World Bank, 2004). While a greater numbers of scholarships were provided by Indonesia to young Timorese to pursue tertiary education in Indonesia, for the majority who were awarded these scholarships it was because their father's worked for the Indonesian government or were those who wanted to be with Indonesia and were of the 'APODETI' party. Most were awarded to males.

Indonesia was following and introducing the concept of 'Education For All'. As mentioned, through this policy the number of schools increased and education became rapidly available. This was about showing the outside world that Timor was integrating with Indonesia, despite the fact the quality of education was very low and there was a lack of availability of teachers long-term (Hill, 2007, p. 224; Nicolai, 2004, p.44). Formal education was emphasised by Indonesia and was used as an apparatus of domination in order to facilitate submissiveness (Millo & Barnett, 2004, p. 727). As well as to 'Indonesianise' and teach Indonesian culture, language and ideology to the young Timorese people, it was as mentioned a strategy to facilitate integration (Millo & Barnett, 2004, p.727; Nicolai, 2004, p.44).

Hill notes that ideas about gender were hidden in the Indonesian style education system; it was seen as not necessary and not suitable to promote girls education, also

discrimination between the rural and urban areas occurred. Rural areas were considered to be second class compared to urban areas (Hill, 2007, p.226). Therefore, many parents kept their children at home because they were not aware about the importance of education for their children, and what was on offer was inadequate.

During the occupation however the Indonesian also implemented non-formal literacy programme as part of the EFA policy for the illiterate adult population, the programme was called ‘Program Pemberantasan Buta Huruf’ which means Literacy Programme. This programme was implemented in 13 districts. Simultaneously, OPMT continued to provide support and non-formal literacy training for women (Cristalis & Scott, 2005, p.30). However, substantial challenges and obstacles were faced by OPMT during their efforts to implement their literacy programme. OPMT was single-out by the Indonesia forces for imprisonment, brutal assaults, sexual violence and rape due to their relationship with FRETILIN and its armed-wing Forças Armadas de Libertacao Nacional de Timor-Leste (FALINTIL), to which many of OPMT’s members were related (Cristalis & Scott, 2005, p.35).

Indonesia’s occupation also had a significant impact on the gendered roles of women. Women were primarily responsible for their family and their community on a daily basis. During this period many women became armed and supported men and “carried out a broad range of clandestine political and armed assistance activities” (Cristalis & Scott, 2005, p. 30). They gave significant assistance to the resistance through the distribution of food, clothing and medicine, in addition to communicating with guerrilla fighters or the FALINTIL. This assistance and support continued until Timor-Leste separated from Indonesia in 1999.

#### **4.5 Post-Conflict reconstruction: Implications for education and women**

Indonesia departed violently after the 1999 referendum. Timor-Leste then had to build their administrative infrastructure and all public and private services from nearly nothing. During the post-conflict situation and reconstruction period, international development agencies and NGOs set up programmes in the area of

education, in order to reach out to children, who had been displaced from their homes during the violence that followed the referendum (many of whom were living in IDP and refugee camps). In order to respond to this issue, UNICEF set up an emergency education programme for Timorese refugees (across the border in West Timor) that focused on school-aged children and offered a psychosocial support component. However, large numbers of children were not enrolled due to the psychosocial issues related to the crisis, and language difficulties. In addition, youth also missed out, since the preference was given to primary school age children (Nicolai, 2004, p. 65-66).

During the reconstruction period, UNICEF served as the de facto body of the Ministry of Education, in the absence of a National Education Ministry, in addition to being under the UNTAET's (United Nations Transitional Administration to East Timor) mission on transition. This organisation, worked with the transitional government, the East Timor Transitional Administration (ETTA), who then governed Timor-Leste until independence on May 20, 2002. The immediate response was to re-establish the formal school system at the primary and secondary school level. However, very few secondary schools opened, due to the fact that school buildings had been destroyed and there was a lack of teachers. The majority of Indonesians in Timor returned to Indonesia in 1999, including nearly 90% of secondary school teachers and 20% of primary school teachers. Schools were officially reopened in October 2000; UNTIL resumed classes in November 2000 (World Bank, 2004).

In summary, the resumption of schooling in 2001, following the virtual decimation of educational infrastructure due to violence after the 1999 referendum, demonstrates the popular demand for basic education in the country. Nearly 90% of the country's schools were destroyed and a large numbers of Indonesian teachers departed from the country (UNICEF, 2008) yet by 2001 some schooling resumed. As enrolment efforts mainly concentrated on children of primary school age, education options for adolescent in refugee camps were almost non-existent. Responding to this issue, some offers were made to Timorese students by International NGOs, in relation to programmes for youth (Nicolai, 2004). In order to explore and gain a deeper understanding about the education context, in 2001 Oxfam Great Britain (GB) and

UNICEF undertook research into the educational needs of rural Timorese. The research sought to identify and understand the situation of the population living in rural areas; previously most of the development efforts had been urban focused. The results and findings of this research highlighted the strong desire of rural adults to access literacy classes in Tetum (Nicolai, 2004, p.92).

During this period there were many challenges to improving the quality of education in both formal and non-formal school system. Poor quality or inadequate inputs usually contributed to high repetition and dropout rates. The roots of the problem were argued to be too few hours of instruction, poor quality teachers, inadequate preparation for the language of instruction, lack of textbooks and learning materials, high student-teacher ratios in primary schools, high student and teacher absenteeism, and the poor condition of physical infrastructure (World Bank, 2004).

#### **4.6 Non-formal education in Timor-Leste**

During the above-mentioned periods the emphasis was not only on formal education, but also non-formal education. Over time many literacy approaches have been applied in Timor-Leste these include the 'REFLECT' method, Solidarity Literacy, Real Literacy Approach (RLA), Community Literacy Approach (CLA) and CUBA literacy, all applied by government, international agencies, and international and local NGOs as they sought to implement a literacy programme, somewhat chaotically, across Timor-Leste.

For example, in 2000, after the Indonesian occupation ended Timor-Leste and Brazil started a partnership involving a literacy programme called 'Solidarity in Literacy' (Alfabetização Solidária in Portuguese), which continued for approximately one and a half years. From 2001 until 2005, Oxfam GB also conducted a literacy programme in several districts, based on the 'REFLECT' methodology. The National Directorate of Non-Formal Education, which is part of the Ministry of Education was also organising a national literacy programme that includes regular capacity building sessions and teacher training (Boon, 2006) using the CLA.

In 2002, the Government of Timor-Leste began working with international agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGO), in order to increase women's role and participation in the public domain, through adult education literacy. UNICEF and Oxfam GB were the most significant donors together with other NGOs, such as Timor Aid, Xanana Gusmão Foundation, OPMT (East Timorese Women's Organisation), Cristal Foundation, Fundasaun ba Futuru Comunidade, BELUN, and other international NGOs (Boon, 2006). The majority of these literacy courses took place in Tetum or Portuguese languages, but local languages are also used for instruction and explanations.

In August 2002 the national literacy programme began using the CLA. This was a partnership programme between UNICEF and Ministry of Education Division of Non-Formal Education (also known as the Recurrent Education and Life Long Learning, which is now the official name for the non-formal education division). After implementing the programme, with support from UNICEF, Dr. Roshan Chitrakar undertook a review of this literacy programme. The findings of this review identified that the programme had not changed people's literacy practices, or their livelihoods. This meant that the participants and graduates of the programme had not found their literacy skills to be useful for their practical daily lives (Chitrakar, 2003). Chitrakar also highlighted the need for more culturally sensitive literacy programme, which considered the participants' socio-economic context, language and literacy across themes, in order to better understand women's participation in the literacy programme.

Currently, the Non-formal Education Division/Recurrent Education and Life Long Learning of the Ministry of Education is in partnership with UNICEF, UNDP, ILO and the Brazilian Missions and it has jointly developed a basic adult literacy curriculum, known in Tetun as Hakat ba Oin and Iha Dalan (and in Portuguese as Passo em Frente and No Caminho). These two basic adult literacy courses aim to develop the basic literacy skills of adults and youth, enabling them to continue onto the primary equivalency course (Boon, 2011). The Hakat ba Oin basic literacy curriculum is organised into four levels, each with its own book. The first level deals with letters, the second level with phrase, the third level with sentences, and the fourth level with paragraphs. After students have completed Hakat ba Oin, they can

progress to Iha Dalan, which is a set of relevant topics that includes health, history, geography, mathematics and agriculture (Boon, 2006). UNICEF offers provision and support for both curriculum materials (Hakat ba Oin and Iha Dalan), through their support of the Non-formal Education Division/Recurrent Education and Life Long Learning of the Ministry of Education, which enables all students to have their own copy of the materials required for classes and homework, thus removing an important barrier to student participation. The Hakat ba Oin and Iha Dalan literacy programme adopted the RLA approach and methods, also using curriculum materials which were relevant and attractive to the Timorese thus helping to engage students or literacy participants more.

Furthermore, the three-month literacy programme in Tetum, *Los Hau Bele* ('Yes I can'), is part of a national literacy campaign that was rolled out by Timor-Leste's Ministry of Education (with Cuban government assistance) in 2007, after a pilot phase in 2006. By mid-2009, the programme was available in every village, in all municipalities in Oecusse district and on Atauro Island. The programme consists of 65 lessons on DVDs, a learner manual and a teacher guide, based on the Cuban adult literacy method *Yo, Sí Puedo* (Boon, 2011). In the first years of the campaign, a version in Brazilian Portuguese, *Sim Eu Posso*, was used. However, this posed problems for many learners and teachers who could not master the Portuguese language (Boon, 2011). Therefore, in 2007, the development of the Tetum version began and it became available in autumn 2008 and by mid-2009 it was being used in almost all sites (Boon, 2011). However, this approach is argued to fulfil the political commitment of the government only, because people only ended up knowing basic literacy regarding reading and writing, so as to for example sign their identity card instead of using a finger print and in terms of voting for their right.

Regardless of all this input there does not seem to be a coordinated approach or a clear understanding about which approach is best. Moreover it is argued there will be major challenges in the years to come, due to a lack of good Timor-Leste-based literacy and numeracy primers for learners and manuals for teachers, also the need to improve the educational level of the literacy teachers, provision of more resources for teachers' salaries, the provision of long-term training facilities and a need to counter the effect of a lack of qualified teacher trainers. Unfortunately, very few of

the literacy programmes mentioned have been thoroughly evaluated and consequently, there is scarce available knowledge on the effectiveness of the various programmes or their results especially with respects to women's participation and/or empowerment (Boon, 2006).

#### **4.7 Concluding points**

In summary, this chapter shows that the majority of Timorese women have been excluded from educational opportunities, opportunities that were available emphasised women's gendered roles. This issue of empowerment is fundamental because many women suffered both physically and sexually during Indonesian rule and even though the Indonesian are gone women continue to face ongoing challenges in all aspects of life. Thus while many rural adult women who have missed out on formal schooling and are illiterate, while on one hand have benefited from non-formal adult literacy programmes, there is still much to be done and to understand. The issue is not so much about making literacy programmes available as there have been a number, but understanding who can and can't participate and why. It is about understanding further whether these literacy program actually do provide the means for women to overcome their disadvantage and hence provide an enabling environment for women's empowerment.

The next chapter will discuss and consider the international approaches to adult literacy which have been introduced in Chapter 3, reflecting upon the effectiveness and appropriateness of these approaches in terms of the Timor-Leste situation, with respects to women's position and condition and the goal of empowerment. As part of this critical reflection I will draw on debates by Rowlands (1995, 1997) and Kabeer (1999), who all draw on Freire's (1970) concept of empowerment, conscientization.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter draws together the information in earlier chapters and looks to consider the ways in which women may experience empowerment as a result of literacy programmes. Four literacy approaches dominate the international literacy scene, these are New Literacy Studies (NLS), Real Literacies Approaches (RLA), the REFLECT Method and the Community Literacy Approach (CLA). The strengths and limitations of these internationally recognised approaches to literacy and gender are examined in relation to empowerment. In addition, consideration is given to which approaches are appropriate and effective in terms of women's empowerment in Timor-Leste.

For clarity the two research questions are noted below:

**Question 1:** Through application of an empowerment lens what are the strengths and limitations of international approaches to literacy and gender empowerment?

**Question 2:** Which of these approaches is appropriate and effective in terms of women's empowerment in Timor-Leste?

### **5.2 New Literacy Studies (NLS)**

#### ***5.2.1 Strengths***

There are several strengths within New Literacy Studies (NLS) as noted in the literature. The main strength is that it understands literacy to be an ideological model and a part of social practice, which suggests a more culturally sensitive viewpoint since literacy practices differ from person to person within groups and institutions (Street, 2003; Sato, 2004). NLS analyses the power relations affecting and reflected in women's literacy intervention, by "exploring how women 'take hold' of literacy within the classroom and their daily lives" (Robinson-Pant, 2004b, p.26). Hence there is no single literacy (Scribner & Cole, 1988) as assumed in traditional

approaches, there exist very different literacies. The shift in thinking from an autonomous model to an ideological model is particularly relevant to research that critically explores the relationship between women's literacy and health attitude behaviour change within their daily lives. Furthermore, women's everyday literacy practices are acknowledged within the classroom, and this is considered the key to understanding how literacy interventions might contribute to improving women's lives.

Another key strength is that literacy is not understood as merely a set of separate skills, but instead there is recognition of the social practices that are shaped by embedded power relations where they are found. It also implies that literacy is not something to master, rather it is part of lifelong learning (Sato, 2004, p.77). Street (2003) acknowledges the value of the social practice approach but observes "the paradigm sometimes veers too far in a reactive direction, exaggerating the power of local contexts to set or reveal the forms and meanings that literacy takes" (Street, 2003, p.84).

However if literacy or literacies exist(s) in their context at least it recognises that illiterate people are still engaged in literate cultures and have managed anyway by using literacy strategies. That is, they have dealt with literacy situations in their own way. This includes asking literate friends and family members to do literacy tasks for them or using colours or shapes (Rogers, 1994, p.21; 1999). Thus, this challenges the dichotomy of the passive illiterate object in need of development and the active literate subjects of development as seen in traditional approaches.

NLS acknowledges that literacy users' positionalities, including religion, gender and language, produce effects on their literacy practices and that those practices are context specific (Sato, 2004, p.78). For instance, within a specific context, women performed most of their literacy work at home and thus reading literacy, as embedded in situated power relations, demonstrates that literacy practices are highly gendered and sometimes written literacies were neither valued nor recognised by the women themselves (Sato, 2004, p.78). In this context, literacy practices are not only influenced by gender. Moreover, various studies found that women's literacy

practices could be unnoticeable within their workplaces and unappreciated in their households, in addition to being connected with other influences, including patriarchal institutional power in for example religion, or language or culture (Sato, 2004, p.78). Viewing the gender issues involved within literacy programmes, through this NLS lens may offer a different and more culturally sensitive viewpoint than that derived from more traditional, 'external' perspectives (Street, 2004, p.66).

Lastly, NLS manifests itself as two of the other approaches: the REFLECT Method and the CLA. The REFLECT Method and the CLA share the theoretical foundation of NLS, however, it is important to note they look somewhat different in practice. These two approaches, the REFLECT Method and the CLA, will be discussed later

### ***5.2.2 Limitations***

NLS is weak in several respects. NLS does not explicitly acknowledge mutuality in knowledge production and doesn't engage with differences among heterogeneous groups of people for collective action. In this case, it fails to refer to critical engagement with multiple differences, or give consideration to power relations among heterogeneous groups of people (Sato, 2004). Failing to consider these points may restrict participants' subjectivities.

Another limitation is 'the limits of the local', or overemphasising the local. Brandt & Clinton (2002) claim that NLS has to be better ready to recognise to what extent literacy frequently originates from 'local' but is influenced by external conditions and is transported back and forth with both skill and meaning, which the largely emic perspective favoured by NLS may not notice (Brandt & Clinton, 2002, p.338). Furthermore, because of the local focus the harder it is to 'upscale' projects using this approach (Street, 2003, p.85).

The final limitation of NLS is the focus is often on women's literacy, rather than gender and literacy. One way to overcome this limitation is a need to change the way women's literacy is conceptualised. That is, there is a need to challenge the idea of the 'illiterate women' who has to be schooled in order to adopt better health

practices. Attention has to be turned to women (both literate and non-literate) and how they live, regardless of their literacy skills. In this case, the use of emerging theoretical concepts (including literacy practices and multiple literacies) has enabled researchers to explore literacy outside the classroom (Robinson-Pant, 2004b, p.27), by asking questions such as *‘How does literacy in the classroom relate to women’s and men’s everyday literacy practices?’* and *‘What does empowerment mean to individuals within this literacy class?’*

### **5.3 Real Literacies Approach (RLA)**

#### ***5.3.1 Strengths***

The Real Literacies Approach (RLA) starts with a strengths-based approach and it views participants positively by looking at what they are already doing in their lives. Furthermore, it enhances people’s ability to carry out their daily tasks more effectively (Sato, 2004), which is unlike traditional adult literacy approaches. They believe that in order to engage more with the learners and the learning materials, the agencies encourage the learners to bring their own real literacy tasks and texts into the classroom, where they can engage through reading and writing (Roger, 1999). Classes usually comprise of small discussion groups, who share their experience among themselves, together with facilitators who discuss with the participants’ what they want to learn and do. Because this approach does not begin with a deficit model it demonstrates a positive attitude towards the participants, by focusing on what they are already doing in their lives (Rogers, 1999, p. 222). They argue that “the most effective way for adults to learn literacy skills is from their own daily literacy experiences” (Rogers, 1999, p. 223). They appreciate that adults can learn more successfully from their daily lived experiences, which is in contrast to traditional literacy programmes and the single use of literacy primers.

An additional strength of this approach is the materials used for learning, which are collected from existing, real materials in the local community (eg. films, T-Shirts, election posters, religious materials and newspapers with real written and printed text), which are further developed in class. The learning process is comparatively

straightforward, although it requires special qualities from the facilitator. As an example, in Timor-Leste, the 'Hakat ba Oin' (One Step Ahead) and 'Iha Dalan' (On the Way) literacy programmes used an approach that is promoted by the RLA. The Hakat ba Oin and Iha Dalan literacy materials, which are used in the classroom, have been well developed by facilitators and students, with support from technical expertise through participatory workshops. Literacy materials, photos/pictures draw on people's and the communities daily lived experiences, in order to enhance student involvement and engage students more. These materials are well conceived and they have been well-tested (personal experience). Similarly, in other developing countries, the collection and identification of real literacy learning materials is often performed by learners and facilitators. As an example, women learners in Uganda brought health materials (a health census) into the classroom so that the learners could help each other to fill in the forms in a cooperative way (Rogers, 1999, p.226).

A final strength, when using this approach to literacy, it is argued to sometimes empower women and this aligns with Rowlands' (1995) concept of empowerment. For example, there was an RLA programme initially implemented in the 1980s within an urban slum in Jaipur, by the State Resource Centre of Rajasthan. This women's literacy group had pointed out that they were bored by the literacy primer, even though the literacy materials had been developed with women's interests in mind (Rogers, 1999, p.226). This women's literacy group stated they wanted to read not from text books, but from information about a film that was currently showing in the town. Several of them attended the cinema regularly and the group discussion that followed related to what the film was about. They were able to discuss confidently because the learners' familiarity with the context, including the words on the notice board, the street name of the cinema, the names of the film actors or stars, the dates of showings and prices of tickets, interested the literacy learners and they were able to learn to read the information quickly with a greater level of success. This confidence also built up their relationships with others. In the end, they took the text home and showed it to others who could read notices (Rogers, 1999, p. 226). This RLA programme opened up many possibilities to build different activities, including class numbers and seat prices which link to numeracy, gender role discussion and related issues, as shown in the film and also a group visited the cinema to watch the film (Rogers, 1999, p. 226).

### ***5.3.2 Limitations***

There are also several limitations to the RLA, and I note these drawing on scholarly research and evaluations conducted in developing countries, in addition to my own experience when supporting Non-Formal Education offered by the Ministry of Education in the area of an adult literacy programme in Timor-Leste.

One of the key limitations of RLA is there are not enough real literacy materials available (Rogers, 1999, p.229). While participants are encouraged to find real literacy many of them have difficulty finding any real task (in their own reality of life) with which to engage. This point is also emphasised by Robinson (1994) who observes there is a lack of real literacy texts in some circumstances (Robinson, 1994). Hence, a community is seen in the same way as the so-called 'illiterates', who suffer from a shortage of literacy materials and therefore, they need to be brought in from outside. Based on my experiences in Timor-Leste, there are definitely insufficient real literacy materials in rural community areas because there are no newspapers and/or films. However, Rogers (1999) states that a survey exposed that many more real literacy materials exist, they are just not recognised. Regardless, there is also an issue about the texts, many texts are found to be too difficult for literacy learning.

Furthermore, one of the issues that occurs in many developing countries, including Timor-Leste, is there is a need for different literacies for different groups, such as literacy for farmers, women's literacy, developmental literacy, youth functional skill literacy and commercial literacy. To put participants who may have different literacies requirements, through a common literacy programme using generalised (even though real) literacy primers is not effective or best practice in terms of learning (Rogers, 1999, p.228).

Another key limitation is that it is not cost effective to gather huge amounts of learning materials which then have to be printed within communities. From my experience in Timor-Leste, the national literacy programme campaign, through 'Hakat ba Oin' (One Step Ahead) and the 'Iha Dalan' (On the Way) programme, which promotes RLA combined with traditional approaches, spends a great deal on printing costs including teacher manuals and student books (Hakat ba Oin comprises

one teacher manual and four student books; Iha Dalan has one teacher manual and more than 13 student books in Tetun and Portuguese). The cost of printing for literacy programmes is approximately USD 70,000 – 100,000 per year, supported by UNICEF. The Ministry of Education in Timor-Leste has limited funds. Formal schooling tends to receive the greater share of financial resources, whilst informal education (through which the majority of adult literacy programmes are delivered) receives a minimal share (McCaffery et al., 2007, p.14). This brings to our attention the sustainability of the national literacy programme in Timor-Leste. That is given the cost of printing these materials and the focus on formal education by the government this brings into question the sustainability of the adult literacy programme.

The final limitation of RLA is that because it has a strong relationship with traditional approaches to literacy and uses literacy primers such as text books (teacher's guide and student books) and takes a specific type of teaching methodology (one-way teaching), there is little space for discussing women's issues (e.g. reproductive health and HIVAIDS), made also harder due to men being present. Since most of the facilitators/tutors are men and most of the teaching and learning takes place in a classroom it is not so beneficial to women, who in most instances may not even be able to attend.

## **5.4 REFLECT Method**

### ***5.4.1 Strengths***

One of the key strengths of the REFLECT method is that its starting point is social development and the identification and analysis of needs. It then moves on to how literacy can assist with that development. Drawing on PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) techniques and in focussing on the social context this approach uses techniques such as such as village maps, or seasonal calendars for learning. The PRA methods are used in combination with Freirean methodology, in order to investigate learners' context specific daily issues. Thus through discussion, participants learn through their own real lives and problems and thus they work out steps, to address challenges and bring about change (Sato, 2004). The words that come out of the

discussions of the learners are used as the literacy materials. During this process the learners develop their own learning materials and the learning practices taught are argued to be better contextualised than those within traditional approaches (Sato, 2004; Attwood et al. 2004).

REFLECT is also quite clear that literacy itself does not empower and that the process of broader learning is fundamental to empowerment. The REFLECT process seeks to inspire participants to think further than literacy. At the same time, participants have to pay close attention to the meaningful use of literacy and how (within this process) they can access their fundamental rights, as well as possibilities of power (Archer, 2002).

A REFLECT strength as noted above, is that it draws on Freirean theory, and also NLS and GAD programme techniques, which borrow from PRA. Using a gender and development framework emphasises the gender dimension of social processes through active participation by means of PRA techniques. Therefore, gender equality is argued to be central to all aspects of REFLECT, since it is important for social transformation. The REFLECT Method is argued to explore and analyse the causes of power inequalities, oppression and conflict in the reality of people's/women's lives (Sato, 2004).

A final strength of REFLECT is not having a literacy primer, textbooks or pre-printed materials, other than a facilitators' manual. The learners thus develop their own learning materials through each literacy cycle, because REFLECT claims to begin with "the participants' existing knowledge" (Archer & Cottingham, 1996, p. 14) and not the ideas/texts based on the knowledge of literacy programme developers (Sato, 2004). In addition, the participants are active agents, who are capable of producing knowledge that also puts an emphasis on the gender dimensions of social processes (Sato, 2004, p.79). This seems to be more effective in terms of financial resources. For instance, it has been acknowledged in Uganda and Bangladesh that the REFLECT method is considered to be cost-effective compared to other approaches (Archer & Cottingham, 1997, p. 201).

### ***5.4.2 Limitations***

The main limitation of the REFLECT method is in regards to its literacy component. Attwood et al. (2004) argues that literacy has definitely come into play in PRA implementation techniques, however, only as a side-effect of the learning and empowerment process, rather than as a central learning process (Attwood et al. 2004, p.156). Furthermore, they argue that in its application, PRA seeks to promote empowerment via dialogue, discussion, communication and negotiation, as a significant function of the REFLECT circle, rather than the promotion of literacy (Attwood et al. 2004).

The REFLECT method is also weak because it appears to create a donor-orientated literacy-learning environment under the name of participation and empowerment (Sato, 2004). As there are no literacy primers in a REFLECT learning setting, using externally structured and facilitated PRA method to draws on the participants' knowledge for the purpose of literacy, may mean participants might be permitted to generate knowledge only within the discourse of the external facilitator (Escobar, 1995; Rogers, 1997).

Another limitation is that this method tends to ignore participants other differences, such as caste, class and religion and it deliberately directs the learner to engage in issues that are predominantly related to a Western construction of gender. This method is similar to the traditional approach and it may require participants to confront issues in their own lives (for which they have a marginal interest) on terms that are not their own. Thus, consciousness-raising on gender issues, through active participation by means of PRA methods, may take place at the expense of ignoring non-gender issues, for instance the participants may remain silent on issues that they feel to be more important (Sato, 2004, p.79). Finally, REFLECT is also very dependent on the skill of the facilitators to handle the learning situation and therefore special qualities are required from facilitators, which mean that intensive facilitator training is also required.

## **5.5 Community Literacy Approach (CLA)**

### **5.5.1 Strengths**

There are three main strengths noted with CLA. Firstly, it aims to explore and promote the social uses of literacy at the community level, rather than just learning literacy (Chitrakar & Hodge, 1999), thus it responds “directly to the need of the community in some way” (Williams, 2000, p.8). In this case, the approach helps learners or participants with their needs and interests. Therefore, this approach’s starting point is similar to that of RLA. It starts with the participants' daily literacy tasks and uses those tasks as tools for learning specific literacy skills. Literacy materials brought from the participants' daily lives are considered to be more relevant and their mastery of them is more likely to make a significant difference in their lives (Hodge & Hudson, 2000; Rogers, 1999; Williams, 2000). This approach recognises that “the most effective way for adults to learn literacy skills is from their own daily literacy experience” (Rogers, 1999, p. 223). This approach seems to have better outcomes whereby learners are able to apply their new skills in their daily lives. Furthermore, this approach seems to have very low ‘drop-out’ rates (Chitrakar & Maddox, 2008, p.202).

Further strengths are CLA promotes greater access to both oral and written information for all people, especially less privileged individuals within local communities, by taking (non-literate) people's oral traditions into consideration. CLA also helps learners or students to develop technical and programming skills that they may need, such as building up a community radio, designing, making/improving an existing community wall newspaper, to make it easier to read, particularly for people who have variety of literacy levels (Sen, 2000).

The CLA is similar to REFLECT, as it is also participatory and process orientated. The participants are viewed as subjects who are embedded in their own specific historical and material contexts and these approaches acknowledge context-specific multiple literacies. However it is said to also engage with learners on their own terms and in the context of their own lives in a manner not equalled by REFLECT due to be so locally focused (Sato, 2004). Participants learn self-identified literacy skills through pursuing pre-existing tasks or interests. Usually, the learning process and activities take place in special classes, together with good coaching and mentoring,

and support is provided during the learning application (Chitrakar & Maddox, 2008, p.198). Since there is a more participatory learning process within this approach, the participants gain the confidence to discuss issues in their daily lives. Most evaluations and reviews mention that literacy classes are empowering for women. As a result, they increase their self-confidence and their attitudes change through their participation in literacy programmes (World Bank, 2003).

In order for learners to fast track their learning, the learning materials collected from the participants' daily lives are considered to be more relevant and they are further developed within the programme. These materials provide opportunities for non-literate learners to quickly learn and use literacy and numeracy in their daily lives. For example the Nepal Community Literacy Project tailor-made their materials by focusing on literacy learning that had a direct application to the learners' daily lives (Chitrakar & Maddox, 2008, p. 198). For instance, the vocabulary for vegetable production was associated with the names of vegetables, numeracy, record keeping, weighing and measuring. These materials (especially the vocabulary used) placed emphasis on people's sustained use and application of literacy, unlike literacy primers that focus on narrative text and development messages. In community literacy projects, materials also focus on basic literacy tasks and numeracy. In terms of the activities, there is more focus on the local context, including local languages also (Chitrakar & Maddox, 2008).

A final strength of the CLA is knowledge of the socio-cultural model of literacy, particularly in the Nepal case, as this community literacy project, had been well-informed by ethnographic studies of literacy and socio-linguistics (Chitrakar & Maddox, 2008). This means that these approaches view literacy as a varied and social practice that is embedded in the local situation, practices and organisations (Collins & Blot, 2003; Street, 1993). Through this type of literacy programme, provision can be made for public space and opportunities for debate and discussion on issues relating to local situations and the meaning of literacy can also offer a practical mechanism to support people to learn and apply literacy within their own reality of a lived situation (Chitrakar & Maddox, 2008).

### *5.5.2 Limitations*

The CLA fails to consider power relationships among heterogeneous groups of people, such as class, race and gender. This approach does not propose that participants strategically engage with each other's differences, although it does recognise differences among the participants' literacy tasks and interests (Sato, 2004), due to the power differences between learners and facilitators. Sato argues that "the researchers and trainers themselves are part of power relations, thus, their or our positionalities mutually affect each other's knowledge production" (Sato, 2004, p.81).

In order to foster and strengthen existing mutual relationships among group members (including instructors) and based on the Third World feminist perspective, it is necessary to examine power differences and actively engage with them, in order to collectively transform society. This viewpoint suggests that knowledge production is a mutual labour between the 'knowers' and the 'knowns' and that everyone contributes to the processes. Without this critical engagement with power differences, it is not possible to embrace a "collective sense of sweet solidarity" (Hooks, 1994, p. 67 as cited in Sato, 2004), in the name of 'empowerment' or 'development' that may re/produce and consolidate hegemonic power relations (Sato, 2004, p. 82). According to Third World feminist approaches, a solidarity developed through critical engagement with internal power differences is required, if further collective praxis is to bring about continuous transformation.

Another limitation is that this approach has a strong emphasis on how literacy is learned and used in both democratic and pragmatic instances, in order to localise people understanding (Collins & Blot, 2003). As result, a community literacy project might not be successful, due to being challenged. For example, in Nepal, this localised approach has been challenged due to the idea that general education is the answer because it addresses national development goals and works towards nation building (Robinson-Plant, 2001; Rogers, 1999). Most community literacy projects while trying to localise their delivery and empower local communities, end up being strongly challenged by those trying to enforce status quo (Chitrakar & Maddox, 2008, p.192).

A final limitation to the CLA is that both literacy and numeracy learning activities were frequently embedded in the broader context of social practices, which were not seen as promoting ‘literacy’. For instance, the wall newspaper was created in order to make it easier for the learners to read, however while “there was a heavy literacy and literacy learning content, the participants did not view the activity as being primarily one of ‘literacy’ learning” (Chitrakar & Maddox, 2008, p.203).

## Summary

*Table 1: International approaches to literacy* below provides a summary of traditional, NLS, RLA, REFLECT Method and CLA, noting key tenets regarding literacy and gender empowerment

<b>Table 1. International approaches to literacy</b>	
Traditional Literacy Approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top down approach</li> <li>• Uses primers developed from outside</li> <li>• Uses outside knowledge</li> <li>• Facilitator is the expert</li> <li>• Facilitators are often men</li> <li>• Men and women together</li> <li>• Teaching in the classroom</li> <li>• One way teaching, so no discussion</li> <li>• Short courses, 3 months long</li> <li>• Reading and writing</li> <li>• No focus on empowerment or gender or rights</li> <li>• Starts from a deficit model</li> </ul>
New Literacy Studies (NLS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top down approach</li> <li>• Uses primers developed from outside</li> <li>• Uses outside knowledge</li> <li>• Facilitator is the expert</li> <li>• Facilitators are often men</li> <li>• Women are key beneficiaries of the programme, occasionally men attend,</li> <li>• Occasionally beneficiaries are also seen as participants, as occasionally there is discussion on process of learning</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deals with women's issues not gender issues, even though some men may be present</li> <li>• Teaching occurs in a classroom</li> <li>• Focuses on practical gender needs, if it deals with strategic, this is by accident not purposeful</li> <li>• Courses are 3-6 months</li> <li>• Literacy is about reading and writing</li> <li>• It is assumed increased literacy automatically empowers women; literacy can improve the position of women in society</li> <li>• Often a focus on health literacy that is women's literacy and health attitude behavior change in daily life</li> <li>• Starts from deficit model, closest to the traditional approach</li> </ul>
The Real Literacies Approach (RLA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top down approach</li> <li>• Uses primers developed from outside, but in Timor-Leste also uses local primers e.g. participants develop own materials which they collect or they bring their own real literacy tasks and texts into the classroom for learning</li> <li>• Uses outside and local knowledge</li> <li>• Facilitator is the expert, however uses local people to develop the learning materials e.g. Adults can better learn from their daily lived experiences</li> <li>• Strengths based - Starts with a positive attitude towards the participants (what they are already doing)</li> <li>• Facilitators are often men</li> <li>• Both men and women attend, viewed to be participants, men's voice is more dominant</li> <li>• Tries to deal with gender issues, but the focus is more on practical gender needs</li> <li>• Teaching occurs mainly in the classroom</li> <li>• Courses are 6 months</li> <li>• Literacy is about reading and writing, after 3 month attempts to link to gender issues may occur, like HIV, health, human rights etc.</li> <li>• Focuses on general empowerment e.g. consciousness-raising, increasing self-confidence through literacy</li> <li>• Doesn't focus on gender empowerment, it is just assumed that increased literacy automatically also empowers women, doesn't look at the reasons why women are disempowerment to begin with, does not alter traditional roles and relationships</li> </ul>
The REFLECT Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bottom up approach</li> <li>• Uses local primers, e.g. participants develop own materials which they collect or they bring their own real literacy tasks and texts into the classroom for learning</li> <li>• Uses local knowledge</li> <li>• Facilitator seeks to work in partnership, requires facilitation expert, facilitator may have their own agenda linked to funder, facilitators are both men and women</li> <li>• Uses PRA techniques, uses local materials, e.g. stones, and uses drawings and matrices and maps</li> <li>• Learning occurs in the classroom and in the field</li> <li>• Participants are men and women but more women are</li> </ul>

	<p>targeted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starts from problems or issues as identified by the group, sees women as agents of change, seeks to address practical and strategic gender needs, starts with practical though</li> <li>• Through PRA seeks to promote empowerment via dialogue, discussion, communication and negotiation</li> <li>• Focuses on the development of a ‘critical consciousness’, which is a conviction that development from changed personal conditions and understanding the social environment will occur</li> <li>• Seeks to empower women and transform relations - the REFLECT process explores and analyses the causes of power inequalities, oppression and conflict in the reality of people’s lives.</li> <li>• Increases women knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence, which is a result of their new found literacy skills</li> <li>• Courses are 6 months, 1 year, or 2 years, this depends on the needs of the person</li> <li>• Offers also post literacy with emphasised on social training human rights, gender, livelihoods, income generation</li> <li>• Sometimes can focus so much on issues that literacy doesn’t occur, so literacy ends up being a secondary gain</li> </ul>
<p>The Community Literacy Approach (CLA)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bottom up approach</li> <li>• Very local, developed at the community level</li> <li>• Uses in total local languages, so very specific and not transferrable</li> <li>• Makes reference to culture but doesn’t critique it</li> <li>• Responds directly to the need of the community in some way, so various models, and learning materials e.g. agricultural or health literacy. Although doesn’t think about whose needs are privy</li> <li>• Different levels of instruction are offered and a variety of instructional strategies are used to capture needs</li> <li>• Participatory in approach, uses lots of discussion and dialogue, but doesn’t use PRA techniques, so the needs of the most marginalized might be missed</li> <li>• Seeks to undertake tasks such as simplify key texts in order to widen access to official documents for marginalised groups</li> <li>• Focuses on things like training for employment</li> <li>• Doesn’t address gender, assumes that literacy classes are empowering women</li> <li>• Assumes increasing women self-confidence will lead to empowerment and their attitudes will change through their participation in literacy programmes</li> <li>• Self-esteem and self-confidence are recognised as being integral to student success and agencies value all student goals equally: independence, employment and further training</li> </ul>

## **5.6 Which of these approaches is appropriate and effective to literacy and gender, in terms of women's empowerment in Timor-Leste**

Based on the discussion above, through application of an empowerment lens as discussed in Chapter Three, it can be argued that these approaches to literacy offer varying levels of empowerment for women. In the context of Timor-Leste the REFLECT method is considered to be the most appropriate and effective approach to literacy and gender in terms of women's empowerment because of its alignment with Freire's (1970) concept of empowerment, that is the concept of 'conscientization'. This refers to the way in which individuals develop critical consciousness and become the 'subject' of their own lives. In other words, it is the process by which individuals become aware of, and understand their environment and the dominant socio-economic structure such as patriarchy, which can serve to oppress and marginalise them. Similar to both Rowlands (1995, 1997) and Kabeer (1999) the focus is on individual empowerment whereby people analysis their lives through the development of a 'critical consciousness', which comes from understanding personal conditions and the social environment (Rowlands, 1995; Kabeer, 1999).

A useful example of this relates to the *collective* strength, as described in 'power with' (Rowlands, 1995, 1997) that occurs outside literacy, when the discussion of sensitive issues for example, reproductive health and domestic violence, occurs (Archer & Cottingham, 1997, p. 201). In Bangladesh, REFLECT circles showed progressive results on health awareness related to physical actions, particularly with the involvement of latrine-building and effective disposal waste. Similarly, in Uganda, a significant change in behaviour or attitudes was noted in relation to reproductive health, family planning and polygamy (Archer & Cottingham, 1997).

In Timor-Leste, particularly in the Venilale sub-district, one woman explained that via REFLECT women learned to support each other in their development. She said *'Initially the women were quick to put each other down, reinforcing an idea that as women in their positions they could not become literate and also should not put themselves forward at all'* (Trembath et al. 2010, p. 113), however this quickly changed to one of encouragement. By using the REFLECT method within their literacy programme and also through the use of social training, for example,

discussions in the literacy classes using the social relationship mapping method and the matrices and calendar method, the participants analytical skills were strengthened.

Some successful examples from developing countries regarding Rowlands' (1995) concept of empowerment through application of REFLECT literacy methods are the REFLECT pilot projects in El Salvador, Bangladesh and Uganda. In Uganda and Bangladesh, the REFLECT pilot is argued to have made positive impacts on gender roles and relationships. In Uganda, the participants and tutors stated that "*many men have taken on domestic roles, such as carrying the water and fetching fuel-wood, as previously perform by women*" (Archer & Cottingham, 1997, p. 201). The involvement of women in important household and community decisions has increased (Archer & Cottingham, 1997, p. 201).

In Bangladesh, women credited the programme with an increase in their involvement in decision-making at the domestic level (Archer & Cottingham, 1997, p. 201). There had been a change in the gender dynamics due to reinforcing the importance and the ability of females to be educated, in addition to showing that women can be successfully involved in life outside the home.

The REFLECT Method of including men has meant that men are more aware of gender issues. Through PRA both male and female have the opportunity to discuss a range of issues, from nutrition to income and expenditure, in open-ended but well-structured discussions rooted in their own experiences. There is no pressure to reach a pre-decided conclusion (Fiedrich, 2004, p.222). In this case, men can realise and recognise that they have to change (Cottingham et al. 1998, p. 31).

Another key strength of REFLECT in using PRA is the idea of achieving empowerment via dialogue, discussion, communication and negotiation. REFLECT recognises that the "practice of power at all levels in the process is essential for determining empowerment outcomes" (Cottingham et al. 1998, p. 28). Hence, the frequent use of PRA as a starting point for development action, and by using local knowledge it is argued to be empowering for people (Attwood et al. 2004).

It is argued that the more women and men discuss and have dialogue, the more they gain confidence to discuss and negotiate their problems within literacy learning, the

more they can personally grow. This is aligned with Rowlands' concept of empowerment in the *personal* dimension, which is the process whereby people begin to internalised things about themselves by developing their personal identity, capacity, ability and belief in self (Rowlands, 1995, p. 103). In other words, they have 'power within'.

To explain further, as noted by Trembath et al. (2010), the women in this REFLECT study were also able to see they were not less intellectually able than men. Prior women had attested to a sense of shame when they were not able to sign their name, which at time was reinforced by negative attitudes from others. Their increased confidence meant they were able to assist and facilitate their family members, especially their children, in relation to education. One women comment that, "... *I feel much lighter, because I can go to the school and sign for my children when the teachers send for us*" (Trembath et al. 2010, p.108). There is a humiliation that often accompanies being illiterate since illiteracy is often equated to being stupid and therefore, it can reinforce a common idea that women are less intellectually able than men.

This also relates to Kabeer's (1999) concept of empowerment that understands *achievements* as those outcomes that embody meaningful choices. In this case, women's participation in the literacy programme could be considered an example of the participants' expressing agency by making their own decision to attend the literacy programme, even though they had many obligations to perform and competing activities for their time. Women are defining their own goals and are also achieving their own outcomes. Participate in the literacy programme would open up opportunities that may have been previously denied to her.

REFLECT is argued to enabled the women to have control over decisions at the community level because of increased confidence. Trembath's research women had placed representing the local community at a significant distance from the circle that represented their own group, so REFLECT showed this, and then it showed how they could work on building confidence and increasing group unity; this was done through singing and dancing games which substantially helped to overcome any negative group dynamics. "The group is now far more cohesive and supportive of

each other's efforts, rather than seeking to undermine each other" (Trembath et al. 2010, p. 113).

In the future, (perhaps in 15 years time), hopefully there will be only one approach to literacy and gender in Timor-Leste, the REFLECT Method. According to various studies and evaluations, the most successful literacy and gender programmes have used the REFLECT Method but the programme is usually implemented by NGOs on a small-scale in rural areas. Questions to ask here are: *Would the REFLECT Method work in urban areas within a government programme? Would it work on a large scale or would the essential features of participation be lost? Would the Timor-Leste government have the capacity to implement this approach?*

## **5.7 Chapter conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed four approaches to literacy and gender and has sought to answer the two research questions:

**Question 1:** Through the application of an empowerment lens, what are the strengths and limitations of international approaches to literacy and gender empowerment?

**Question 2:** Which of these approaches is appropriate and effective in terms of women's empowerment in Timor-Leste?

RLA and CLA have a similar approach in terms of starting point in the process of learning and the collection of learning materials. However, these two approaches require the collection of an enormous volume of learning materials such as textbooks, literacy primers, pre-printed materials and facilitators' guides or manuals which is not seen to be cost effective. While the REFLECT Method supports learners to develop their own learning materials through each literacy cycle and only a facilitators' guide is produced and printed.

In terms of the learning process, the RLA as it is delivered in Timor-Leste still models the traditional approach to learning literacy, particularly in Timor-Leste,

while both REFLECT and CLA use a participatory process, The main difference between CLA and REFLECT is in the application of PRA, as REFLECT seeks to promote empowerment via dialogue, discussion, communication and negotiation. Moreover because the REFLECT Method quite clearly states that literacy itself does not empower, the REFLECT process thus inspires participants to think further than just literacy. At the same time, participants have to pay close attention to the meaningful use of literacy and how this process could enable them to access their fundamental rights, in addition to the possibilities of power (Archer, 2002). Thus the REFLECT method is considered to be the most appropriate and effective approach to adult literacy and gender in Timor-Leste. This approach should however be combined with other approaches (in particular the RLA), which is currently implemented nationwide in Timor-Leste, however in years to come this may change.

## **Chapter Six: Concluding points**

Five main points are made to conclude this research. Firstly, empowerment through education/literacy is important for the advancement of women and in terms of addressing gender inequality, however, it cannot be assumed that increasing literacy automatically leads to empowerment.

Secondly, in Timor-Leste the majority of women have been denied their educational opportunities during both the Portuguese Colonial period and the Indonesian illegal occupation, despite enormous effort from the OPMT who sought to promote an education-literacy programme. This has impacted on women's ability to participate as equals in daily life and in a meaningful way in development activities in their home and community. There is a humiliation that often accompanies being illiterate since illiteracy is often equated to being stupid and therefore, it can reinforce a common idea that women are less intellectually able than men. Low levels of literacy means women are often left out of the decision-making process at the family and community level.

Thirdly, since independence the Timor-Leste government has made a concerted effort to address the literacy gaps, noting the importance of providing non-formal adult literacy programmes for women and youth as an alternative way of gaining literacy skills. This is particularly important as Timor-Leste continues to rebuild its education services including infrastructure and human capital. However due to a socio-cultural framework which, for example, does not value women and their right to education, or the fact that for women in the rural environment daily life revolves around reproductive, unpaid productive, and community tasks related to their traditional gender defined roles and as such impacts on their ability to access educational programmes many women are not able to make the most of the opportunities on offer. This means that literacy programmes must do more than just address low levels of literacy they must also seek equip women so they are able to challenge the very systems and processes which disempower them.

Fourthly, through application of an empowerment lens, and in focusing specifically on debates by Rowlands (1995, 1997) and Kabeer (1999), who draw on Freire's (1970) concept of empowerment, conscientization, this report unpacked four

international approaches to adult literacy, these were NLS, RLA, the REFLECT method and CLA. The most common empowerment dimension experienced by women participating in adult literacy programmes using the REFLECT Method and RLA relate to the personal or psychological sphere, also referred to as 'power within' (Rowlands, 1995, 1997). With respects to Kabeer (1999) empowerment could be understood in relation to the achievement dimension. That is women's participation in the literacy programme could be considered an example of the participants' expressing agency by making their own decision to attend the literacy programme, even though they had many obligations to perform and competing activities for their time. Also, in terms of evidence of 'conscientization' or critical consciousness (Freire, 1970), whereby women become aware of their situation and environment, their rights, and the inequalities inherent in the social, economic and political structures that exist in society and so they seek to transform them.

Fifthly, the REFLECT Method is the most empowering and in terms of the Timor-Leste context it is the most appropriate and effective approach to address gender inequality. However, this approach can be combined with other approaches (in particular the RLA) which have been implemented nationwide in Timor-Leste.

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