Cuba’s Yo Si Puedo Literacy Method and Timor–Leste’s National Literacy Campaign

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Northern Coastline of Timor-Leste, East of Dili
Edited Highlights

Cuban advisers, VM & Adalfredo Sep 2006

Anti-Alkatiri graffiti, Dili 2006

FFDTL help out June 2007

PM & President open 1st class, Metiaut 28 June 2007
Class in Vatuboro, Liqueca, September 2007
Local context: legacy of ‘75

- “Timor is our country” – FRETILIN literacy campaign
- Literacy in the resistance
- Sahe Study Club
- Dai Popular
- “Education for self-determination”
‘Timor is Our Country’

Pages from 1975 FRETILIN Literacy manual.
National Campaign Model: Three Elements

- Socialisation & mobilisation – the Commission structure
- Initial classes – 65 one-hour lessons on DVD, 12 people/class, suco-based monitor, strong control
- Post-literacy phase – formal, non-formal, funcional literacy activities – a ‘culture of literacy’
### Illiteracy by District, 2004 Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Popn</th>
<th>Adults</th>
<th>Illiterate</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</table>
Ceremony to open 1st class in Dili 26 June 2007, attended by new President, FRETILIN Prime Minister and Cuban Ambassador

President Horta gave commitment that literacy campaign would continue, regardless of election result
Achievements 2007–2010

• Feb 2008 changeover of advisers; campaign was losing momentum
• April 2008 new team arrived (35), campaign began to recover
• By November 2008, classes running in all but 35 ‘sucos’
• 2009 Minister decided to pilot accelerated campaign in Atauro & Oecusse
• January 2010 classes running in 558 sites, and 45,285 people had graduated
Achievements

Secretariat meeting with VM

Training Ermera monitors

Coordinators training session

Class in progress in Liquica
Literacy class Bobonaro District November 2008
Cuban advisers

- Experts: High quality pedagogy & excellent control
- Very close to community
- Strong work ethic
- Stayed during crisis despite attacks & threats
- Very respectful of community staff and students
- Diverse – men, women, younger, older
- Involve Cuban doctors in program
Financials (1)

- Cuba provides methodology, expertise at no cost; & shares cost of DVD production
- Advisers receive an allowance to cover basic living costs, out of Timor-Leste Ministry of Education budget; & return travel to Cuba
- TL Ministry of Education pays cost of books, materials, equipment, transport
- TL Ministry pays for monitors and district and sub-district coordinators (US$85–$100/month)
- TL contribution
  - 2007 US$800,000
  - 2009 US$1.2m (approx)
- Cuban contribution – not specified
Financials (2)

- Cuban program costs significantly less than programs developed by UNICEF and other agencies
- Biggest difference is in ‘adviser’ cost. Average international adviser costs US$5000 – $12000 per month (Donors pay)
- Cuban advisers cost $750 – $1000 per month
- Because TL government pays, program does not depend on donors or international agencies
Issues and challenges (1)

- Poor understanding and commitment to post literacy phase of campaign
- No longer a National Commission or Secretariat
  - Too much Ministry of Education control
  - No involvement of other Ministries, NGOs etc
  - No development of Timorese expertise at national level
- Low participation by youth especially young men
- Low numbers of women monitors; and coordinators (1/65)
- Program being over-extended
  - New government wants classes in every ‘aldeia’, to eradicate illiteracy before 2012 election
  - Advisers and coordinators spread too thin
  - Insufficient monitors or budget
Issues and challenges (2)

- YSP Program not understood or supported by international community in Timor-Leste, including UN agencies (e.g. UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP, ILO)

- World Bank, US & its allies (including Australia) promoting more neoliberal ‘human capital’ education model; USAID study critical of YSP

- Low capacity inside Ministry of Education, nationally and at regional and local level
Post–Literacy

- Ministry has a UNICEF–funded literacy program and a primary school ‘Equivalence’ program in Portuguese and Tetum
- Some people thought students could go straight from YSP to ‘Equivalence’
- In one place (Atauro), UNICEF literacy program is being used successfully now for post literacy with YSP graduates
- But, the UNICEF–funded programs are not well coordinated & controlled like YSP
- RISK: If no co–ordinated post–literacy, YSP graduates will lose literacy, Cuban program will be blamed, and money will have been wasted
Conclusions

• Achievements of Cubans in Timor–Leste are outstanding and inspiring, and not matched by any other program anywhere in world

• YSP and Cuban School of Literacy deserve to be better known in English–speaking academic adult education and literacy field

• Question: Could a campaign based on the Cuban model be undertaken in Australia?