East Timor

LAND
East Timor or Timor-Leste is a country north-west of Australia. Rugged mountains run the length of the island and the southern coastal plain consists of swamps and river deltas. The rocky soil and low rainfall make farming difficult, often leading to food and water shortages in the dry season.

Regular droughts and heavy seasonal rains have resulted in erosion, soil loss and poor water-quality, which in turn threaten coral reefs and fisheries. Widespread use of slash and burn agriculture has led to deforestation and soil erosion.

PEOPLE
There are regionally distinct groups made up of people of Malay-Polynesian and Papuan background and also a small Chinese minority. Approximately 92 percent of the population are Catholic. Tetum and Portuguese are the official languages although Indonesian and English are the more common working languages.

HISTORY
The Portuguese started to trade with Timor in the early 16th century and colonised it mid-century. During World War II, the country was occupied by the Japanese. In 1975, East Timor declared independence from Portugal and nine days later was invaded and occupied by Indonesian forces. Over the next 25 years, the Timorese people opposed the occupation and 100,000 – 250,000 Timorese were killed.

In August 1999, a large majority of the people voted for independence from Indonesia in a UN-supervised referendum. However, between the referendum and the arrival of an Australian-led multinational peacekeeping force in late September 1999, militias loyal to Indonesia killed thousands of Timorese and pushed 300,000 into West Timor as refugees. The majority of the country’s infrastructure was destroyed.

On May 2002, East Timor was internationally recognised as an independent state.

ECONOMY
After the independence poll in 1999 most of East Timor’s economic infrastructure was destroyed. Today, international aid is helping East Timor rebuild and create a new economy.

Most people are subsistence farmers, and in some areas bartering is common. Industries are only beginning to develop, so most manufactured items are imported. This makes the cost of living high.

Major industries include coffee, rice, maize, logging, fisheries, spices and coconuts. Tourism has potential to develop but is limited by the lack of hotels, transport and other facilities. East Timor’s main trading partners are Australia and Portugal. In 2005, Australia and East Timor agreed to share revenues from offshore gas and oil fields in the Timor Sea.

This is a major source of income but will do little to directly create jobs for the unemployed.

LIVING CONDITIONS
The majority of the population live in small villages and grow their own food. Dili, the capital, and Baucau are the two major towns, and they are struggling with the issues of unemployment and rebuilding after the destruction which accompanied the vote for independence.

Villagers live in a variety of traditional housing made from bush materials. Food consists of what can be grown in gardens – rice and corn are the main staples, while chickens, sheep and pigs provide protein. People living near the sea also eat fish.

Malnutrition is a significant issue for nearly half the children. East Timor is suffering massive loss of their forests due to the use of fire wood as the main source of energy for cooking. Less than five percent of the population use gas or electricity.

Comparatively speaking...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>TIMOR-LESTE</th>
<th>AUSTRALIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>1.2 million</td>
<td>21.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban population (as % of total)</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>89.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNI per capita ($US PPP)</td>
<td>$3,303</td>
<td>$38,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population with access to an improved water source</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy rate</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population living below US$1.25 (PPP) a day</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under-5 mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth</td>
<td>62.1 years</td>
<td>81.9 years</td>
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For You To Do!

1. Watch Get Connected DVD Chapter 5. How does the history of East Timor continue to affect the people today?
2. Choose a country listed on p. 6-7 and write an information report on that country. Use this text as a model.
3. Complete the worksheet at worldvision.com.au/schoolorg resources

World Vision is working with communities to provide better quality and access to education.