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The World Bank's land of kiosks: Community driven development in Timor-Leste

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Abstract

The World Bank's Community Empowerment and Local Governance Project (CEP) was the key donor programme to assist with community reconstruction in a newly independent Timor-Leste. Commencing in 2000, the US\$18 million project provided funds to over 400 local development councils that had been newly created to meet their community's development needs. Rather than creating genuine participatory structures, tight deadlines to disburse project funds and bureaucratic project rules reduced the councils to little more than transmission lines to Bank-controlled dollars. By bypassing existing governance structures, including that of the fledgling government, the councils also bypassed sources of local legitimacy and technical knowledge, which resulted in community conflict, indifference, and poor project sustainability. The CEP's poorly administered microcredit scheme led to a proliferation of unviable kiosks—

underlining the folly of hastily attempting to construct a market economy on a deeply scarred subsistence economy.

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Notes

1. A nationwide consultation for Timor-Leste's National Development Plan organised over 1000 forums covering more than 38,000 Timorese citizens. They produced a 20-year national vision for the country, identifying education, health, and employment as the top priorities.
 2. Ben Fine argues forcefully that such concepts have been used by the Bretton Woods institutions to enable their brand of economics to 'colonise the social sciences' (Fine [2002](#):18–33; see also Harriss [2002](#)).
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Ben Moxham is a volunteer with Focus on the Global South, a research and advocacy organisation based in Bangkok, Thailand.



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