

**Yasinta Lujina Conceicao das Regras**  
Profile of a Young Timorese Feminist

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In general, JASS sees our role as *contributing* to change; we don't claim to *cause* it. But in certain moments, someone's life can be transformed by a timely intervention. And that seems to be the case for Yasinta, a young activist from Timor Leste.

A group of young women from Indonesia and Timor Leste were invited to the first [JASS movement-building institute in Southeast Asia](#) (in Bogor, Indonesia, June 2007). Here, they shared a common language – Indonesian – and a common commitment to social justice, but also the complicated history of their two countries, as colonized and colonizer.

At this point, Yasinta worked with a large social justice group, [La'o Hamutuk](#), and – as she stresses – had little knowledge of gender issues. At the end of the Bogor workshop, she commented, "it brought me new knowledge ... I am now able to understand more about women's movements and young feminists, about power relations, and about LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender]. The experiences shared by other participants about their work have motivated me to continue my struggle for personal change and to support my friends who have less information about this, and to do awareness-raising in my own organization."

Yasinta was born and grew up in Oecusse, the enclave of Timor Leste surrounded by Indonesia. She studied at the Social Welfare University in Bandung, Indonesia, and worked at Christian Children's Fund and Catholic Relief Services before joining La'o Hamutuk in August 2002. She speaks Tetum, Indonesian, Dawan and some English. As the La'o Hamutuk website noted, Yasinta's work there included monitoring bilateral assistance, research in agriculture, personnel, finance, and *Bulletin* coordination. After attending the first JASS workshop, Yasinta wrote an [article](#) about what she had learned, which was published in the La'o Hamutuk *Bulletin*.

Then, in January 5, 2009, Yasinta took up a new opportunity as Director of [Rede Feto Timor Leste](#). Rede Feto is built upon its constituency – 18 women's organizations from all over Timor Leste. It was established on March 10, 2000 during the first National Women Congress, with the mission of strengthening the organization and advocacy capacity of the member organizations to advance the status of women and their participation in the national development process.

Yasinta says, "I came to this position because I have become closely involved in the Timor Leste women's network. My previous organization didn't focus on women's issues, but since the JASS workshops, I have learned more and now my work at Rede Feto is to promote gender equality.

"I have learnt from our JASS friends' experiences that actually in Southeast Asia we have a similar patriarchal culture strongly rooted in our societies. It does not exist in my own country only. I am motivated to support my fellow women to combat this culture.

"What impresses me about the activities organized by JASS is the space available for us to tell each other the stories of the lives that we live as individuals, workers, society members, and so on. JASS is very important in supporting my personal life and my work. I never had space to share stories in my work or in other workshops. JASS gave me this rare opportunity.

"In Timor Leste, the number of young feminists is still small because information and opportunity are inadequate; moreover, most live in rural areas. Hence, I am so enthusiastic about focusing JASS activities on young feminists in rural areas. They are the potential for our movement."

In August and September, 2009, Yasinta was traveling in rural districts of her country, preparing women legislative candidates for suco elections, to elect chiefs and councils. [Suco describes a traditional administrative unit of governance, something like a local council, although often translated as "village."] IPSNEWS.net [reported](#) that "female participation in the last suco election, held at the end of 2004 and start of 2005, was poor. Only 7 of the 66 women who ran for the village chief's post won. And, 27 of the 2,228 for aldeia (sub-village chief) emerged victorious."

All at JASS look forward to hearing about Yasinta's experiences in trying to organize rural women to vote women into local government. Hers is an ongoing story and one we all celebrate.