

# **Megaprojects and National Development Models in Timor-Leste**

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Rapid change is coming to a few previously isolated rural regions of Timor-Leste following the government's decision to pursue megaprojects as a national development model. A decade after the nation's 2002 independence, the sudden availability of oil revenues enabled a national strategic development plan that envisioned dispersed megaprojects as revenue producers for the nation. The two areas primarily affected are Timor-Leste's south coast, where government programs are forging ahead with onshore facilities for an oil and gas industry, and the Oecusse-Ambeno enclave, which in 2013 was declared the site of a \$4.11 billion project with an as-yet-undefined focus for a Special Economic Zone. Public money is now disproportionately spent on infrastructure development in these previously remote regions, for projects with uncertain future trajectories. This talk discusses the causes and effects of this choice of national development strategy, drawing on long-term fieldwork in a location and political context of profound and unexpected change.

**Dr. Laura Meitzner Yoder** is a political ecologist. Her scholarship engages multiple dimensions of human-environment interaction: agricultural biodiversity, land and forest authorities and access, and how rural land policy affects smallholder farmers and forest dwellers who make their living in marginal conditions. Professional highlights include work with local universities and research institutes, NGOs, and international programs in post-conflict/disaster settings in Southeast Asia, especially in Indonesia (West Papua and Aceh) and Timor-Leste. She has taught in university-level environmental field programs in Bhutan, Thailand, Indonesia, and the United States. Currently at Wheaton College (Illinois), she is Director and John Stott Chair of the Human Needs & Global Resources Program, and Professor of Environmental Studies. Her background includes a Masters in International Agriculture and Rural Development (Cornell) and a Ph.D. in Forestry and Environmental Studies (Yale '05). Her dissertation examined land and forest authority in the Oecusse enclave of newly independent Timor-Leste, a region now barely recognizable due to the recent landscape transformations.

**Wednesday, February 27**

**12:00 Noon**

**Room 203, Luce Hall, 34 Hillhouse Avenue**