

### The crocodile that became Timor



I heard it said that there was once a crocodile who had lived for many hundreds of years in a swamp and whose great dream was to grow and reach a phenomenal size. But not only was he a small crocodile, he also lived in a very confined space. Only his dream was large.

A swamp, of course, is the worst possible place to live. Shallow, stagnant water, hemmed in by strange, ill-defined banks, and above all lacking in food to tempt a crocodile. For all these reasons, the crocodile was sick and tired of the swamp. But he had nowhere else to live.

Over the years - thousands of years it would seem - it was the crocodile's love of talking that

kept him going. Whenever he was awake, he would talk and talk... he would ask himself questions and then, as if he were somebody else, would answer them.

Even so, when you talk to yourself like this for centuries, you begin to run out of topics of conversation. Not only this, but the crocodile was also getting hungry, first because there weren't enough fish or other creatures in the swamp to provide him with suitable meals, and second because although they were tasty, tender animals to be caught, like goats, piglets and dogs, they all lived a long way off.

"I'm sick of living on so little, in a place like this!", he would exclaim in exasperation.

"Be patient, be patient...", replied his imaginary companion.

"But a crocodile can't live on patience!", he would grumble.

There is of course a limit to everything, including resistance to hunger. The crocodile's body grew weak and his spirits sank. He eyes became dull and he could hardly lift his head or open his mouth.

"I must get out of here and look for food further afield..."

With an effort he climbed the bank and made his way through the mud and across the sand. The sun was high in the sky, scorching the ground. There was no refuge anywhere. The crocodile became weaker and weaker until he remained where he was, roasting alive.

At that moment a lively young lad happened to pass by, humming to himself.



## Friendship School Project Stories from Timore-Leste

*Sheet 9*

"What's the matter, Crocodile? You're in a bad way! Have you broken your legs? Did something fall on you?"

"No, I haven't broken anything. I'm all in one piece. It's just that although I'm small, I can't carry my own body any more. I'm too weak even to find a way out of this sweltering heat."

The lad replied: "If that's all it is, I can help you."

And with that he went up to the crocodile, picked him up and carried him to the edge of the swamp.

What the lad failed to notice as he carried him, however, was that the crocodile had perked up considerably: his eyes brightened and he opened his mouth and ran his tongue round his saw-like teeth.

"This lad must be tastier than anything I've ever eaten," thought the crocodile, and imagined stunning the lad with a lash from his tail and then gobbling him up.

"Don't be so ungrateful," replied the other voice inside himself.

"But the need justifies the end."

"That may be, but remember it is also shameful to betray a friend. And this is the first friend you've ever had."

"So you expect me to do nothing and starve to death?"

"The lad rescued you when you needed him. Now, if you want to survive, it's up to you to look for food."

"That's true..."

So when the lad placed him on the wet ground, the crocodile smiled, rolled his eyes, shook his tail and said: "Thank you. You're the first friend I've ever had. I can't give you anything in return, but if you never been further than this swamp we see all around us, and would like one day to travel abroad, to cross the sea, come and see me..."

"I'd like that very much, because it's my dream to see what lies out there across the sea."

"Dream? Did you say dream? I too have a dream," replied the crocodile.

They went their separate ways, the lad little suspecting that the crocodile had been tempted to eat him. Which was just as well.

Time passed, and one day the lad returned. He hardly recognised the crocodile: his burns has disappeared and he looked plump and well fed.

"Listen, Crocodile, my dream hasn't gone away. I can't stand it anymore."



## Friendship School Project Stories from Timore-Leste

*Sheet 9*

"A promise is a promise. I've been finding so much food that I'd almost forgotten my dream. You did well to come and remind me of it, Lad. Do you want to set off right now, across the sea?"

"That's the only thing I want, Crocodile."

"Then me too. Let's be off."

They were both delighted with the arrangement. The lad settled himself on the crocodile's back, as if in a canoe, and they set off out to sea.

It was all so big and so beautiful! What astonished them most was the open space, the size of the vista that stretched away before and above them, endlessly. Day and night, night and day, they never rested. They saw islands big and small, with trees and mountains and clouds. They could not say which was more beautiful, the days or the nights, the islands or the stars. They went on and on, always following the sun, until the crocodile finally grew tired.

"Listen, lad. I can't go on. My dream is over."

"Mine will never be over..."

The lad was still speaking when the crocodile suddenly grew and grew on size until, still keeping its original shape, he turned into an island covered with hills, woods and rivers.

And that is why Timor is the shape of a crocodile.

*Taken from Fernando Sylvan's Cantolenda Maubere.*