



SUCCESS STORY

Public Speaking, Speaking Out

Programs targeting one topic often enhance women's lives in other ways as well



[Photo: I. Ximenes, USAID/East Timor]

Women from Dato village in Liquiça district gain new confidence for public speaking. When women feel free to express themselves, democracy, freedom, and development efforts are improved.

USAID works with community groups and other partners to support East Timor's political activities, grow democratic values, and develop skills necessary for advocacy on community issues. It also encourages direct interaction among citizens, local government institutions, and elected representatives.

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Training sessions designed to help women express their opinions in public—and private—proved particularly empowering for Sabina da Silva. Following a three-day session on public speaking in Baucau, da Silva articulated her position clearly.

"In the house," she said, "the husband always beats the wife because he says he paid for her so he can hit her when she doesn't do what he says. From this training, we can be brave enough to stand up to our husbands and tell them that just because they paid a bride price doesn't mean that they have the right to beat us."

The training program in which Sabina took part focused on strengthening women's public speaking skills, not domestic violence. As the overall aim of the training was to encourage women to contribute their ideas and opinions publicly—including in their own homes—her determined pronouncement demonstrated not only the success of the session, but also how women can advocate for themselves when given appropriate encouragement and skills development.

Almost 200 women have participated in the training, which has been offered throughout the country. The three-day public speaking sessions are part of National Democratic Institute's Civic Forum program to increase citizen participation in the country's nascent political life. Recently, NDI conducted its second round of training sessions, focusing on young women at the village level, especially those who excelled in the initial sessions.

USAID supports the Civic Forum program through its partnership with NDI. The program works with community groups to provide information on East Timor's political activities, support democratic values, and develop skills necessary for advocacy on community issues. It also encourages direct interactions among ordinary citizens, local government institutions, and elected representatives.

The scale and impact of the program range from the national, to the community, and even to the household level. As Sabina da Silva explained, "[E]veryone in the family should respect one another, especially husband and wife." Sabina and her fellow participants have asked NDI to plan another series of training sessions for them.