



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

EAST TIMOR

SUCCESS STORY

Rural Communities Gain Skills

Rural communities gain skills and income through training



Photo: DAI/Kate Heuisler

With USAID-sponsored literacy and numeracy training, these women in Oecussi are ready to join the formal economy. Here they are selling kerosene at the weekly market.

USAID programs provide basic entrepreneurial training, boosting success rates for crop expansion plans and new businesses.

Telling Our Story
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East Timor is primarily a rural country, with more than three-quarters of its people living outside the cities. One of the most effective ways for USAID to reach this diverse, and sometimes remote, segment of the population is through focused grants to local organizations. In 2006, USAID awarded almost \$1 million of in-kind grants to more than a dozen local organizations, government offices, and the private sector, as they work with rural communities around the country to help improve people's lives.

Agriculture is central to the lives of many East Timorese. USAID's small grants program has helped more than 400 farmers improve their skills in horticulture, animal husbandry, and marketing. In some areas, the projects have helped farmers double their yields of rice and corn. USAID partners also provide entrepreneurial training, boosting success rates for crop expansion plans and new businesses. To stimulate small enterprises, small loans projects worth almost a quarter of a million dollars have expanded access to credit to more than 1,000 women and their families.

One problem that underlies many of the country's economic weaknesses is illiteracy. The government estimates that more than half the population cannot read and write; among women, this figure is almost two-thirds. USAID actively supports local organizations that provide literacy and numeracy training, particularly for women. Training-of-trainer projects, as well as more direct literacy and numeracy classes, have already given 530 women greater access to information and the ability to participate more actively in civic and economic activities.

In 2005, East Timor held its first nationwide local elections. After a concerted voter education campaign, about 80 percent of registered voters cast their ballots. USAID's grant program supported a range of voter education activities targeting the rural population, including mobile radio broadcasts, informational campaigns, and independent monitoring of the polling. The local elections provided civil society and government agencies with valuable experience ahead of national elections in 2007.

USAID's program has shown how a strategic approach to overcoming challenges can provide rural people with better access to information, economic resources, and services.