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**EAST TIMOR**

## SUCCESS STORY

# Women Learn How to Speak Out

### Public speaking sessions empower women to use their voice



Photo: USAID/I. Ximenes

Women from Dato village in Liquiça district gained new confidence with public speaking.

***The scale and impact of the civic forum program range from the national, to the community, and even to the household level.***

Training sessions designed to help women express their opinions have proved particularly empowering for Sabina da Silva, in public — and in private. After attending a three-day session on public speaking in Baucau, Sabina explained why she valued the training so much: “In the house, 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.”

While the USAID-sponsored program focused on strengthening women’s public speaking skills, and not on combating domestic violence, the women who attended the courses were encouraged to contribute their ideas and opinions, both in their communities and in their own homes. Sabina’s determined pronouncement demonstrated not only the success of the session, but also how women can advocate for themselves when they have the appropriate encouragement and skills. In 2005, a second round of training sessions was conducted that focused on young village women, especially those who excelled in the initial sessions. Almost 200 women have participated, and Sabina and other participants have requested that another round of training sessions be held.

USAID is supporting the public speaking sessions countrywide as part of an effort to increase citizen participation in East Timor’s nascent political life. The program also works with community groups to provide information on political activities, support democratic values and develop skills necessary for advocacy on community issues.

The scale and impact of USAID’s program extend from the national, to the community, and even to the household level., “Everyone in the family should respect one another, especially husband and wife,” said Sabina.

#### Telling Our Story

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