

## BUILDING YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION: THE STORY OF SABINO MENDONÇA



In the remote village of Aituto in Timor-Leste, where disasters and climate-related risks are common, community members have increasingly recognized the need for a proactive approach to disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA). One of the key figures driving this initiative is Sabino Mendonça, a 33-year-old youth leader of the Aituto Village Council. His journey of growth through capacity-building training highlights the significance of local leadership in promoting sustainable community resilience.

In February 2024, Sabino participated in a DRR-CCA training facilitated by the MAHARU team. The training aimed to equip local leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to strengthen community resilience. Reflecting on his experience, Sabino expressed his satisfaction with the program: *“Ha’u rasik kontente tebes ho projetu ida-ne’e tanba ha’u aprende ona koñesimentu sistemátiku foun kona-ba RRD-AMK no GEDSI ne’ebé fasilita husi ekipa MAHARU liuliu koñesimentu tékniku kona-ba análize risku no vulnerabilidade partisipativu hodi identifika uma-kain sira ne’ebé vulneravel liu ida-ne’e sai hanesan baze ba dezeńu planu redusaun risku komunitáriu atu promove reziliensia comunidade.”* (“I am very happy with this project because I have learned new systematic knowledge on DRR-CCA and GEDSI facilitated by the MAHARU team, especially technical knowledge on participatory risk and vulnerability analysis to identify the most vulnerable households, which serves as the basis for designing a community risk reduction plan to promote community resilience.”)

### RELEVANCE AND MOTIVATION

The training resonated deeply with Sabino, as it aligned with his community’s lived experiences and challenges. He noted: *“Hau entuziazmu no motivadu liu atu aprende, tópiku ne’e relevante tebes ba ita-nia kontestu no esperiênsia pasadu kona-ba impaktu dezastre. Ha’u nota katak ita-nia comunidade agora daudaun moris ho risku klimátiku no ita presiza foti asaun apropriadu hodi prepara mitiga no adapta ba impaktu klimátiku iha futuru.”* (“I was enthusiastic and motivated to learn, because the topic is very relevant to our context and past experiences with disaster impacts. I observed that our community currently lives with climate risks, and we need to take appropriate action to prepare, mitigate, and adapt to future climate impacts.”)

This sense of urgency fueled Sabino’s commitment to share his newfound knowledge with his peers and the wider community. The training not only enhanced Sabino’s understanding but also encouraged him to take a proactive role in sharing this knowledge. He emphasized: *“Hafoin ha’u tuir treinamentu ha’u hetan ona koñesimentu kona-ba RRD-AMK. Ha’u enkoraja ha’u-nia an atu fahé parte importante husi koñesimentu RRD-AMK nian ba kolega foin-sa’e sira no mós membru comunidade sira atu halo asaun nesesáriu iha nivel uma-kain no comunidade ida-idak hodi hamenus prátika tradisionál sira ne’ebé kauza risku naturál no klimátiku.”* (“After attending the training, I gained knowledge on DRR-CCA. I encouraged myself to share the important parts of this knowledge with fellow youth and community members

to take necessary actions at both the household and community levels to reduce traditional practices that contribute to natural and climate risks.”)

The changes were evident in the increased awareness and motivation among the youth and other community members, leading to more environmentally friendly practices. Despite these positive outcomes, Sabino acknowledged the challenges in shifting deeply rooted beliefs. He explained: *“Maske konsiênsia kontinua iha nivel comunidade maibé comunidade balun nafatin iha konxiênsia tradisionál fiar duke aprosimasaun JRDBK maibé sira halo relasaun ho assistênsia estranjeiru no depois sai parte ida husi ita-nia solusaun.”* (“Even though awareness-raising continues at the community level, some people still rely on traditional beliefs rather than the CBDRM approach and depend on outside assistance instead of being part of the solution.”) This realization highlighted the need for more intensive awareness campaigns to drive significant changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practices.

## THE ROAD AHEAD

Sabino’s reflections on the training demonstrate a deep appreciation for the program’s impact and a vision for the future. He shared his belief in the potential for well-organized disaster management and youth-led initiatives: *“Komunidade liu-liu foin-sa’e sira fiar katak tradisionálmente iha koñesimentu balun kona-ba lokalizasaun dezastre no ita hasoru ita-nia rekursu rasik liu-liu hodi iha koñesimentu adisionál kona-ba RRD-AMK*

*husi projetu ne’e ami fiar katak iha jestaun dezastre ne’ebé organiza didi’ak iha futuru hodi hamenus impaktu negativu sira.”* (“The community, especially the youth, believes that we traditionally have some knowledge on localized disasters, and we cope with our own resources. With additional DRR-CCA knowledge from this project, we believe that we can have well-organized disaster management in the future to reduce negative impacts.”)



Sabino’s journey underscores the transformative power of localized DRR-CCA training and the vital role of youth leadership in fostering resilient communities. His commitment serves as an inspiration for similar initiatives across Timor-Leste and beyond.

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